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**Representation of Women and Children in the Novels of
Arundhati Roy and Anita Desai**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the representation of women and children in Arundhati Roy's novel, *The God of Small Things*, and Anita Desai's novels, *The Fire on the Mountain* and *Clear Light of Day*. Each of these novels has at its centre a female protagonist who resists the demands of tradition. The interactions of these women with the antipathetic forces of tradition and culture are seen from a female point of view and with a profound understanding of female sensibility. How far to conform, how far to break away to assert one's selfhood, and how to resolve the crisis brought about this challenge - these are the questions asked, and the answers are slightly different in each case. While resistance to traditional norms leads the protagonists of *The God of Small Things* to a complete rejection of them, Anita Desai's protagonists turn inward, and achieve a wider and more unified vision of life by coming to terms with socio-cultural realities. The chosen novels also display remarkable insights into the minds of children, whose perceptions are based on a different order of reality from that acknowledged by the adults. However, overwhelmed by adult reality and faced with demands beyond their comprehension, they are unable to sustain their distinctive view of the world. At best they are able to synthesise their childhood fantasies with a more adult discretion.

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INTRODUCTION

A great proportion of Indian novels in English illustrate social and cultural aspects of Indian life such as the role and position of women in the family and society, their relation to men and the extent of freedom they enjoy in their respective social set-ups to live life on their own terms. The response of women to the socio-economic and political situations in which they find themselves is a rewarding study by itself. A theme that constantly occurs in Indian novels and writings in English is the plight of women in families and societies whose systems are controlled largely by male power, and the consequent agony and apprehensions experienced by women.

In India a woman has been considered, from time immemorial, an embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith and knowledge. Marriage is considered the final destiny for woman. She should be chaste, virtuous, submissive, homely, graceful, and devoted to her husband and his family. She must seek pleasure in these relationships. This is as much as to say that a woman should not have rights of her own; that she has duties only in relation to man. Shirwadkar (23) observes:

In the complex fabric of the Indian family, society and culture, the woman's sphere of life and activity was in the past bound by the protective and prohibitive walls raised by the moralists, from the middle ages down to the beginning of the present century. The taboos laid down by Manu were tightened during the centuries that followed to restrict woman's life to the family.

Krishnaswamy (10-11) in this regard comments:

Throughout Indian history, in subtle ways, the Indian woman's essential commitment to her religion and the institutions and rituals such commitment entails, has enabled her to be portrayed as the guardian of culture and religion. ...The women have been described as the embodiment of purity and spiritual power and respected as godly beings on the one hand and on the other, viewed as being as essentially weak creatures constantly requiring the protection of man as their lord and master.

The subordination of woman has restricted her individual role in the family and society over centuries. Mukherjee (99) remarks:

Individualism has been emerging as a human ideal in the west for a couple of centuries, and even though in actual fact a woman's life lacked the relative autonomy of a man's the possibility did exist as an idea. In India even though exposure to the west was beginning to make an alternative ideal available in the nineteenth century, such individualism was alien to traditional thinking.

The social order takes precedence over the man and woman in marriage. Family and marriage laws bind women completely to ensure social cohesion. Krishnaswamy (12) observes: "The Indian woman marries into a family, into a community. Once married, she is expected to eschew all personal ambitions and goals: she has to find her fulfilment in the family, not outside it. she is generally segregated from men and her social life is confined to the home, the temple and the company of female relatives."

Though people of several religions co-exist in India, tenets of all those religions deny women freedom and equality with men. Desai and Patel (12-13) remark:

The Indian sub-continent is inhabited by people practising various religions such as Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Zoroastrian, Jain, Buddhist, Sikh etc. Within each religion there are various sects. But all of them in one form or another overtly or covertly support subjugation of women. Our secular state believes in respecting all religions. The constitutional provision of respecting 'personal laws' of various communities has resulted in perpetuating unequal status of women in various religious communities. The personal laws of Hindu, Muslims, Parsis, etc. directly affect women's lives and status. These laws are not discriminating against women but they have a deep-rooted prejudice against women. None of them consider woman as an independent human being with individuality but as dependent on father, husband or son.

In the chapters that follow I attempt to explore the representation of female characters in their familial, social and cultural contexts. The protagonists in these novels are caught in conflict situations. How far to conform, how far to break away to assert their individuality, how to overcome their sense of alienation and how to resolve the identity crisis - these are the questions that intrigue them.

In *The God of Small Things* the protagonists are in conflict with the culturally prescribed norms of female identity. Though Ammu rebels against her marginalisation in the family and society she tragically succumbs to the socio-political forces dictated by tradition. As

Kapur observes, "Along with the now-familiar tale of class and caste rebellion, *The God of Small Things* is also about female rebellion: Ammu's affair with Velutha is a flagrant - if hopeless - violation of what Roy calls society's 'Love Laws'". However, in the novel Roy seems to privilege the process of violating the social code and the ensuing struggle of the protagonist despite its tragic outcome. By valorizing Ammu's struggle above everything else, Roy seems to condemn unequivocally those cultural codes and structures of power that perpetuate the subordination of women.

Desai's protagonists are fugitives from a male-dominated world and in their desperate search for freedom and fulfilment, as Jena (13) observes, they also "turn out to be rebels" against societal values. Pabby (33) observes: "[Anita Desai seeks] to portray the agonies and tensions suffered by sensitive women placed in critical situations. These situations arise, more often, owing to their emotional involvements with their past as also to love, marriage, family, home including generation gap." However, this trauma causes them to explore their inner psyches, and consequently they experience higher visions of life which enable them to transcend their conflicts. As Jena (17) aptly remarks, "Her novels are certainly reflective of social realities, but she does not dwell like Anand on social issues; and rather delves deep into the forces that condition the growth of a female in the patriarchal, patrilineal, male dominated Indian family. She observes social realities from a psychological perspective, not as a social reformer or moralist". In their different ways, then, both novelists present a narrative in which received models of womanhood are challenged and reinstated.

All three novels also inquire into the fate of children who are marginalized in various degrees, ranging from neglect to outright victimization. The novels feature a portrait of childhood that underscores the fragility of the children's dreams and fancies when confronted with the adult world. The contrast between the child's perspective and the adult one is built into the very structure of these novels. As the adult world continues to impinge on the world of children, they are unable to sustain their dream world; yet with the enhanced awareness of their inescapable interaction and involvement with the adult world, they can achieve a fuller maturity involving a unity between childhood experiences and adult existence.

CHAPTER 1

WOMEN IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

The God of Small Things is a powerful dramatisation of women's predicament in the social and cultural milieu of Kerala in south India against the backdrop of events that took place during the decade 1958-1968. The agony and pain experienced by the female characters in the novel illustrate the subjugation and marginalisation of women at large in the male-dominated society of Kerala.

The story of Mammachi projects an archetypal image of the muted wife in the Indian family. As a mother of the old order, Mammachi's lot is to suffer in silence at the hands of Pappachi, her tyrannical husband. She stoically accepts her state of subordination with an unfailing acquiescence. An alcoholic, "every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beatings were not new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place" (49). For Pappachi, the authoritarian figure, Mammachi has no identity other than that of mother and wife. While Pappachi works as an entomologist in Vienna, Mammachi takes lessons in violin. When the violin teacher reports to him her great talent for music, Pappachi is deeply incensed at his appreciation of his wife's talent and her violin lessons are stopped short.

Pappachi gets into the habit of beating his wife's head with brass vases whenever he is in the grip of his "black moods" (49). He stops his wife-beating only when his Oxford-educated son Chacko comes home on vacation and physically restrains his father from doing so. The

benign intervention on the part of the son, presumably influenced by the liberal humanism of the west, puts a stop to the ritualistic wife-beating of his father, and shields his mother from further physical injury. However, the intervention fails to bring about a lasting solution to the passive yet acute suffering of his mother; Pappachi now opts for a kind of subtle revenge whereby he can inflict more psychological pain on his wife and cause more emotional damage. He resolves to downgrade her to the position of a nonentity in his own household where he is the undisputed master. Pappachi stops talking to his wife and, condemned to silence, she becomes inconsequential in his house. Not being on speaking terms with Mammachi, Pappachi "uses Kochumaria or Baby Kochamma as his intermediaries" (48) whenever he needs anything. Pappachi's silence is his revenge. He behaves as if the whole mission of his life is avenging himself upon his docile wife.

When Pappachi retires from his imperial position in Delhi, he and Mammachi come down to Ayemenem House to live the rest of the life there. Pappachi continues his revenge unabated in Ayemenem. Mammachi starts a pickle factory. Irked by her success and the ignominy of his retirement, Pappachi learns to hate her with all his heart and he refuses to help her in the enterprise. As a "high-ranking ex-Government official" (47), he considers his wife's pickle-making beneath his notice. As Ayemenem people take for granted the subordination of women within the family and the society, Pappachi wants to take advantage of their traditional views to discredit his wife before the public. He sits on the verandah in full view of the visitors, stitching the buttons that are not missing on his shirts, to impress upon them that he is neglected by his own working wife. Pappachi's calculated actions, while inviting sympathy for himself, augments the indignation of society against the woman who dares to

transgress the accepted boundaries of the feminine. To the people, hidebound by tradition, Mammachi fails to fulfil her highly institutionalised role as a strictly orthodox Christian wife. The narrator observes that Pappachi's actions are aimed at creating public disapproval of working women in the society: "To some small degree he did succeed in corroding Ayemenem's view of working wives" (48).

While Mammachi works hard at her business, Pappachi, in his elegant suit, drives round in his exclusive blue Plymouth. "He wouldn't allow Mammachi or anyone else in the family to use it, or even to sit in it. The Plymouth was Pappachi's revenge" (48). Mammachi, however, is unable to revolt against the injustice for fear of losing respect in public. Any fissure in the marriage will in turn threaten the social order. In the tradition-bound society of India the harmony of the social order takes precedence over the happiness of a man or woman in marriage and the onus of keeping its stability intact rests more on the resilience of the woman than the man. Parikh and Garg (162) observe:

Confronted with the traumatic reality of marriage, most women initially find that they have no other alternative but to surrender and cope, to give and not demand, to withhold and disown themselves and not compromise the family's status. If the woman contemplates any action in her search for new alternatives, she ends up facing the possibility of being deserted, physically brutalised and/or living in the family as an outcast or as a kept woman. In fact, the central theme of many woman's lives is that of violation. Violation takes many forms - from the physical to the psychological.

When Pappachi dies, Mammachi cries profusely "more because she was used to him than because she loved him" (50), according to Ammu. The idealised image of the meek, suffering woman is rooted in tradition and Mammachi in the novel conforms to this as she mutely suffers at the hands of her tyrannical husband. It is significant to note here that Mammachi, who proves her competence and resourcefulness by starting a business on her own and making it prosper, is unable (or unwilling?) to resist the violence of her husband. She is the victim of social forces beyond her control. Mammachi's resilience stems largely from the internalization of patriarchal values which dictate the principle of surrender for the woman in marriage. As Krishnaswamy (46) observes, "the formula is predetermined"; the stability of the social order is predicated on male autonomy and women's willing subordination to it.

Chacko's intervention during Pappachi's assault on Mammachi is a momentous event in her life. The devotion and submission she evinces towards her husband is now to a large extent transferred to her son. The chivalry with which he saves her from distress entails this transfer of love.

The day that Chacko prevented Pappachi from beating her (and Pappachi had murdered his chair instead) Mammachi packed her wifely luggage and committed it to Chacko's care. From then onwards he became the repository of all her womanly feelings. Her Man. Her only Love (168).

Rendered impotent by a cultural ideology that privileges male autonomy, Mammachi is unable to protest; but she channels her repressed feelings in the direction of her son, who turns into the repository of all her affections. Mammachi offsets her failed marriage and unfulfilled love by exacting a price for it in terms of motherhood, whose power is

uncontested in Indian myth through the ages. Her love for Chacko is so possessive that she will not allow anybody to share it. This really accounts for her despising Margaret

Kochamma, Chacko's former wife. Ramanathan (18) comments:

In India, despite feminist protest and struggle, femininity is maternity. Sudhir Kakar contends that male worship of motherhood as cultural icon makes maternity the only uncontested space of power for women in India. ... Maternity becomes the pre-condition of the foreclosure of the female sexuality and autonomy.

Mammachi's adoration of Chacko goes beyond maternity, however; it is a step into forbidden territory. As Rahel reminisces, "They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much. The laws that make grandmothers grandmothers, uncles uncles, mothers mothers, cousins cousins, jam jam, and jelly jelly" (31).

Externally Mammachi symbolises the woman acquiescent to male order and its double standards. Behind her customary role of docile Indian wife, however, lurks the woman who is eager for emancipation. Unable to challenge the conventions of society openly, Mammachi absorbs them and derives satisfaction as best as she can. This identification with the male-engendered values prompts her to champion Chacko's clandestine relations with the working women of his factory. In appreciation of "men's needs" she even sets up a back door to his room for the willing women as an act of discretion on her part. "He can't help having Men's needs" (168), says Mammachi. Moreover, she even pays for their sexual services. By rewarding the willing women liberally, Mammachi "disjuncted sex from love. Needs from feelings" (169). Thus her explicit sanctioning of Chacko's "needs" is a

resolution of her conflicts; she is able to identify with the male libido and values in an oblique way.

Mammachi looks upon Margaret Kochamma, Chacko's ex-wife, as her rival, as a competitor for the affections of her son. Mammachi slips money into Margaret's dress in the laundry to derive the satisfaction of feeling that her relationship with Chacko is nothing but sexual, that she does not want any obligations. The money is always taken away by the dhobi, and Margaret knows nothing about it. Mammachi, however, construes it as tacit acceptance of her arrangements by Margaret. Mammachi is happy to devalue Margaret by reducing her to the position of a prostitute. Roy illustrates here the destructive effect of social norms on individuals, a destructive effect that often operates as much from within as from without.

Ammu's predicament also brings out the formidable power of dominant cultural codes and assumptions that govern the structures of family and society. Ammu grows up in her family largely ignored by Pappachi and Mammachi, her parents. Pappachi, going by the general custom, assumes that as a girl Ammu, his daughter, does not deserve college education and like other girls she has to be trained from girlhood to serve others without complaint.

Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl, so Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with them. There was very little for a young girl to do in Ayemenem other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with the housework. Since her father did not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry, no proposals came Ammu's way (38).

The birth of a female is generally considered an unfortunate event in an Indian family.

Shirwadkar (24) observes:

In India, from the days of the Atharva Veda (VI-2-3) - 'The birth of a girl, grant it elsewhere, here, grant a boy' - down to the middle ages and then to our times, the birth of a girl has been looked upon with resignation, if not with sorrow.

Indo-Anglian fiction reflects how a girl is unwelcome in the family and explores the reasons behind the traditional view. One reason is the dowry system which impoverishes the parents.

Pappachi's exercise of paternal authority leaves Ammu with few options. It is not common for girls in middle-class families to speak their minds before their elders and act on their own. Ammu as a young girl is confined to her enclosed space at home. The restrictive social norms forbid her to mix with the society outside her family and it seems to her that the only way of escape for her tormented spirits is marriage. Gupta (126) comments:

Women [in India] had no right, let alone the freedom, to settle important issues for themselves. The birth of a girl was a regrettable occurrence in the eyes of parents and other members of the family. The marriage bond was subject to such rigid rules and the general opinion of female morals was so low that the only way that a woman could safeguard her life and character was to marry as quick as possible, and thus secure the protection of a husband.

Roy here attacks society's sexual ideologies, which, on the one hand, deprive women of educational training and vocational opportunity and, on the other hand, do not allow them to choose a marriage partner after the manner of the romantic fiction which many of them

would have read. Mukherjee (8) comments: "Where girls were married off by their parents before puberty and marriage was a social institution rather than an act of individual choice, there was very little scope for romantic pre-marital love of the kind depicted in the English novels being read by English-educated Indians". Ammu, as a helpless daughter, lives in a world defined by others, especially by her parents. As a captive of traditions she is forced to surrender herself to the code of the family and society.

The narrator describes how Ammu's father conducts himself like a tyrant in the privacy of home while keeping up the public image of a great benefactor of society. The image of the benefactor veils the horror of domestic paternal oppression:

In her growing years, Ammu had watched her father weave his hideous web. He was charming and urbane with visitors, and stopped just short of fawning on them if they happened to be white. He donated money to orphanages and leprosy clinics. He worked hard on his public profile as sophisticated, generous, moral man. But alone with his wife and children he turned into a monstrous, suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning. They were beaten, humiliated, and then made to suffer the envy of friends and relations for having such a wonderful husband and father(180).

The narrator goes on to describe how Ammu witnessed her own mother being driven from home by her father on cold winter nights, and how he, caught in a frenzy of destruction, damages the furniture in the house and also Ammu's beloved gumboots which she treasures:

Ammu had endured cold winter nights in Delhi hiding in the mehndi hedge around their house (in case people from Good Families saw them) because Pappachi had come back from work out of sorts, and beaten her and Mammachi and driven them

out of their home. ...While Ammu watched, the Imperial Entomologist shred [*sic*] her new gumboots with her mother's pinking shears (181).

The narrator describes the damaging effects of paternal oppression on the psyche of a young sensitive girl:

As she grew older, Ammu learned to live with this cold, calculating cruelty. She developed a lofty sense of injustice and the mulish, reckless streak that develops in Someone Small who has been bullied all their lives by Someone Big. She did exactly nothing to avoid quarrels and confrontations. In fact, it could be argued that she sought them out, perhaps even enjoyed them (182).

Ammu's experiences suggest in important ways how deeply the traumatic experiences of childhood influence the adult life of the individual. Ammu grows into a rebel with an "Unsafe Edge" (44) about her.

As her father does not have a suitable dowry, the prospect of an arranged marriage grows dim for Ammu. Life in the family becomes more tormenting for her. Disregarded by her parents and denied a social life by the conventions, Ammu's emotional deprivation accentuates her sense of insecurity. Under the circumstances, Pappachi's approval of her idea of spending the vacation with a distant aunt of hers in Calcutta comes as a great relief to her. While in Calcutta, Ammu meets a "pleasant-looking" Hindu man who captivates her with his "schoolboy humour" (39). When he proposes she readily accepts and is delighted by his enthusiasm for her. She is also carried away, perhaps, by fanciful notions of freedom

from the fetters of her claustrophobic maidenhood through marriage. "She thought that *anything*, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem" (39).

Without further deliberation, she informs her parents of her decision to marry him. Her impetuous decision to marry out of caste is deemed an act of revolt by her parents and "they didn't reply" (39). Koilaparambil (2) remarks:

The Caste system in India is sometimes said to be comprehensible only when viewed against the religious matrix of Hinduism. This view does not explain the existence of essentially similar systems of stratification within non-Hindu groups on the Indian sub-continent. This difficulty, however, could probably be solved by demonstrating that those beliefs of Hindus most relevant to the caste system are also held to some degree by similarly stratified non-Hindu groups such as Christians and Muslims.

Ammu's decision to marry out of caste a man of her own choice is not so much an indication of her resolve to take charge of her own life as an expression of her anxiety to escape the severe restrictions imposed on her by family and society. It may also be pointed out that Ammu's restricted life at home before her marriage renders her ignorant of the ways of the world and, being easily deceived by appearances, she falls an easy prey to the external charms of a youth. She fails to assess him realistically. Parikh and Garg (52) comment:

[Girls'] ignorance of the bio-social reality often renders them susceptible to the charms and the endearments of the men around, who are often the undesirable type. The adolescence of many such women is therefore marked by sexual exploitation, disillusionment, and disappointment, which leaves them scarred for the rest of their lives.

Ammu's marriage turns out to be a terrible mistake, as her husband is discovered to be an incurable alcoholic with strange codes of behaviour: "Her husband turned out to be not just a heavy drinker but a full-blown alcoholic with all of an alcoholic's deviousness and tragic charm. There were things about him that Ammu never understood" (40). Being subjected to many indignities and acts of violence by her intoxicated husband, Ammu realizes that her marriage is a dreadful failure and she is thrown into an abyss of despair. To Ammu, her marriage is like going from the frying pan into the fire. As her husband's alcoholism costs him his job, her cup of misery is full and she faces a bleak future with her children.

At this stage, her husband requires her, as suggested by his boss, by way of a "practical solution", to sleep with the boss in return for financial security for the family and a sound education for her children. Feeling outraged by her husband's indecent suggestion, Ammu beats him, and then, having no other alternative, decides to walk out on her husband and return to her parents' home, her only refuge, distressed and disillusioned. Back home without her husband, Ammu is faced with a stifling atmosphere; she is not welcomed by her parents, her relations or society: "Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcomed, to her parents in Ayemenem. To everything that she had fled from only a few years ago. Except that now she had two young children. And no more dreams" (42).

Her life is now one of misery and pain aggravated by public disapproval, traditional taboos, and economic dependence. The narrative throws light on the traditional norms of society that threaten the individuality of women who happen to be victims of circumstance in life. In the first place, her father Pappachi will not lend credence to her story that her husband's

boss wanted her to sleep with him. Pappachi, being a confirmed Anglophile, is strongly inclined to idealise all Englishmen as perfect models of integrity with the highest standards of moral behaviour, so any idea of any Englishman coveting another man's wife is beyond his comprehension: "Pappachi would not believe her story not because he thought well of her husband but simply, because he didn't believe that an Englishman, *any* Englishman, would covet another man's wife" (42).

Back in Ayemenem, the stigma of ostracism for having been left without a husband and the humiliation of being considered a parasite and liability by her parents and relations generate feelings of denial, discrimination, deprivation, anger and frustration in her. She is haunted by an acute sense of psychological insecurity, particularly when she becomes an "object of pity" in the eyes of people whose false sympathy exasperates her beyond endurance:

And in the background, the constant, high, whining mewl of local disapproval. Within the first few months of her return to her parent's home, Ammu quickly learned to recognize and despise the ugly face of sympathy. Old female relations with incipient beards and several wobbling chins made overnight trips to Ayemenem to commiserate with her about her divorce. They squeezed her knee and gloated. She fought off the urge to slap them. Or twiddle their nipples. With a spanner. Like Chaplin in *ModernTimes*" (43).

Parikh and Garg (67) observe:

It is obvious, then, that the husband's home is the place where the woman has to relocate and root herself, and in doing so can either flourish or wither away. Even today, most families discourage a woman from returning to the parental family, even

when the husband or his family are brutal. The message is - that is your place and there you stay. The daughter is showered with advice about the need for adjustment and for giving in. But she is not offered any support. The woman can either become a victim or a martyr. The wife suffers both physical and psychological brutality, accepting it as her destiny, as her lot by virtue of being a female. The parents of such women bemoan the loss of a daughter but remain mute and helpless in the name of their daughter's destiny and their own inability to make new choices in terms of action. If a woman succeeds in separating herself and her husband from the in-laws, she is often condemned and held guilty.

In delineating Ammu's painful confrontation with the rigidities of social codes, Roy captures their complexity and multiplicity brilliantly. Gorra (23) comments on the multiplicity: "Each moment in these characters' lives may have been a necessary one in shaping their fates, but none of them was, in itself, sufficient." The complexity is illustrated by the fact that, though the patriarchal structures of society circumscribe the role of women in the family and society and inhibit their attempts at self-actualisation, the narrative presents situations where the women in the family are found acting in collusion with those structures of power, thus perpetuating the misery of the female victim. In fact Ammu's misery in the novel seems to stem mainly from the schemes of those women who actively support the patriarchal codes and values of the society even as they imagine ways of undermining their power structure. It is significant to note, as the narrative implies, that Ammu's fate is, to a large extent, determined by the dynamics of the relationships among women within the confines of the family. The behavioural patterns of Baby Kochamma and Mammachi in relation to Ammu

illustrate how these women, deriving their power from male structures, are arrayed against Ammu and become formidable agents of oppression.

The narrative projects Baby Kochamma, Ammu's aunt, as a figure of overpowering dominance and gloom. She treats Ammu with biting malice, and the aggressive force with which she executes her schemes is as great a threat to Ammu's individuality and freedom as the more open assault of the patriarchal institutions working against her. Though Baby Kochamma lives on sufferance in the Ayemenem House, like Ammu, and though both of them suffer more or less the same fate of despairing at an unfulfilled love, the former bears an inordinate grudge towards the latter. Baby Kochamma's despair at the failure of her heterosexual romance with Father Mulligan, the Catholic priest, is transformed into a growing rage against Ammu. The narrator throws some light on the mechanics of this transformation: "Baby Kochamma resented Ammu, because she saw her quarrelling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma herself, felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-less woman" (45).

Baby Kochamma actively supports the traditional view that a married daughter has no place in her parents' home and that a divorced daughter is an absolute nonentity with no rights whatsoever. And "as for a *divorced* daughter from a [*sic*] *intercommunity* love marriage - Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject" (45-46). Baby Kochamma's "righteous indignation" at Ammu's position illustrates how casteism and gender discrimination function together as social determinants in controlling the fates of individual women in society. For Ammu, society has become a prison. Roy seems to

emphasise that senior women conducting themselves in an authoritarian manner towards weaker women in the domain of familial relations function like stern guardians of the tradition and contribute substantially to the crippling effects of male chauvinism.

When Baby Kochamma hears the story about Ammu's illicit affair with the outcaste Velutha, she

recognized at once the immense potential of the situation, ... They did what they had to do, the old ladies. Mammachi provided the passion. Baby Kochamma the plan. Kochu Maria was their midget lieutenant. They locked Ammu up (tricked her into her bedroom) before they sent for Velutha. They knew that they had to get him to leave Ayemenem before Chacko returned. They could neither trust nor predict what Chacko's attitude would be. It was not entirely their fault, though, that the whole thing spun out of control like a deranged top. That it lashed out at those that crossed its path. That by the time Chacko and Margaret Kochamma returned from Cochin, it was too late (257-258).

The passage exemplifies the manipulative skill of the dominant women and the ruthless impersonality of power dynamics in the sphere of domesticity working towards the erasure of the rebellious errant. And at the local police station Baby Kochamma fabricates the story of Velutha's rape of Ammu, her niece, to enable the Inspector of Police to file a case against the culprit, presuming to redeem the honour of her family before the public. "Baby Kochamma misrepresented the relationship between Ammu and Velutha, not for Ammu's sake, but to contain the scandal and salvage the family reputation in Inspector Thomas Mathew's eyes" (259).

Mammachi, in her relation to Ammu, her daughter, symbolises female acquiescence to male order and its double standards. Though she plays the customary role of a docile Indian wife to her bullying husband and dotes on her son Chacko, she adamantly refuses to provide succour and relief to her distressed daughter seeking refuge in maternal love. Mammachi's unusual favours to her son signify the privileged position of male offspring in the Indian family. When Chacko is in financial difficulties during his stay in Oxford as a student, Mammachi pawns her jewels and sends money to him. When Margaret divorces Chacko, "Mammachi joyfully welcomed him back into her life. She had fed him, she sewed for him, she saw to it that there were fresh flowers in his room every day. Chacko needed his mother's adoration. Indeed, he *demand*ed it, yet he despised her for it and punished her in secret ways" (248). But when Mammachi learns that her daughter Ammu has an affair with Velutha, she is driven to a devastating fury even as her partiality for Chacko renders her blind to his moral turpitude and allows her to actively help him with his clandestine sexual relations with the female workers of his factory. "Her tolerance of Men's needs as far as her son was concerned, became the fuel for her unmanageable fury at her daughter. She had defiled generations of breeding..." (258).

Society considers Ammu's desertion of her loveless husband, who goes even to the extent of pushing her to prostitution, a violation of culturally prescribed norms of female identity. And her returning home to live in that society without a proper husband is a worse act of revolt against tradition, inviting the stigma of social ostracism and public condemnation. Ammu realizes that the codes that condemn her to subordination, while blatantly supporting the male tyranny and privileges, employ double standards in the judgement of women and

men. This is evident in the partial treatment meted out to Chacko by Mammachi and Baby Kochamma. The humiliation and the alienation that Ammu and her own innocent children undergo in the domestic sphere at the hands of her mother and Baby Kochamma testify to her insignificance and marginality, both dictated by cultural authority.

As the narrative projects Ammu's agonizing struggle to define herself against the cumulative forces of the cultural strictures, the prospect of her resistance to her enforced subordination and devalued position becomes a moral certainty. The narrative invites our attention to Ammu's defiant posture and her readiness to usurp the authority of conventions that threaten to erase her womanhood:

Occasionally, when Ammu listened to songs that she loved on the radio, something stirred inside her. A liquid ache spread under her skin, and she walked out of the world like a witch, to a better happier place. On days like this, there was something restless and untamed about her. As though she had temporarily set aside the morality of motherhood and divorcehood. Even her walk changed from a safe mother-walk to another wilder sort of walk. She wore flowers in her hair and carried magic secrets in her eyes. She spoke to no one. She spent hours on the riverbank with her little plastic transistor shaped like a tangerine. She smoked cigarettes and had midnight swims(44).

The change from the "safe mother-walk to another wilder sort of walk" points to the rejection of the site of the painful conflation of womanhood and motherhood wherein conventions dictated by culture locate her identity. Though Ammu's step into a forbidden and unknown territory, rejecting the self-abnegating model of motherhood that is identical

with ideal womanhood, promises heroic possibilities, she becomes aware of the potential dangers implied by such a transgressive act. As she sets out to challenge the traditional patterns of social arrangement with a kind of male bravado, she cannot yet exactly figure out the dimensions of her intended revolt. Suspended between the maternal poise and the daring womanhood, she develops "an unsafe edge about her" (44). The narrator asks:

What was it that gave Ammu this Unsafe Edge? This air of unpredictability? It was what she had battling inside her. An unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber. It was this that grew inside her, and eventually led her to love by night the man her children loved by day (44).

The uneasy blend of the maternal and the subversive woman generates a pent-up rage in Ammu whose ferocity must break loose. Her femaleness turns incendiary and must burn and consume. It begins to appear that the demands of the maternal as inscribed by the conventions of the culture are antithetical to the independent accomplishment of her female desire. Through desiring Velutha, Ammu emphatically declares her intention to break out of the bounds of the entombments culturally decreed by the society. As Hirsch (170) observes,

to be angry is to assert one's own self, not to subordinate it to the development of another's self. A mother cannot articulate anger *as a mother*; to do so she must step out of a culturally circumscribed role which commands mothers to be caring and nurturing to others, even at the expense of themselves.

Rao (VIII) observes: "What is being dramatised is 'The whole Question of a Woman's Locus Stand I' and the struggle between the mother and the woman in Ammu." Ammu

realizes that her empowerment can only be achieved through the fulness of her love for Velutha, the outcaste. Only in the fulness of her love for him can her self unfold. Bose (60) says: "*The God of Small Things* depicts protagonists who are ready to break social laws and die for desire, for love." Ammu's rage and desire take on a ferocity which the conventional structures of society cannot assuage, a ferocity that can occupy the hearts of mothers and daughters. As Kapur also remarks, "...*The God of Small Things* is also about a female rebellion: Ammu's affair with Velutha is a flagrant - violation of what Roy calls society's 'Love Laws.'"

In her sensitive portrayal of the Ammu-Velutha relationship, Roy displays a keen understanding of the social and psychological constrictions working upon the female victim. Ammu feels justified in violating the taboo and seeking her fulfilment with Velutha, as "she hoped that under his careful cloak of cheerfulness, he housed a living, breathing anger against the smug, ordered world that she so raged against" (176). Ammu feels drawn to Velutha because she discovers in him a self-tormented like hers. She shares with him a rebellious spirit against the codes of the society that seek to erase the dissenting voice of the marginalised. The hierarchical ordering of the caste-ridden and tradition-bound society displaces Velutha, as the gender constructions and class structures do Ammu; the stigma and the humiliation Velutha suffers by virtue of his outcast status in society has thus striking parallels with Ammu's ostracism. Though their placements in the same society, economically and classwise, are different, they share the same fate of being marginalised by the cultural codes.

Velutha's great creative skills do not offset his stigma. He works efficiently as a carpenter (though, being an outcaste, he is not meant to work in this capacity and he receives a low wage) at the Paradise Pickles and Preserves factory, but other workers shun his company. Derrett (49-50) remarks:

[The caste system in India] became the great social expression and took over most of the actual political functions assumed in other countries by centralised bureaucracies. Indians are taught at all times to respect, even encourage, differences between human beings, rather than to seek conformity and uniformity. But the caste system, although it stresses the important principle of ethical independence completely blocks the way for many to individual progress and has frequently led to the oppression and exploitation of one class by another.

"Velutha's presence is unsettling to many who believe he acts above his station" (Elliott, 1). Vellya Pappen, his father, a man of the old order, fearing for his son's safety says, "It was not what he said, but the way he said it. Not what he did, but the way he did it" (76). The narrator clarifies further: "Perhaps it was just a lack of hesitation. An unwarranted assurance. In the way he walked. The way he held his head. The quiet way he offered suggestions without being asked. Or the quiet way in which he disregarded suggestions without appearing to rebel" (76).

As Ammu gazes at Velutha in the company of her children, the twins, creating a "subworld" of unalloyed (though short-lived) joy and mirth, sharing fun and games, she feels left out; cultural expectations of her gender, class and status are so overbearing as to preclude her entry into that "subworld" orchestrated by Velutha. The irresistible urge to be a part of that

world and to inhabit its unbounded space overwhelms her. This urge is matched by her compulsive desire to flee the weighty traditions of the culture.

[Ammu] was surprised at the extent of her daughter's physical ease with him.

Surprised that her child seemed to have a subworld that excluded her entirely. A tactile world of smiles and laughter that she, her mother, had no part in. Ammu recognised vaguely that her thoughts were shot with a delicate, purple tinge of envy. The man or her own child. Or just their world of hooked fingers and sudden smiles (176).

Ammu is naturally drawn to Velutha for succour, support and fulfilment of her womanhood. She confronts her fate despite a foreknowledge of her doom. Their desire for each other breaks an ancient taboo as to "who should be loved and how much". It shatters complacencies of cultural myths dating from antiquity. "Ammu saw that he saw. She looked away. He did too. History's fiends returned to claim them. To rewrap them in its old, scarred pelt and drag them back to where they really lived. Where the Love Laws lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much" (177). In asserting their biological desire for each other, both Velutha and Ammu wilfully embrace a transgressive life overriding the prescriptions of traditional culture. The penalty for the fulfilment of such forbidden desires is death.

When Mammachi comes to learn about Ammu's illicit liaison with the untouchable Velutha, she throws him out of his job in her factory. Furthermore, she gives vent to her insane fury by spitting on him. Velutha keeps his composure and, being a member of the Marxist party,

he is resolved to act on the party instruction manual. K.N.M. Pillai, the party's spokesman, loses no time in appreciating the hidden potential of the situation to advance his own interests, while ostensibly conforming to the avowed principles of the party. And in accordance with the party's avowed denial of eroticism in man-woman relationships, K.N.M. Pillai refuses to look into Velutha's complaint, thus reaffirming his commitment to the party. Howe (245-246) observes: "The aim of the party was not merely to prevent men and women from forming loyalties which it might not be able to control. Its real, undeclared purpose was to remove all pleasure from the sexual act." K.N.M. Pillai makes no secret of his unwillingness to help Velutha: "Velutha watched Comrade Pillai's body fade from the door. His disembodied, piping voice stayed on and sent out slogans" (287). This description of his voice underscores the dehumanizing power game of the party that seeks to blot out the erotic freedom in male-female relationships.

Comrade Pillai clinches the issue with this masterful statement to Velutha: "But Comrade, you should know that Party was not constituted to support workers' indiscipline in their private lives" (287). The ditching of Velutha agrees well with K.N.M. Pillai's ambitious schemes to advance his political career. The narrator observes K.N.M. Pillai's schemes with telling sarcasm: "It was not entirely [K.N.M. Pillai's] fault that he lived in a society where a man's death would be more profitable than his life had ever been" (281).

Through the narrative of the horrific murder of Velutha, Roy calls into question the hypocrisy, cant and false values of the socio-political structures, embodied in such characters as Baby Kochamma and Mammachi, on the one hand, and Comrade K.N.M. Pillai

and the local Inspector of Police, Thomas Mathew, on the other. The narrator denounces the power game of party politics through the caricature of K.N.M.Pillai, who, while posing as champion of the down-trodden, secretly plots to eliminate Velutha for fulfilling his personal ambitions. The novel brings into sharp focus the role of social and political power as a key factor in the sphere of male-female relationships. The custodians of orthodoxy and the caste-ridden politicians are mortified to learn that Velutha, the untouchable, has transgressed the "love laws." The ironic portrayal of the efficiency of the policemen bearing down on Velutha as custodians of order and harmony in the society serves as a concrete manifestation of the enormity of the social forces which crush the individual spirit of men or women failing to conform to the cultural codes and strictures of the society: "Then together, on their knees and elbows, they crept towards the house. Like Film-policemen. Softly, softly through the grass. Batons in their hands. Machine guns in their minds. Responsibility for the Touchable future on their thin but able shoulders"(307).

Ammu's visit to the police station and her ready confession of her love for Velutha testifies to her defiance of traditional codes, which deter a modest woman from vindicating her honour and virtue in public. Baby Kochamma and even Mammachi are dismayed beyond measure by the sudden eruption of her impetuosity because they never reckoned on the possibility of the "unsafe edge in Ammu" (321) asserting itself. When the police inspector Thomas Mathew calls her a prostitute, the expression is a measure of the degradation that she has undergone in society through her transgressive affair with Velutha, the outcaste. The mortification and the obloquy pursuing her like a nightmare till her death signal the fate of female transgressors generally in the middle class society of contemporary India.

Through her transgressive relationship with the untouchable Velutha and her open vindication of it, Ammu challenges the patriarchal definitions of woman. For Ammu, whose identity is inscribed by the codes and conventions of the society, this rebellious pursuit is potentially catastrophic. The text projects a hostile society which stands opposed to any assertion of female autonomy and hence her struggle to define herself against the forces of the society tragically fails. Thrown out of Ayemenem House, where she has no rights after marriage, unable to shift for herself for lack of a job through chronic illness, Ammu along with her dreams dies an ignoble death in an obscure lodging in a town.

Rahel, along with her twin brother, has witnessed the suffering of her beloved mother, and the memory of her mother's death and Velutha's weighs heavily on her mind. Living in the aftermath of those tragedies, she becomes more introspective and coldly rational in her outlook on life. Paying scant regard to those conventions that proscribe the individuality of woman in the tradition-bound society, Rahel creates transgressive lines for her life even as an adolescent. Her activities at school are atypical of a modest girl and are frowned upon by the school authorities. In the school she is blacklisted for ungirlish activities which entail three punitive expulsions for her - the first for "deliberately colliding with her seniors" to "find out whether breasts hurt" (16), "the second for smoking" (16), and "the third for setting fire to her Housemistress's false hair bun" (17). "It was, they whispered to each other, *as though she didn't know how to be a girl*" (17). Constantly subjected to disciplinary measures at school and to lovelessness at home, Rahel develops an independent spirit of her own and learns to shift for herself in the vicissitudes of life. She defies conventional expectations of a young girl's proper education, disposition, values and sense

of identity. Her gestures of independence and personal authority are frowned upon by orthodoxy. After a mediocre education she ventures into the world as a female adventuress and moves through a variety of worldly adventures and careers in search of economic and psychological independence, witnessing misfortunes, tragedies, betrayals and deceptions. Though alienated from her middle-class family and estranged from her relations, she pursues her own identity in the wider world of flux and mutability.

Rahel's life in Boston after her marriage with Larry McCaslin may be seen as her attempt to remain outside the weighty traditions and the debilitating conventions of her home country, which in her past life caused her moral suffering. Though the liberal humanism of America grants her the freedom to pursue her own life less hampered by those culturally prescribed norms of female identity, Rahel is haunted by a sense of desolation and restlessness which is largely generated by her brooding on her past miseries and her separation from her twin, Estha. Even Larry McCaslin, who marries Rahel for love, cannot account for her "exasperating expression" (19) which he mistakes for "enforced optimism" (19):

What Larry McCaslin saw in Rahel's eyes was not despair at all, but a sort of enforced optimism. And a hollow where Estha's words had been. He could not be expected to understand that. That the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other. That the two things fitted together. Like stacked spoons. Like familiar lovers' bodies (20).

Failing to achieve a satisfactory relationship with her husband, Rahel leaves him and takes up a series of jobs in America that make her economically independent. However, her

attempts to make her life more coherent, less chaotic and threatening meet with failure and add to her emotional deprivation. For some time she lives dangerously in cities gripped by unpredictable terror and violence:

After they were divorced, Rahel worked for a few months as a waitress in an Indian restaurant in New York. And then for several years as a night clerk in a bullet-proof cabin at a gas station outside Washington, where drunks occasionally vomited into the money tray, and pimps propositioned her with more lucrative job offers. Twice she saw men being shot through their car windows. And once a man who had been stabbed, ejected from a moving car with a knife in his back (20).

Bewildered by her inability to discover a cultural space and identity in a totally foreign milieu, Rahel is overwhelmed by an accentuated sense of deprivation and alienation. When Baby Kochamma writes to her that Estha has been "re-Returned" she gladly gives up her job and American life to join him.

Rahel's return to Estha breaks his silence of twenty three years, a silence that signifies his entrenched despair over the separation of his mother and her subsequent death. As the twins are united in love, Estha is restored to the long-lost world of tangible realities. The floodgates of his consciousness break open and let an avalanche of cataclysmic images into his mind:

It had been quiet in Estha's head until Rahel came. But with her she had brought the sound of passing trains, and the light and shade that falls on you if you have a window seat. The world locked out for years, suddenly flooded in, and now Estha couldn't hear himself for the noise (14-15).

The agony and the ecstasy of their reunion make him "rock himself in the air" (15). The world of their childhood dreams and fantasies has drifted away; yet they find the courage to face the world again as they have themselves to cling to.

As Rahel grows to a responsible adult, having seen so much of life and lived through cataclysmic events, she understands a great lesson: with their beloved mother, their mainstay, gone there is nothing beyond the love they have for each other. Turning to Estha in the dark she calls him "Esthapappychachen Kuttappen PeterMon"; this term of endearment is poignantly evocative of all the memories of their shared childhood, long memories of sorrow punctuated by brief interludes of fun and games. As they are united in love they achieve its consummation, though this consummation is once again an infringement of ancient "Love Laws" that prescribe "who should be loved and how much." Through such a transgressive act Rahel breaks out of the old pattern of domestic arrangements and is well on the way to reconstituting her own alternative order. The reunion of the twins makes it possible for them to overcome the pain of emotional deprivation and go on with their lives as Roy ends the novel with an "amoral" vision of familial love.

Ammu and Rahel move with bravado beyond the prescribed paradigms of female self-representation. Though Rahel, unlike Ammu, does not have to die for her private violation of the social code perpetrated in the space of her privacy, Roy seems to say that the intensity of both women's pursuit of female desire matters more than their success or failure. As Bose (64) remarks,

In asserting her own 'biological' desire for a man who inhabits a space beyond the permissible boundaries of 'touchability,' it appears that Ammu attempts a subversion of caste/class rules, as well as the main tendency to dominate by being, necessarily, the initiator of the sexual act. Further, Rahel and Estha's incestuous lovemaking as the culmination of a 'dizygotic' closeness that transcends - and violates - all biological norms, is proof once again of the subversive powers of desire and sexuality in an arena that is rife with the politics of gender divisions and the rules that govern them.

Rahel's growth to womanhood is inextricably bound up with the deprived childhood which she shared with Estha. She has inherited from her mother something of that "courage of a suicide bomber and the infinite tenderness of a mother". Like Ammu, it is this strange combination that emboldens her to flout not only the age-old traditions of society but the laws and taboos governing familial relationships. Misfortunes empower her to stand on her own feet and fend for herself. The moment of her reunion with Estha is the moment when she is finally able to transcend the man-made moral code.

Through the transgressive affair with Velutha, Ammu interrogates the rigidities of cultural norms and the strictures of society which include the love laws. What Rahel does is even more subversive - throwing overboard the taboos that govern the structure of familial relationships that have existed from time immemorial.

CHAPTER 2

WOMEN IN *FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN*

Roy delineates her protagonist's struggle against the strictures of society that dictate the subordination and marginalisation of women; Ammu is willing to die for her desire and fulfilment. In her search for freedom from the tyranny of conventions and her determination to achieve fulfilment on her own terms, Nanda Kaul, the protagonist of *Fire on the Mountain*, tries to evade the reality of human experience altogether in self-imposed exile. Her struggle, like Ammu's, is essentially to achieve her womanhood. However, her attempts to define herself in opposition to the prescribed norms of female identity and to appropriate a female space of her own by means of escapism are self-defeating and she is forced to relocate her identity within the framework of society.

Nanda Kaul thinks that, having fulfilled her duties as wife and mother, she is entitled to end her life in solitude and hence she retreats into the private space of Carignano to relish splendid isolation on her own terms. She belongs to upper-middle-class Hindu society and her husband was a Vice-Chancellor. All her life she has been busy ministering to her husband's needs and she had many children to attend to. Her long subordination to her domineering husband, to whom she was mere an appendage, has made her life hollow and meaningless. Splendidly clad in silk sarees, she presided over his table and managed his household, family cares and chores. But she was an unhappy wife and she felt like an imprisoned animal. She detested the monotony of domesticity and constant male domination: "She had suffered from the nimity, the disorder, the fluctuating and

unpredictable excess. ... It had been a religious calling she had believed in till she found it fake. It had been a vocation that one day went dull and drought-struck as though its life-spring had dried up" (30). Nanda Kaul becomes "a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation" (48).

To Nanda Kaul, life's realities become unbearable, which accounts for her retreat into the protective shell of solitude. Life has given her a raw deal. Her solitude is a rejection of her life as a wife and mother and its attendant duties and responsibilities. Though she enjoyed the status to some extent in Delhi as Vice-Chancellor's wife, her marriage was a farce. Her husband had disregarded her as his partner in life and had carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David, the mathematics teacher in the University. He

had only done enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David, the mathematics mistress, whom he had not married because she was a Christian but whom he had loved, all his life loved. And her children - the children were all alien to her nature. She neither understood them nor loved them. She did not live here alone by choice - she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing (145).

Nanda Kaul's spiritual impasse is a direct consequence of male domination. Extreme awareness of her plight is due to her refusal to accept the myths created and sustained by male-dominated society. Her retreat signifies in particular a rejection not only of traditional female roles but of the entire male-ordained system of social relationships as well. She rejects them because she does not want to fulfil them. "Everything she wanted was here, at

Carignano, in Kasauli. Here, on the ridge of the mountain, in this quiet house ... She wanted no one and nothing else. Whatever else came, or happened here, would be an unwelcome intrusion and distraction" (3).

The constrictions that Nanda Kaul remembers being subjected to in her Delhi house were submerged in her silence, and the external trappings of the ostensible luxury around her rendered her misery opaque to public gaze. "Looking down, over all those years she had survived and borne, she saw them, not bare and shining as the plains below, but like the gorge, cluttered, choked and blackened with the heads of children and grandchildren, servants and guests, all restlessly surging, clamouring about her" (17). Her life was one of duty and sacrifice. She constantly attended to the guests, looked after the children, and served her husband efficiently: "Too many trays of tea would have to be made and carried to her husband's study, to her mother-in-law's bedroom, to the veranda that was the gathering-place for all, at all times of the day. Too many meals, too many dishes on the table, too much to wash up after" (29).

The guests who were perpetually streaming into the house appreciated her efficiency in household management and they wanted her to overhear them when they complimented her: "'Isn't she like a queen? Really, Vice-Chancellor is lucky to have a wife who can run everything as she does,' and her eyes had flashed when she heard, like a pair of black blades, wanting to cut them, despising them, crawling grey bugs about her fastidious feet. That was the look no one had dared catch or return" (18). The plain truth was that she was acutely conscious of being an unloved woman, just a status symbol of her husband.

The enormity of the situation renders Nanda Kaul helpless. As Bande (92) remarks, "Under these circumstances, the choice for Nanda is limited-to fight or bear it mutely. She chooses the second alternative". She continues to serve her husband and children, and her silent suffering is noticed by none. The imagery of the lapwing symbolizes her plight: "That nervous, agitated bird, thought Nanda Kaul, watching its uneven flapping flight through the funereal moonlight, what made it leap so in fright, descend again on nervous feet, only to squawk and take off once more, making the night ring with its cries? That hunted, fearful bird, distracted and disturbing" (26).

Nanda Kaul's sensitivity to her external environment eludes her male counterpart. Her Vice-Chancellor husband, despite his prestigious position and academic status, remains impervious to her subtle vibrations. The discrepancy between what she aspires to and the reality she finds herself enmeshed in plunges her into untold agony and suffering. Nanda Kaul is an outcaste from a male world and her problem is to live down a life-time of humiliation and desolation. Her inner throbbings and aspirations are entirely at odds with the prosaic reality of the male-ordered world symbolized by her husband.

As Ramanathan (23) suggests, the history of Carignano, as presented by the narrator, functions as a trope for the woman's quest for the dominion of her own space. Its history is inscribed in violence by a series of female owners of the house (6-9). The narrator hints that this violence has arisen from the rage of the women who have occupied the house in the past. One of the occupants of the house, an English Pastor who had lived there with his wife, loved the apricot trees he grew there; however, "the longer their marriage the more she hated him and almost daily she made an attempt to murder him" (7). She tried to kill

him with a kitchen knife, though he survived; finally she "split her head open on a rock" (7). Miss Appleby was another occupant of the house, who, being very short-tempered, would "thrash the gardener for planting marigolds which she hated. ...She also poked a fork into her cook's neck when he was choking on a mutton bone in the belief it would make an aperture for him to breathe through. Unfortunately he died..." (7-9).

Even at the outset, it seems that Nanda Kaul's desire to appropriate a private space of her own at Carignano is under threat. "Then a Cuckoo called, quite close, here in the garden, very softly, very musically, but definitely calling - she recognized its domestic tone. She gave that ironic bow again very, very slightly, and went into the kitchen ..." (19). The cuckoo's call foreshadows intrusion into her privacy and prospective disorder. It doesn't take long for Nanda Kaul to realize that the cocoon she has built up around herself is tenuous and vulnerable to the onslaughts of the world. The state of desirelessness which Nanda Kaul aspires to is a flight from life itself and hence a self-deception. It is the result of a failed marriage. Her anxiety to shirk responsibilities verges on the neurotic: "Have I not done enough and had enough? I want no more. I want nothing. Can I not be left with nothing?" (17). As Jain (23) observes, "The world of Anita Desai's novels is an ambivalent one; it is a world where the central harmony is aspired to but not arrived at, and the desire to love and live clashes - at times violently - with the desire to withdraw and achieve harmony."

The letter Nanda Kaul receives from her daughter Asha at Carigno is, on the one hand, a painful reminder of female agony in a male-dominated world. It documents the agony and

torment of Tara, Asha's daughter, suffered at the hands of her alcoholic husband Rakesh, who is a diplomat. His waywardness and brutality make miserable her conjugal life which is drifting towards a break-up: "...as a result of his ill treatment of her, the affairs he had, his drinking and brutality, (she) was reduced to a helpless jelly, put away out of sight and treated as an embarrassment who could, if she tried, pull herself together" (14). Tara's disillusionment is complete and her marriage is nothing but a disaster. The letter, however, explains how Tara persuades her daughter Asha into putting up with her brutal husband. It even attempts to justify his evil ways and blames her daughter for her inability to appreciate her husband's faults and men's general weaknesses: "...he's not really so bad as Tara might make you believe, she simply doesn't understand him, doesn't understand *men*, and she really is the wrong type of wife for a man like him so I can't blame him *entirely* although it is true that he does drink - well, I have to get Tara ready" (15).

In the traditional Indian family and society, a wife is expected to be submissive, docile and even self-effacing to her husband. A woman who deviates from this rigid code of conduct is stigmatised. She is expected to adjust herself to all the vagaries of her husband, however callous and selfish he is. As Shirwadkar (67) observes,

Sociologists find that woman suffers as wife owing to her emotional home-loving temperament. She might try to rebel as an individual but it gives her infinite pain to be away from home as wife and mother. She prefers to suffer in silence and remain at home even though a part of her being dies in the process. Moreover it is difficult for the wife to rebel because the code of submission, sacrifice and chastity is dinned into her ears and imprinted on her mind from childhood.

Asha requests Nanda Kaul to take care of Tara's daughter Raka, who is recuperating after an attack of typhoid. Nanda Kaul who has had enough of caring for the children in her husband's house feels threatened by this. "It was against the old lady's policy to question her but it annoyed her intensely that she should once again be drawn into a position where it was necessary for her to take an interest in another's activities and be responsible for their effect and outcome" (46). The prospect of looking after her great-grand-daughter discomferts her considerably. In great distress she accepts this request against her own will.

Raka turns out to be a girl with an independent spirit who does not intrude on Nanda Kaul's privacy. Living her own solitary life, she avoids all human contact. As Krishnaswamy (261) suggests, Raka's rejection of the world seems natural and effortless, while Nanda Kaul's is planned and deliberate. "If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, her great-grand daughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct. She had not arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifices - she was born to it, simply" (47-48). Mistrustful of other people she seeks refuge in wild aspects of nature and broods on its desolation. Her solitary walks always lead her to burnt houses and ruins.

However, as the narrative unfolds, it transpires that Raka's fascination for uncanny nature is related to her unhappy childhood in a broken family. One of her walks takes Raka to a dance club in Kasauli where, lying hidden, she witnesses bizarre revelries and macabre dance. The violence of the revelry appalls her.

She wished she could close her eyes. She wished she were a million miles away from the band. She tried to think she was asleep and this was a nightmare. ... A woman

with a bucket on her head laughed inside it so that it was like a cooking spoon rattling in an empty pot. A figure in black answered her call and sidled up and bowed. When he straightened, Raka saw the skull and crossbones in white upon his chest. He had a scythe tucked under his arm and it glinted and shot off bolts of lights when he raised it and chopped off the woman's bucket head. Under her dishevelled hair her pink throat opened wide and she laughed in bubbles of blood. The bucket clanked across the floor and came to rest at Raka's foot. Her toes shrivelled. (69)

What Raka witnesses is the celebration of male chauvinism and violence towards women. Petrified with horror, she flees the festive orgy sobbing, "Hate them - hate them ..." (71).

The encounter with the drunken revelry at the club jolts Raka into the memory of her own nightmarish life with her parents. She remembers the image of her own drunken father acting violently towards her helpless, emotionally unstable mother. Raka's experience validates the contents of Asha's letter to Nanda Kaul, which revealed that Raka comes from a broken home with an alcoholic father and a mother who suffers from frequent nervous breakdowns. At this point we realize that Nanda Kaul's estimation of Raka as a recluse by instinct is not true to fact, that her fascination with desolate nature and her avoidance of human contact are devices for psychic self-preservation, enabling her to escape from the traumatic fears of her childhood. The club scene purges her of the unconscious fears and enables her to meet the challenges of life with strength and courage.

What she construes as Raka's "natural solitariness" wins Nanda Kaul's admiration and she feels drawn to the self-willed child. Soon Nanda Kaul gets caught in conflicting emotions.

She wants to evade Raka, but at the same time cannot keep her emotional distance from her. "[Nanda Kaul] did not really impose herself, or her ways on Raka. Yet she could not leave her alone" (63). It is significant to note here that despite her attraction towards Raka, Nanda Kaul is not keen on understanding Raka's past trauma; she fails to understand that Raka has not "arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection" (48). Reluctant to play the role of a loving mother to Raka, she makes gestures towards the girl in the form of walks, talks and stories to win her attention, but they are hollow, lacking genuine love. Nanda Kaul's attempts to beguile Raka by mythicising her childhood and building up a fantasy world backfire; Raka becomes suspicious of the truth of her stories and instinctively rejects them.

The culmination of the novel - Raka's setting the mountain on fire - suggests the purging and purification of both characters. Certainly the fire destroys Nanda Kaul's illusions and confronts her with the truths of life:

It was all a lie, all. She had lied to Raka, lied about everything. Her father had never been to Tibet - he had bought the little Buddha from a travelling pedlar. ... Nor had her husband loved and cherished her and kept her like a queen - he had only done enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David, the mathematics mistress, whom he had not married because she was a Christian but whom he had loved, all his life loved. And her children - the children were all alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them. She did not live here alone by choice - she lived here alone because that she was forced to do, reduced to doing. All those graces and glories with which she had tried to captivate Raka were only a

fabrication: they helped her to sleep at night, they were tranquillizers, pills. She had lied to Raka. (145)

The second intruder into Nanda Kaul's sequestered world is Ila Das. Born into a rich family, she has had a happy childhood. However, the miseries of her life begin with her father's death, and soon her family is in ruins. Her father, like Ammu's in *The God of Small Things*, is led by the conviction that girls in middle class families do not need any college education, for their destiny is to play the role of devout wives to their husbands and caring mothers to their offspring. Ila Das' brothers are sent abroad to universities like Cambridge and Harvard, where they lead dissolute lives and drink away the whole family fortune.

The family fortune, divided amongst three drunken dissolute sons as in a story, and not a penny of it to either of the two clever, thrifty, hard-working daughters, Ila and Rima, was then quickly becoming a thing of the past, no longer retrievable, barely believable. The sons had been sent to foreign universities-to Heidelberg, Cambridge, Harvard - and wherever they were, each had contrived not to attend a single lecture, to drink themselves ill, to find the nearest racecourse and squander their allowances on horses that never won. To begin with their father had paid the debts, then begun to sell his own horses, his carriage, his house. When he died, not one of them came to the funeral. They knew there was nothing left for them to inherit. They pestered their mother and two sisters then, for the last of the jewellery, and soon had them driven out into rented rooms and boarding houses, finally to whatever roof charity would hold over them. Eventually, blessedly, they died. Or disappeared (124).

Though reduced to penury and poverty, Ila Das and her sister Rima have good character as an asset. Ila Das evinces considerable resourcefulness and she stands up to adversities in life. After their father's death, Ila Das and her sister Rima share the burden of the family responsibilities and, in the absence of their brothers, have to take charge of the ailing mother with a rotten hip. Ila Das is blessed with a teaching position in the university which is granted to her more as a favour than on the strength of her merits by her friend Nanda Kaul, whose husband is the Vice-Chancellor. However, her glory is short-lived. The new Vice-Chancellor, who reviews her appointment strictly from the point of view of merit, decides against her and she is turned out of her job. Ila Das has to fall back on the mercy of her sister for survival: "For a while her sister had kept her, literally dividing each piece of bread in two between them" (125).

Later, as a social worker Ila Das fights against the male hegemony and superstitions of the villagers. Several men in the village threaten to harm her because of her progressive beliefs. She tells Nanda Kaul how the innocent and uneducated women in the village are blindly led by the village priest. His denunciation of modern medicine in favour of quackery reflects an irrational and superstitious mind:

Did I tell you, Nanda? The little boy was playing barefoot in the lane as these children do, and cut his foot on a rusty nail. I *told* Maya-devi to take him to the clinic straightaway for an anti-tetanus, but she wouldn't hear of it. Or rather, the priest-man wouldn't hear of it. Nooo, he said, Nooo, injections were the work of the devil and Maya-devi was not to take the child to the clinic. Well, 'she went on, 'that

little boy died, of course, and you know what it is to die of tetanus. Now Maya-devi knows' (128).

We also learn from her that, though the law of the land had abolished the institution of child marriage which prevailed in India for centuries, the custom still obtains in the villages of India; Ila Das feels obliged to enforce the law as a responsible welfare officer, but she meets with stiff opposition from the bastions of orthodoxy represented by the village priest. Moreover, even the husbands and the young men in the village, under the influence of the priest, rally against Ila Das who takes a heroic stand against this irrational orthodoxy that is injurious to the well-being of the womenfolk in the village.

Ila Das finally becomes a scapegoat of male wrath and chauvinism. She is raped and murdered by Preet Singh, who wants to marry off his daughter to an old widower for a little financial gain. Libert (576) observes:

Preet Singh's act is one of revenge executed under passion. Ila Das, by trying to prevent him from marrying off his young daughter, has called into question the condition of women in India, with its tradition of male dominance and female submission. By questioning this dominance and submission, Ila Das challenged Preet Singh's ego and virility which so infuriates him that he wants to assert his power and superiority over her. This he can do by raping her, thus violating her womanhood, something that murder alone would not have accomplished.

As a woman worker Ila Das fails to bring about any changes to the decaying life of the village people, especially the women folk, because of an irrational opposition to her gender. This offsets all the advantages of the relatively good education that she has enjoyed. Male chauvinism takes justice into its hands and punishes her by taking away her life. Lal (253) observes:

The remote communities [in India] live by customary practices of their own and one of these is child-marriage. Ila's city education and beliefs pose a threat to a community entirely different from her. The villagers know only one solution to the problem - the ancient one of taking justice into their own hands and 'punishing' Ila Das as only a woman can be punished.

Ila Das' death points to, as Lal (255) notes, the predicament of the single woman in postcolonial India, who is forced to fend for herself economically in the absence of a social security system.

Ila Das' tragic end also explodes Nanda Kaul's illusions of retreat from life. It helps her face up to the realities of her life. She realizes that she has to accept the facts about her husband's disloyalty in good faith and carry on with a life based on truth. Libert (577) observes:

She even accepts the fact that her past roles as wife and mother were failures. Learning about the rape and murder enables her to face what she had so painfully concealed, what had undermined her faith in life. As Nanda Kaul recognizes the truth of her past, there seems to be an echo of Raka's earlier moment of discovery when she witnessed the scene at the club. For just as Raka's world of pretense was

shattered when she faced the truth about her childhood, Nanda's world of illusions crumbles.

The past which Nanda Kaul has tried to obliterate inflicts itself upon her in the shape of Ila Das. Nanda Kaul's concerted effort to disown it results in Ila Das' death, which confronts Nanda Kaul with the realization that her life has so far been founded on fantasy and illusion. The death enables her to realize that, like Raka, who faces up to certain unpalatable truths about her childhood, she has also to come to terms with her past, however bitter it is. Nanda Kaul's search for freedom through a self-imposed exile proves abortive as she is not freed from egoism and attachment to the world. As Radhakrishnan (95) points out, "If man rises above egoism and acts without selfish attachment only then he is truly free."

The novel culminates, as we have seen, with the forest fire. Raka calls at the window to her great-grandmother: "Look, Nani, I have set the forest on fire" (145). There is no response; she "saw Nanda Kaul on the stool with her head hanging, the black telephone hanging, the long wire dangling" (145). This concluding description of the posture of the protagonist can easily be misconstrued as an indication that she is dead. However, such an interpretation would detract from the symbolic importance of Raka's act. The fire is surely meant to indicate the destruction of Nanda Kaul's illusions. Her death-like posture suggests her shocked recognition of the futility of her retreat from the world, along with her consternation at the news about Ila Das' death. Libert (577-578) observes:

Not only would Nanda Kaul's death add little to the narrative, it would diminish its momentum. A second death, especially that of the main character, would seem false, contrived, and anti-climatic. Moreover, Nanda Kaul's discovery of the futility of a life

of fantasy would not have carried such significance if it had simply been a revelation coming to her just before dying. Nanda Kaul must live after the discovery in order to struggle toward a new life based on truth - not an easy matter.

CHAPTER 3

WOMEN IN *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY*

Fire on the Mountain demonstrates the futility of the female protagonist's attempt to forge an identity of her own apart from society. The impingement of society on the isolation of Nanda Kaul causes the collapse of her fake retreat and confronts her with the inescapable reality of social life. It would seem that the break-up of her retreat is not meant to land her in despair, but to save her from self-deception and to enable her to face life courageously, however imperfect it is. In *Clear Light of Day* the protagonist Bim, like Nanda Kaul, is on a voyage of self-discovery and revolts against the conventional matrices by which a woman is judged. And Bim too experiences her fulfilment not in rejection of anything but in acceptance and positive commitment. She emerges victorious with an intuitive appreciation of how to reconcile the apparent discords and disparities in life.

In *Clear Light of Day* Desai shows how parental indifference and irrationality thwart the lives of women in the family. Moreover, the responses of the female characters are set against the backdrop of the partition of India, which brings in its wake a pattern of violence and bloodshed. The lives of Bimla and Tara are made miserable by the irresponsibility and lovelessness of their parents. They are strangers to parental love and affection. Playing cards has become their parents' obsession and they have little time to spare for their children, who crave warmth, sympathy and love. There is virtually no communication between parents and children, for the former "had sat, day after day and year after year till their deaths, playing bridge with friends like themselves" (15). They mostly sit silent, heads bent, their

soft hands "shuffling the cards, now and then speaking those names and numbers that remained a mystery to the children" (22). This "all-absorbing occupation" of their parents infuriates Bim so much so that she "flashed her sewing scissors in the sunlight and declared she would creep in secretly at night and snip all the cards into bits" (22).

Though their father's insurance business is the mainstay of the family, his extreme absorption in the card game leaves the business neglected. Deeply embittered by the lack of parental responsibility, Bim gives vent to her feelings of resentment against him:

...I don't understand the insurance business. Father never bothered to teach me. For all father cared, I could have grown up illiterate and - cooked for my living, or swept. So I had to teach myself history, and teach myself to teach. But father never realized ... that that doesn't prepare you for running an insurance business (155).

Bim's response to her father's indifference indicates how the decadent life of her parents tells on the future of the daughters in the family. Hedged in by traditions and taboos, they are left with few options in life.

After the father's death, Raja, the eldest son, is naturally expected to carry on the insurance business which assures the family a steady and regular income. To Bim's dismay, Raja is not interested in the family business and his suggestion that Baba, his mentally retarded brother, take charge of it reflects not only his lack of concern for the future of his family but also his insensitivity to his unfortunate brother, who, being retarded, needs to be supported by all family members. When Bim protests that Baba cannot be entrusted with the responsibility and suggests Raja look after the business, he curtly remarks, "Let him grow up, let him take

a little responsibility. Give him a simple task or two to perform. See if he can't manage" (66). He even goes to the extent of saying, "It's nothing to worry about, see, Bim. These aren't the things to worry about in life" (66). Bim is furious at Raja's response:

'No, that's only for me to worry about,' said Bim, as dour as her father, as their house, popping the thermometer into his mouth. 'That, and the rent to be paid on the house, and five, six, seven people to be fed every day, and Tara to be married off, and Baba to be taken care of for the rest of his life, and you to be got well again - and I don't know what else' (67).

Raja's failure to meet his responsibilities as he pursues his romantic freedom throws the family into an uncertain future. Bim is left in charge. Raja tells Bim, " You don't want me to spend all life down in this hole, do you? You don't think I can go on living just to keep my brother and sister company, do you?" (100). His departure shocks Bim badly. She finds herself solely responsible for looking after a retarded brother, prompting in her feelings of frustration and anguish.

Bim opts out of marriage and resolves to lead a life of spinsterhood. By doing so, as Jena (31) notes, she revolts against the traditional image of Indian womanhood. In fact it is her sense of responsibility towards her family that prompts her to live like a spinster. She is not bothered about the limitations thus imposed on her; she knows that marriage "wouldn't be enough to hold her for the whole of her life" (Krishnaswamy, 274). "... I can think of hundreds of things to do instead. *I won't marry ... I shall work - I shall do things, ... I shall earn my own living and look after Mira-masi and Baba and - and be independent*" (140).

Bim's capacity for philosophical reflections marks her out as a woman of great individualistic spirit and her philosophical consolations are largely derived from her exposure to great western thinkers. As Gupta (119) remarks, "When Bim felt very lonely and unhappy during the upheaval of 1947, she turned to poetry to provide her solace and comfort - she reads 'Thodol Bardel,' Lawrence's 'Ship of Death,' and Eliot's The 'Wasteland'" (97). Krishnaswamy (277) observes, "Ironically it is [Bim's] unconventionality, her brusqueness, and her mental alertness that attract men to her;" even the prudent and practical Bakul feels attracted to her (Krishnaswamy, 277). Tara realizes this: "[Bakul] had always admired Bim, even if she infuriated him often, and Tara sensed this admiration in the murky air" (150).

Bim is happy to remain single without any male companionship. She resists the advances made by Dr. Biswas once she learns that he would be incompatible as her partner in her life. She continues to discharge her duties to the family to the best of her ability. She does not feel the need to fall back on a man for emotional comfort. In her treatment of the Bim-Dr Biswas relationship, the narrator seems to favour the position taken by Bim and turns Dr. Biswas into an object of derision. The tea party in Dr. Biswas' house attended by Bim brings out the conflicting attitudes of Biswas and Bim: "The tea party was of course a mistake and Bim scowled and cursed herself for having softened and let herself in for what was a humiliation and a disaster for every- one concerned" (90). The party provides an

occasion to prove once and for all the incompatibility of Dr. Biswas and Bim as life-long partners in marriage. Bim listens to the conversation between Mrs Biswas and her son and has no difficulty in concluding that Mrs Biswas' idealization of her son disgusts her: "His mother made it seem he was Apollo in disguise" (92), observes Bim during the party. As Bim hurries home she reflects: "How much his mother's son he was, ... he had inherited her gift for loading the weight of his self-sacrifices onto others" (92). The narrator shows Biswas and his mother in a comical light so as to favour Bim's reactions.

Though Bim "refuses to play the conventional role of a submissive wife ... her commitment to her [independent] role [ironically] makes her the sustaining force of the family" (Jena, 31). When aunt Mira dies, Bim takes up the role of benign mother and father to Baba, her brother. Though she is individualistic to a considerable degree, she does not neglect her retarded brother. As Jena (59) observes, "Bim's life acquires a heroic dimension in this symbolic motherhood, for she not only sustains the family, she also sustains the house which is metaphysically suggestive of tradition. She thus becomes symbolic of forces that sustain and support life against all destructive impulses." Bim's individualism is not a retreat from the responsibilities of life. Her life exemplifies how a woman can fulfil responsibilities to her family even while refusing to play conventional roles. Nabar (229) comments:

...[Bim] clearly belongs to a class easily identifiable in Ms. Desai's novels, a class which is comfortably well off, anglicized, even neocolonial. However, like Ms. Desai's other female characters, like most of the Indian women whom she recognizably resembles, Bim is also conditioned by her Indian environment. It is *this* environment which positions her as the moral and physical caretaker of the

Das household after her parents die. ...Bim, saddled with her alcoholic aunt and retarded brother, accommodates them into her scheme of things. Her western counterpart in similar circumstances would have most likely dumped them into appropriate homes in order to preserve her existential freedom.

Bim takes charge of the Das household after her parents' death; she rises to the occasion and becomes the caretaker of the family morally and physically. By contrast, *Mira-masi* (Bim's aunt) is completely thrown off balance and she falls into alcoholism. Tara, who is also timid by nature, marries Bakul, the diplomat, turning away from the responsibilities of the family. Even Raja, carried away by romantic notions of individualistic freedom, flees the home instead of facing up to the problems in the family and tackling them boldly. Bim is hence burdened with an alcoholic aunt and an imbecile brother, but she takes charge of them in good faith. Bim projects the image of a self-sufficient woman capable of advancing in her life by virtue of her decisiveness and independent spirit. Her resolve to stay at home looking after Baba, her retarded brother, can be viewed as a benevolent act of her own choice. Bakul says, "She made what she wanted" (158) and admires her for it. Bim also shows a maternal affection towards her students who have lessons in history from her.

However, having stayed back for years, Bim eventually feels that she is in a rut with her fate sealed. She feels confined with no space of her own. Embittered by her responsibilities, she begins to live with regrets, though she cannot admit that to her own self; she hides her anguish under a cloak of brusqueness. For twenty years, Bim has been tormented by the desertion of Raja, her elder brother, whom she had idealised with great affection. After

Raja runs away to Hyder Ali in Hyderabad, leaving her in the crumbling house with an alcoholic aunt and imbecile Baba, the bitterness she feels gives rise to a sense of rejection and alienation.

"During Tara's visit to Bim and Baba, both the sisters become aware of the tremendous changes brought about by time" (Gupta, 122). The encounter between them brings to the fore in particular the disenchantment suffered by the stay-at-home Bim. The image we get of Bim is that of an aging spinster, rotting in the decadent house in old Delhi, the city that does not change, that only decays, "a great cemetery, every house a tomb" (5). Here we meet a Bim who is irate, sarcastic and embittered. Left behind in the house deserted by Raja and Tara, she feels bitter towards them. Envious of the freedom that they enjoy, she too wishes to be independent. She feels rejected and deserted and is in dire need of a renewed sense of self-worth. The gnawing sense of disintegration renders her estranged not only from her kith and kin but from the whole world. Gupta (125) remarks: "[Bim] resists Tara's and Raja's gestures of love and affection, for she feels that she, the house and Old Delhi are all part of the decaying dead past, while the rest of the family, and country have moved far ahead, in a new direction".

When Tara tells her that she, Bakul and Raja want to come there often, to be with her, Bim asks in despair: "‘who would be thrilled to return to this - this dead old house?’ She thwacked the wire screen with her fist so that the dust flew out of it" (156). The untidiness of the decaying house reflects Bim's lacklustre life and Tara is shocked at the condition of the "dead old house."

To some extent Bim's rage arises from her realization that her latent aggressive spirit cannot be accommodated fully within the "dead old house" of Indian society. Bande (146) observes:

The Hindu social code sees external ambition in women as detrimental and unnatural. Anita Desai also affirms in an interview with Jasbir Jain that in Indian society of the early nineteen forties, of which she is writing in this novel, 'certainly one was aware that men had a different kind of life open to them which was entirely shut to girls. Girls at that time didn't even visualise having any kind of independent will to choose for themselves.'

Bim's ambition to be something in life is undermined by the codes of the society that reduce women to subservience. It is this friction between her real self and the values of the society that ignites her conflict. Bim finds herself overwhelmed by the sordid realities of life that make a mockery of her ambitions. The conflict in her gives rise to a rage that is directed primarily against Raja, who shrugs off his responsibilities in the family without good reasons. Her caustic remark against Raja is clearly expressive of her rage that she can no more contain: "He (Raja) is too rich to be interesting anymore, too fat, and too successful. Rich, fat and successful people are *boring*, I'm not interested, Tara" (143). The long and short of her story is that her frustration and the consequent anger can be attributed to the fear of being left alone with responsibilities. Deeply incensed at Raja's irresponsibility she bursts out, "Oh, if only Raja would take care of these things" (154).

Before Bim comes to terms with her real situation, she is dangerously close to neurosis. Tara notices her talking to herself. Finally when her anger erupts, it is channelled against

Baba, whom she has never admitted to herself as a hindrance to her freedom. Bim gradually develops the notion that her staying back is an act of self-sacrifice. Her apparent composure gives way to a rage directed against Baba whom she sees as the source of all her sorrows.

However, the explosion of her rage has a cathartic effect. Soon she is confronted with the moment of self-actualisation. As the narrative unfolds we see Bim's changed vision. In the long night following her outburst against Baba she watches the turbulence of the emotions within her and makes a great effort to transcend the suffering. Bim emerges victorious out of the cocoon of her mind to experience the bliss of self-actualization. She realizes that all her fears were due to her imperfect love. Soon Bim acknowledges a full recognition of her deep love for Tara, Raja and Baba. She feels "No other love had started so far back in time and had so much time in which to grow and spread. They were really all part of her, inseparable, so many aspects of her as she was of them" (165). Gupta (127) remarks: "This love relates her knowledge, reason with imagination and provide her a sense of fulfilment integrates her knowledge, reason and imagination into a meaningful whole and provides a sense of fulfilment". The "gleam of light" that she experiences is the joy of her own expanded consciousness. Bim's quest for self-actualisation ends with the discovery of selfless love, the love that makes no claims or demands in life. Bim realises this ultimate truth by the clear light of day. Wheeler (259) comments:

One of Desai's most striking accomplishments is her success in unifying the outer world of social life with the inner realm of her characters, so that the distinction between the two dissolves into the order which reintegrates them. Thus, in her artistic effort to design, out of the meaningless chaos of life, an imaginative

composition, Desai has achieved a unity of vision which completely overcomes the dualistic philosophies arising from mere surface facts.

Haunted by fear and a sense of insecurity, Tara, the most sensitive of the siblings, provides a contrast to Bim. While Bim holds out firmly against marriage and meets her responsibilities as a sibling, Tara behaves like a conventionally domesticated Indian woman and seeks marriage as an escape from the decadence of the family, and the boredom of her childhood and adolescence: "It seemed to her that the dullness and the boredom of her childhood, her youth, were stored here in the room ... everything that she hated as a child and that was still preserved here as if this were the storeroom of some dull, ininviting provincial museum" (21).

Tara's morbid sense of insecurity and fear, as we have seen, are largely caused by the lovelessness and aloofness of her parents. The chronic suffering of her diabetic and invalid mother and the hopeless future of Baba, her mentally retarded brother, make her cup of misery full. One of Tara's haunting memories is the image of her father plunging a needle into the arm of her diabetic mother. The grim look of her mother's face caused by the acute pain overwhelmed her with fear. Tara fancied that her father was trying to kill her mother. "Tara had fled, trembling, because she was sure she had seen her father kill her mother" (23). Chakravarty (83) observes: "The description, with its projection of female helplessness in the face of male aggression within the sanctioned framework of matrimony, carries explicit associations of sexual violence and death, triggering the subconscious fear which haunts Tara's relationship with her husband."

The life at school is equally dreary for Tara; it does not bring any of the joy or comfort she constantly yearns for. While Bim evinces her leadership qualities as a monitor at school, Tara, timid, shy and introverted lags behind in all activities, and feels miserable about it: "Forced to go back to school, she accepted with a weak abandonment of hope that these grey, wretched days would stretch on forever, blighting her life with their creeping mildew" (127). The missionary ladies who run the school are all elderly spinsters and they all find her lack of ability "too deplorable". They all misunderstand her and mistake her loneliness for snobbishness and conceit. Tara sees their malice as a projection of their own frustration: "Tara sensed a bank of frustration - surely that was what made them so frighteningly spiteful, bitter and ill-tempered. They had such very sarcastic tongues and always seemed to single out Tara, as if sensing her distaste and disapproval, for their sharpest tongue-lashings" (125). When Tara finds that other pupils including Bim relish her misery at school, she feels very frustrated and alienated.

Bim even becomes angry with Tara because Tara, having a natural phobia for hospitals, avoids going there on Charity Thursdays along with her other school mates to serve the sick: "If you can't even do this little bit for the poor, what will you ever be able to do when you grow up?" (126). Even when Tara explains that she can give generously to the sick without physically going to hospitals, Bim is not satisfied, leaving Tara feeling outraged and estranged: "'I don't mind giving them my breakfast fruit,' cried Tara passionately, tearful and red-faced now that she had been found out. 'They can have *all* my fruit, every bit. Only *I* don't want to go and give it to them!'" (126).

The desperation that Tara experiences both at school and at home creates in her an aching desire for escape from her present predicament, and she sees marriage as the only solution, leaving Bim with all the responsibilities of keeping their family going: "It was not spite or retaliation that made Tara abandon Bim - it was the spider fear that lurked at the centre of the web-world for Tara. Yet she did abandon Bim, it was true that she did" (134). Tara's homecoming proves, however, that her dreams of finding escape from the decadence of the family through marriage and love were difficult to fulfil in the face of life's realities; the problems and conflicts she glossed over need to be confronted and sorted out with the help of Bim, with whom she had shared her past.

While Bim wanted to be a heroine, Tara sought her security and fulfilment in becoming a perfect wife and mother. Life has upset the dreams of both, and both are disappointed. Back home with Bim, Tara appears more sophisticated, confident, and socially poised. Yet soon it begins to appear that her external composure and sophistication, which are largely due to having lived in great cosmopolitan cities, are just a pose, not proof against external pressures or inner turmoil. Tenuous as it is, her composure breaks up under the burden of past experiences. Bim is keen enough to note the vulnerability of her sophistication: "It amused Bim to see, through a haze of cigarette smoke, Tara's not quite assimilated cosmopolitanism that sat on her oddly, as if a child had dressed up in its mother's high-heeled shoes - taller, certainly, but wobbling" (37).

The family re-union also shows that Tara, who always takes pride in the idea of becoming a contented wife and happy mother, has rather "dwindled into a mere shadow of her husband,

Bakul" (Chakravarty, 82). Bakul, the diplomat, who swears by order, planning, and execution, is supposed to have taught her to be strong, to exercise her will, to face challenges, and to be decisive. But she appears happy to be controlled by her efficient and prudent husband.

Once back home, Tara falls helplessly back into the old grooves, irritating her husband considerably. She soon shows signs of resistance to her husband's attempts to impose his will on her. Bakul does not respect Tara's plans to spend her time in her own way. He cannot appreciate her desire to spend time with her sister Bim in the house where they grew up. Tara protests, "But it's what I want - just to be home again, with them. And of course there are the neighbours - I'll see them. But I don't want to go anywhere today, and I don't want to go to New Delhi at all" (11). Bakul, irked by her "unaccustomed stubbornness" (11), is not slow to restore male order and authority: "Of course you will come.' Bakul said quite sharply, ... 'There is no question about that'" (11).

Tara's growing defiance mystifies and exasperates Bakul, who goes out alone, leaving her with her sister. He is quite unable to understand the workings of her mind, blissfully unaware of her commotions, and confused about her wish to spend time with her sister instead of seeing round New Delhi with him. The narrator observes that Tara's defiance is symptomatic of her disillusionment in marriage: "[Tara] felt she had followed him enough, it had been such an enormous strain, always pushing against her grain, it had drained her of too much strength, now she could only collapse, inevitably collapse" (18). Though Tara has founded a family of her own and has become the proud mother of two children, her apparent success in life is vitiated by fears and anxiety. Tara's "unaccustomed stubbornness"

(11) in disobeying her husband testifies to her frustration and discontentment, but also to an incipient strength.

Furthermore, Tara now feels a compulsive need to come home at regular intervals, so as "not to lose touch ... to find out and make sure again" (6). Tara and Bim realize how much they have been shaped by their shared past and to what extent it has distorted their views of each other and of the family. As Tara admits, reflecting on her sister's mental make-up,

She had always thought Bim so competent, so capable. Everyone had thought that ...

But Bim seemed to stampede through the house like a dishevelled storm ... Tara saw how little she had really observed - either as a child or as a grown woman. She had seen Bim through lenses of her own self, as she had wanted to see her. And now, when she tried to be objective ... she found she could not - her vision was strewn, obscured and screened by too much of the past (148).

They agree never to return to the past, their childhood, "all that dullness, boredom, waiting" (4), but life seems to have outsmarted them. Memories of guilt and betrayal intermingle in Tara's mind. She comes to the old decaying house to exorcise them. She is conscious of the fact that she abandoned Bim not because of any spite or retaliation but in order to escape from fear: "'Of course now I do see,' Tara went on at last, 'that I must have used him as an instrument of escape. The completest escape I could have made - right out of the country'" (157).

Bim wonders whether these typically adult feelings arose in Tara's mind as a child. Tara's answer is that she only felt them; their articulation came later: "I only felt it. The thoughts -

the words - came late. Have come only now!' she exclaimed in surprise" (157). It is this bold confrontation with the past and steady reflection on it that enables Tara as well as Bim to shed its horrors and come to terms with it. Such a mature reflection on the past leads to a better mutual understanding on their part and a unified vision of the past and the present.

Tara has tormented herself for long with the thought of having abandoned Bim to their decaying house and imbecile brother. The guilt feelings have been weighing heavily on her mind. ... "When I married - and left - and didn't even come back and help you nurse Mira-*masi*, Bim - whenever I think of that - how *could* I?" (174) When Bim comforts her, telling that it does not matter, as it happened long ago, Tara answers, "but it's never over. Nothing's over, ever" (174), and Bim agrees. When the siblings make bold to confront the past and accept its pains and pleasures as part of their integrated experience, there are no more fears left in their minds. It dawns on Bim that Tara's desperation is a reflection of her own tormented self. She reflects: "They were not so unlike. They were more alike than any other two people could be. They had to be, their hands were so deep in the same water, their faces reflected it together. 'Nothing's over, ' she agreed. 'Ever,' she accepted." (174). As Bim agrees to her view, Tara feels comforted in her "corroboration". The sisters agree to a meaningful "continuation" (174).

For Tara as well as for Bim, to resolve the past calls for confronting it courageously. They have to face the truth to come to terms with it. This proves to Tara how distorted her earlier vision of the past was. Tara and Bim eventually realize who they really are so that they can live more truthfully as themselves and for each other. Bim becomes reconciled to

her life in the house while Tara accepts living with her past failings, without blaming others or seeking their forgiveness. The past, re-experienced in its fullness, needs no further explanation: "Everything had been said at last, cleared out of the way finally. There was nothing left in the way of a barrier or a shadow, only the clear light pouring down from the sun" (177). Bim experiences a "gleam of light", which is the light of her own self; this light not only illumines her relationship with her siblings and the world but also enables her to get an insight into the unified existence of past, present and future.

As Bande (152) remarks, "Bim's moments of inner delight come on the musical evening arranged by the Mishras". The sublimities of music coming from the Guru of Mulk enable Bim to obliterate the arbitrary distinction between past and present. "With her inner eye she saw how her own house and its particular history linked and contained her as well as her whole family with all their separate histories and experiences - ..." (182). Bande (152-153) remarks: "Through this harmony complete identification of the inner and the outer world is established. As Frederick Schiller points out, it is only through beauty that man makes his way to freedom. The aged singer's sharp but sad voice brought out 'the storms and rages and pains of his life.' (*CLD*, p. 182)." In these moments of Bim's self-actualisation all become one in spirit. Bim sees through the limitations of human perception, beyond time. Her epiphany promises ongoing comfort and solace.

CHAPTER 4

CHILDREN IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*, *FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN*, AND *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY*

THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

A central concern of Roy's novel is the contrast between the child's and the adult's view of things. The world of childish imagination is contrasted with the world of fact and reality as the adults understand it. Menon (1-3) says, "*The God of Small Things* is about childhood and loss of innocence. The fear of it, the terror and love of it, the deep scars it leaves." Roy deals sensitively with situations of childhood without falling into sentimentalism. The novel enquires into the fate of innocence and investigates the dramatic and moral possibilities ensuing from the confrontation between innocence and experience.

The bulk of the narration defines a memory. The fragility of the twins' world and its subsequent destruction by the adult world emerge through the tortuous trajectories of events unfolding in the present and the past. As the narrative moves forward and backward in time, we see how the twins' world of joy and wonder is shattered, as they are confronted with happenings in the adult world that are too complex for their comprehension. The central voices are those of Rahel the child and Rahel the adult, the latter recollecting her past childhood, shared with her twin brother, Estha. The ever-present contrast of the two states gives the narrative its particular momentum and poignancy.

The story starts with Rahel's return to Ayemenem to meet her twin brother Estha after a separation of twenty-three years. The opening chapter establishes the contrast not only between what the twins thought of themselves and what the world thought of them when they were children but also between what they thought of themselves as children and what they think of themselves as adults. As Estha and Rahel were "dizygotic twins", not identical, they appeared different, and there was little difficulty in knowing which was which. The joint identity of their twinhood and the depths of their shared delights were thus imperceptible to the world at large.

Rahel as an adult remembers these delights, but she is also aware that their existence as twin children was far from idyllic, featuring sorrows and pains brought about by contact with the adult world. As Rahel looks back, she remembers how their synergy enabled them to share each other's sorrows as well as joys. But as they grew up, they developed distinct identities with definite "Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits" (3).

The twins' perception of the events and systems of the adult world are characterized by an idiosyncratic logic: "They ... believed that if they were killed on a zebra crossing, the Government would pay for their funerals. Free funerals. They had the definite impression that that was what zebra crossings were meant for" (4). Similarly, the account of the first funeral experienced by the twins is couched in such terms as to suggest the novelty of the spectacle from a child's point of view rather than its significance in the adult world:

She thought of what would happen if the rope snapped. She imagined him dropping like a dark star out of the sky that he had made. Lying broken on the hot church

floor, dark blood spilling from his skull like a secret. By then Esthappen and Rahel had learned that the world had other ways of breaking men. They were already familiar with the smell. Sicksweet. Like old roses on a breeze (6).

The imagery, besides capturing an overwhelming sense of wonder at the novelty of the spectacle on the part of the children, brings out its sickening association with the death, decay and destruction that contaminate the adult world. It thus registers the essential imperfections and depravities of that world. The narrator, Rahel, though an adult in the present, here involves herself completely in her recollections, looking back at events through the eyes of her childhood. The memory of events inflicted on her childish mind is so deeply entrenched that even now her perception of facts is not accompanied by an ability to comprehend their true significance: "Sophie Mol died because she couldn't breathe. Her funeral had killed her" (7).

As twins, Estha and Rahel have an emotional connection far stronger than that of most siblings. As Prasannarajan (5) points out, "Their sadness, their joys, their dissent have no autonomous divisions." The narrator observes: "[Rahel] could feel the rhythm of Estha's rocking, and the wetness of rain on his skin. She could hear the raucous, scrambled world inside his head" (21). Their extraordinary ability to enter each other's consciousness and partake of the myriad events registered therein can be attributed to their unique mutual empathy and love. The secret of this magical power is impenetrable to the outside world at large. Even Baby Kochamma, who bears inordinate malice towards them for being the children of an intercaste marriage, and who succeeds to a large extent in aborting their childhood joys, is intimidated by the strength of their mutual love. Her decision to separate

the twins physically by returning Estha to their father in Calcutta may be largely due to her fear of their inviolable unity.

Baby Kochamma hates the twins with all her heart because they were born of a Hindu father. She considers them "Half Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry" (45). The narrator painfully remembers how the twins, returning home fatherless with their beloved mother, Ammu, began to live on sufferance at Ayemenem House. Left alone in the world, their life was one of isolation, fear and bewilderment. Chacko, their uncle, and Mammachi, their grandmother, provided the care, but "withdrew the concern" (15). Baby Kochamma makes them realize that they have absolutely no rights in Ayemenem House, as Ammu, their mother, having married and deserted her husband, is not entitled to stay there. Moreover, their mother, having married a Hindu, has violated the time-honoured customs of the society; she has broken "the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much. ... It was a time when the unthinkable became thinkable and the impossible really happened" (31). Estha and Rahel, perceptive as they are, slowly come to realize that, as children, their security is threatened and that they cannot depend on the perilous world of adults. They also learn an important lesson: that violation of the social code is attended by dreadful consequences.

The twins also realize that the adults representing the authoritarian code of society are deceptive opportunists who exercise their authority with double standards to tyrannize the weak and humour the strong. While Ammu, the twins' mother, is despised and looked down upon as a parasite for having come home to stay after deserting her husband, Chacko,

despite being divorced from Margarite, his English wife, is joyfully welcomed back home by Mammachi. With the arrival from London of Sophie Mol, Chacko's daughter by Margarite, and thus the twins' cousin, the twins are forced to appreciate their relatively second class status. While Mammachi plays "Welcome Home, Our Sophie Mol melody on her violin"(183), allowing Sophie Mol to make off with her thimble, and Kochu Maria bakes a cake in honour of Sophie, the twins realize that they dwindle into insignificance in the family and that Sophie Mol, being the daughter of Chacko, the master of the house, has been privileged and loved from the beginning. The preferential treatment meted out to Sophie Mol bewilders the twins and aggravates their agony and pain.

When Kochu Maria says that Sophie Mol will grow up to become Rahel's mistress, the latter is deeply incensed; Rahel calls Kochu Maria ugly and refuses to eat any of the cake offered by Kochu Maria, who warns Rahel that, as she is jealous, she is bound to go to hell. Rahel gets even angrier but, being unable to deal directly with her since she lives on sufferance in Ayemenem, she directs her anger against a column of ants:

Rahel put on her sunglasses and looked into the Play. Everything was Angry-coloured. Sophie Mol, standing between Margaret Kochamma and Chacko, looked as though she ought to be slapped. Rahel found a column of juicy ants. They were on their way to church. All dressed in red. They had to be killed before they got there. Squished and squashed with a stone. You can't have smelly ants in church (185).

Kuttappan, Velutha's brother, expresses his desire to meet Sophie Mol, who has come from London. "'We're not allowed to bring her here...and anyway, there's nothing to *see*', Rahel

assures Kuttappen. 'She has hair, legs, teeth - you know - the usual...only she's a little tall.' And that was the only concession she would make." (210). Rahel, provoked by the privileged treatment accorded to Sophie Mol, will not grant any distinction to her and prefers to treat her just as an ordinary girl.

Alienated from the world of adults, Estha and Rahel often escape into a world of fantasy, myth and nursery rhymes. This plane of existence is far removed from the adults' world of careful planning and execution. Rahel's vision of the ants "on their way to church" (185) is an example of her ability to transform mundane events into a fantastical shape. She and Estha also take delight in exploiting the playful possibilities of language; they devise nonsense rhymes full of patterned absurdity. The impulse to fantasize is an important part of the child's development. Fantasy's main function, like that of fairy tales, is to express imaginative insights into the human condition by images which evoke - rather than explain - the essence of life and good and evil.

Nursery rhymes, fairy tales and fantasies are built into the narrative to accentuate the children's perspective. The mediating adult vanishes and the reader is brought face to face with a world which appears illogical, disordered and unreal. These rhymes have no purpose other than to evoke how the world looks through the eyes of a child. A good example is the nonsense rhyme sung by Kuttappan when the twins enter his hut:

Papera-pera-pera-perakka

(Mr gugga-gug-gug-guava,)

Ende parambil thooralley.

(Don't shit here in my compound.)

Chetende parambil thoorikko,

(You can shit next door in my brother's compound.)

Papera-pera-pera-perakka

(Mr gugga-gug-gug-guava.) (206).

Kuttappan's brother Velutha is the only adult in the novel who can fully conjure up this world of childlike fantasy. He can summon up that world with a wave of his hand for the sheer fun of the twins. The unselfconscious abandonment to joy in this fantasy world is exclusive to the twins and Velutha. Ammu watches them with profound envy:

[Ammu] was surprised at the extent of her daughter's physical ease with him.

Surprised that her child seemed to have a subworld that excluded *her* entirely. A tactile world of smiles and laughter that she, her mother, had no part in. Ammu recognized vaguely that her thoughts were shot with a delicate, purple tinge of envy.

She didn't allow herself to consider whom it was that she envied. The man or her own child. Or just their world of hooked fingers and sudden smiles (176).

The uninhibited freedom with which her own child enjoys the company of Velutha, the outcaste - a privilege denied to her by virtue of her being an adult woman with a superior station in life - makes her tremendously sad. It brings to her mind all the restrictions and taboos erected by the conventions of society. The adult passion that she develops for Velutha seems incapable of fulfilment, while the twins are absolutely free to act out their

fantasies in their world of make-believe. Years after, Rahel remembers how Velutha, though an adult, was perfectly able to sustain the fantasy world with inordinate discretion, care, and caution:

It is only now, these years later, that Rahel with adult hindsight, recognized the sweetness of that gesture. A grown man entertaining three raccoons, treating them like real ladies. Instinctively colluding in the conspiracy of their fiction, taking care not to decimate it with adult carelessness. Or affection (190).

As Estha and Rahel realise that Margaret Kochamma and Baby Kochamma blame them for the death of Sophie Mol, they are afflicted by a heavy sense of guilt. They look to Ammu, their beloved mother, as their only source of comfort and hope. Baby Kochamma and Mammachi lock Ammu up in a room for her illicit love of Velutha, the untouchable, and as the children in great anxiety ask her why she has been locked up in the room, Ammu, seized by uncontrollable rage, replies: "Because of you!" ... 'If it wasn't for you I wouldn't be here! None of this would have happened! I wouldn't be here! I would have been free! I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born! You're the millstones round my neck!'" (253). Ammu asks her children to go away and leave her alone. Later the narrator describes how the twins, "weighed down by their mother's words" (291), feel helpless; bewildered by their inability to locate the real source of her anger, they flee to History House on the other side of the river with the hope of joining Velutha, their only friend and guardian.

The narrator makes us see that Ammu uttered "careless words she hadn't meant" (253). Later she is able to reflect on how the hasty despatch of her words in rage and despair have had a devastating effect on the children, prompting them to flee. The narrator, with great insight into the working of the child's psyche, makes us see how children accord absolute value to the adult's words and how a moment's indiscretion may traumatise their minds beyond repair. Ammu unintentionally unloads her own despair on her innocent children in a bid to procure some relief from the intensity of her emotions. As a result the twins feel increasingly disempowered, humiliated and hurt. If the children find it difficult to accept the abusive treatment of the adult world, how much more difficult is it for them to accept the denial of love and care from their own mother?

Roy here points to the extremely fragile sensitivity of children's minds. Children naturally develop a keen intimacy with their mother. To them there is no disjunction between the mother's word and reality. Hence Ammu's careless words are taken entirely at their face value, and the sudden disorientation effected by them causes the children to despair. Having nothing more to lose they are possessed with the courage of suicide bombers and embark upon the perilous journey towards the "History House" (53), the haunted "house on the other side of the river" (52), defying the taboo placed on it by their mother.

It is Chacko, the twins' scholarly uncle caught in his "Oxford moods" (54), who tries to enlighten the twins on the importance of forming a historical perspective with a view to developing a larger vision of reality: "He explained to them that history was like an old house at night. With all the lamps lit. And ancestors whispering inside. 'To understand

history,' Chacko said, 'we have to go inside and listen to what they're saying. And look at the books and the pictures on the wall. And smell the smells.'" (52). However, Chacko warns them of the impossibility of understanding the spirit of history in the right perspective since according to him the very forces of history have manipulated our real selves to such an extent that it has become virtually impossible to comprehend the true spirit of history disinterestedly:

'But we can't go in,' Chacko explained, 'because we've been locked out . And when we look in through the windows, all we see are shadows. And when we try and listen, all we hear is a whispering. And we cannot understand the whispering, because our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that we have won and lost. The very worst sort of war. A war that captures dreams and re-dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves' (53).

The twins, fired by the imaginative splendour of their uncle's rhetoric, take his speech at face value and literally venture into the haunted "house on the other side of the river" which they take for the History House.

Feeling alienated from the adult world, they seek refuge here. To the twins, the History House, where Kari Saippu lived and committed suicide, looms large as the concrete manifestation of remembered history. The perilous journey to the house symbolises the twins' ephiphanic encounter with the perfidy and the venality of the adult world, and all the bloody acts of violence, corruption and erosion of values that accompany it. History to the twins is not simply a procession of events before an indifferent observer, but an encounter

and a personal involvement with the monstrosities perpetrated in the day-to-day existence of man and woman.

The twins' confrontation with the forces of evil and savagery surpasses all their expectations and confirms their worst fears. History is not a detached observation of the thinking and feeling and acting of a set of people; it is something immediately experienced, which comes alive to the twins in all its horror. Far from a generalization of the overall conditions of a society at a given time, it is the sickening awareness of those elements in the society that crush the body and the spirit of the individual. The forces of history are so formidable that the individual self no longer has significant value. They realize that History is a leviathan that swallows powerless individuals.

In the History House things take on an uncanny reality for the twins because they are particular and concrete. Here, the twins witness the horror of a spectacle in which a man of flesh and blood becomes a scapegoat. As the policemen, History's agents, efficiently break Velutha's skull, the values of society are enacted on the errant rebel; the inviolable codes are once again affirmed and restored. The episode becomes a model and a vision - a model of the power of society in its pure and essential form and a vision of what it can do to a human life. The children experience tangible evidence of terror as it unfolds under their nose. The loathsome and sickening odour of the blood testifies to the truth of history. The children have the best nose to smell the blood spilt, a nose that is not deadened by the dissembling mind of the adult. They see here a vision of history coming alive with a peculiar smell of its own, and they feel it in their bones, though it might be just a "blink" in the

"Earth Woman's eye" or a "twinkle" (54) according to Chacko, their scholar-uncle from Oxford.

The twins are mystified by the horror that is enacted before them. They understand *how*, but they do not understand *why*. Their enigma is that they can't understand why "they" find pleasure in torturing and humiliating the innocent. The rhetoric that aims to establish ultimate sanctions for the murder through the devious argument and specious logic of the adult world fails to convince them. The twins seem to finally arrive at the conclusion that the forces of history in which terror and irrationality play so great a role may finally have no goal beyond terror and irrationality.

The deft manipulation of the children's vulnerability by Baby Kochamma after Velutha's death, aided actively by the police inspector takes on the reality of a nightmare. Baby Kochamma, with all the specious logic and reason of an adult, confronts the twins with a hard choice: the choice of either saving Ammu at the cost of "a small price" or "sending her to jail" (318). Prior to this, Baby Kochamma has made the twins believe that they alone would be responsible for Ammu's going to jail if they do not choose to save her. The children are bewildered by the intrigues and falsity of the adults: "The twins looked up at her. Not together (but almost) two frightened voices whispered, 'Save Ammu.'" (318). The narrator describes how the whole episode leads to later morbid self-questioning: "In the years to come they would replay this scene in their heads. As children. As teenagers. As adults. Had they been deceived into doing what they did? Had they been tricked into condemnation?" (318).

The victimisation of the twins epitomizes the crushing power of a patriarchal structure and the associated social codes. The horror of helpless childhood caught in the tentacles of the scheming adults is most poignantly portrayed in the police station scene where Estha and Rahel are made to bear false witness with regard to Sophie Mol's death. Estha does so, and "the small price" he has to pay is the loss of their beloved Velutha, the sacrificial victim. He pays that price in bad faith because he has to, just as he earlier suffered indignities in the theatre at the hands of the orange lemonade man because he had to. In all these humiliating situations, the innocence of the child, unable to resist the onslaughts of the adult world, is assaulted and violated.

Yet the vicious adult world makes the twins feel that all the mishaps in the family occur because of their irresponsibility. The twins "held themselves wholly responsible for [Ammu's] grief" (324). The cumulative pressures of these social experiences have a deadening influence on Estha's psyche, and the insecurity of the adult world becomes a menacing reality to him. He crosses the threshold of a silent adulthood the moment he says "yes" to the police inspector: "Childhood tiptoed out. Silence slid in like a bolt. Someone switched off the light and Velutha disappeared" (320). Estha's silence is enforced by his entrenched guilt feelings that are wholly the creation of the adult world; it is not just a psychic condition of violated childhood, but a sadness that is too deep for words. It transcends the deceptive garrulousness of the adult world and is also a shield against it. Deprived of the means to express his vexation, Estha turns inward to the quiet spaces of his mind in order to find his identity and the meaning of existence. Appearing dumb on the

outside, he is active on the inside, questioning, pursuing knowledge, and grappling with injustice. His silence is thus a refuge from moral suffering. Estha's acute desolation is shared by Rahel too: "the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other" (20).

The agony and intensity of the experiences shared by the twins - enough to fill a life-time - render them tragic. Having gone through these harrowing experiences, they respond differently to their situations in adult life. Bewildered by the onslaughts of the world, Estha suffers an intense alienation from society. The deaths of Velutha and his own beloved mother after his forced separation from her are devastating to his psyche, and he holds himself culpable for them. Though physically moving in the material world, he behaves as if he does not belong here. This might account for his merging with the inanimate things in nature. The narrator observes: "Over time he had acquired the ability to blend into the background of wherever he was - into bookshelves, gardens, curtains, doorways, streets - to appear inanimate, almost invisible to the trained eye. ...Estha occupied very little space in the world" (10-11). Overwhelmed by guilt, he is rendered incapable of responding adequately to life situations. His sorrow is too deep for words and when he is "re-Returned" he goes through Ayemenem like a lone wolf. The feelings of rage and humiliation experienced by the child at the hands of the adult are repressed, but they nonetheless remain, and continue to influence, however obliquely, his subsequent development and behaviour. In fact the nature of Estha's mental processes is not explicitly revealed, but it seems reasonable to assume that his silence arises from a tormented drive for psychic

self-preservation which prompts in him a complete apathy and indifference to the social environment.

Though Rahel shares the agony of Estha's painful experiences and likewise lives in their aftermath, her responses are markedly different from Estha's. After Ammu's death, Rahel stays at Ayemenem House, ignored by Baby Kochamma, Chacko and even by Mammachi, her grand-mother: "They provided the care (food, clothes, fees), but withdrew the concern" (15). For an imaginative child to have affection and sympathy withdrawn will cause a trauma from which it could suffer throughout life. It is perhaps the psychic condition of deprived affection that prompts Rahel to behave delinquently at school. Her behaviour can be attributed to a defence strategy aimed at achieving some self-respect on the part of a child who is haunted by a sense of insecurity. Rahel enters a rebellious adolescence that presages the transgressive lines of her future life. At school, she is blacklisted for activities that are atypical of a modest girl; these ungirlish activities entail three punitive expulsions - the first for "deliberately colliding with her seniors" to find out whether breasts hurt" (16), "the second for smoking" (16), and "the third for setting fire to her Housemistress's false hair bun" (17). "It was, they whispered to each other, *as though she didn't know how to be a girl*" (17).

Constantly subjected to disciplinary measures at school and lovelessness at home, Rahel develops an independent spirit and learns to shift for herself. She defies conventional expectations of a young girl's proper disposition, values, and sense of identity. After a mediocre education, she ventures into the world as a female adventuress and moves through

a variety of worldly adventures and careers in search of economic and psychological independence. She continues to witness misfortunes, tragedies, and deceptions. Her drifting through life ends when she comes home to join her beloved twin brother Estha after twenty-three years of separation. Giving up her job and marriage, Rahel returns to Ayemenem from America.

The narrator observes that the complementary nature of the "emptiness" in one twin and the "silence" in the other originates from "the Small Things"; "the Big things" always lie hidden. Hence the narrative winds its way to confront those "Small Things" through its shifts between the past and the present. Such an enterprise leads to a better evaluation of those "Small Things" and an appreciation of their bearing on present reality.

Exploring the origins of Estha's silence, the narrator remarks: "Perhaps it's true that things can change in a day. That a few dozen hours can affect the outcome of whole lifetimes. ...Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story" (32). In this highly condensed retrospective summary, the narrator sets a point of reference from which succeeding events can be seen to unfold; the "day" referred to is the day of Sophie Mol's arrival in Ayemenem. Almost immediately, however, reference is made to a larger framework of history:

Equally, it could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago. Long before the Marxists came. Before the British took Malabar, before the Dutch Ascendency, before Vasco da Gama arrived, before the Zamorin's conquest of Calicut. Before

three purple-robed Syrian Bishops murdered by the Portugese were found floating in the sea, with coiled sea serpents riding on their chests and oysters knotted in their tangled beards. It could be argued that it began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag. That it really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much (33).

Roy's point seems to be that the twins' difficulties are emblematic of larger problems embedded in Indian society.

Estha's silence is broken only when Rahel comes home. Her return jolts him into an awareness of the physical world around him. "A dam had burst and savage waters swept everything up in a swirling. Comets, violins, parades, loneliness, clouds, beards, bigots, lists, flags, earthquakes, despair were all swept up in a scrambled swirling" (14-15). Rahel sets off an avalanche of images in Estha's mind, and the intensity of the visual impressions restores him to the long-lost world of their joint enterprise. The ecstasy of their reunion makes him "rock himself in the air" (15).

Rahel has seen a great deal of life and the world by this time and the greatest lesson she has learned is that, with their mother gone from their life, there is nothing beyond the love they have for each other. Turning to Estha in the dark, she calls him "Esthapappychachen Kuttappen PeterMon." This term of endearment is poignantly evocative, as it brings back all the memories of their shared childhood, long memories of sorrow punctuated by brief

interludes of fun and games. They consummate their love, and the lost world becomes tangible, real and adult at last.

It had been quiet in Estha's head until Rahel came. But with her she had brought the sound of passing trains, and the light and shade that falls on you if you have a window seat. The world locked out for years, suddenly flooded in, and now Estha couldn't hear himself for the noise. Trains. Traffic. Music. The Stock Market.

Rahel's love for Estha restores him to the world And life goes on for both of them.

Throughout the novel Roy attempts to give an aura of authority to the twins. The idea that is constantly dwelt upon is that the impressions of the child are possessed of authenticity, and that children are important by themselves and not to be treated as diminutive adults. The children in the novel are not passive subjects of others' perception; an important emphasis of the novel is on them as souls endowed with their own ways of seeing and feeling things - ways which are finally valorised as authentically adult, despite their remoteness from conventional adult behaviour.

In writing of children Roy is commenting on human nature generally. The twins emerge as an expression of human potency in the face of hostile experience. Innocence is valuable, but what is more important is the power of the child to survive this hostility and to emerge stronger and wiser. The aggression and deadening influence of the adult world does not condemn Estha and Rahel to a psychic death; instead they are awakened to an indestructible integrity in themselves that helps them to integrate their childhood and adult experience. Estha and Rahel surmount conventional adult insensitivity. The awareness of their

childhood experiences wins them resources for an ongoing creative response to life. Theirs is a movement towards life and growth - a true maturity.

FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

The children in *The God of Small Things* are helpless victims of the intrigues and onslaughts of the adult world. The twins' perspectives in the novel are given special prominence so as to highlight the contrast between their world of innocent play and the rigid authoritarianism of the adult world which threatens to devour it. Roy does not present us with any indication that the adult world is amenable to childish innocence; the grown up Estha and Rahel are the only adults in the novel who achieve any kind of synthesis between the two worlds.

The contrast between childish and adult perspectives is also built into the structure of *Fire on the Mountain*. It is embodied in the relationship between the child Raka and the mature adult Nanda Kaul. However, here, both the adult and the child are in retreat from the outside world, and the interaction of their perspectives is enacted at a more psychic level in the isolation of Carignano. The outcome of their interaction helps to deny the value of Nanda's self-imposed isolation from society; Raka helps her to realize that her withdrawal is a self-deception and that one's life is fulfilled only when it meaningfully connects with the outer world, however imperfect that world may be.

Raka's perceptions are built into the structure of the story and become an instrument to serve this moral. Durix (125-126) observes: "The novel hinges on the contrast between the old woman's desire to retire into herself after a busy social life and her increasing affection for this child who draws her away from the safe, but eventually stultifying, world of dreams in which she had decided to shut herself".

The first two sections of the novel delineate the isolation of Raka and Nanda Kaul. Their situations look similar on the surface, but the underlying factors vary widely, and their relationship changes as a result. Initially we learn that Raka's need for isolation is as intense as Nanda Kaul's. However, Nanda Kaul looks upon Raka's arrival at Carignano as nothing more than an intrusion on her hard-won isolation: "To Nanda Kaul she was still an intruder, an outsider, a mosquito flown up from the plains to tease and worry" (40). A major part of her life has been devoted to caring for others, including many children, but when she realised that she was unsuited to this role, that she was a "fake", she came to Carignano to savour a life of isolation. And so "She did not want to be drawn into a child's world again - real or imaginary, it was bound to betray" (45).

Soon Nanda Kaul learns that Raka, unlike other children, can live a life of splendid isolation on her own under the same roof without patronage or protection from her:

...she appeared a freak by virtue of never making a demand. She appeared to have no needs. Like an insect burrowing through the sandy loam and pine-needles of the hillsides, like her own great-grandmother, Raka wanted only one thing - to be left alone and pursue her own secret life amongst the rocks and pines of Kasauli (48-49).

As Krishnaswamy (261) observes, Nanda Kaul soon realizes that while her own isolation is maintained with considerable effort and strain, to Raka, the child, it comes easily and naturally: "If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, her great-granddaughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct. She had not arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice - she was born to it, simply" (47-48).

Raka's preference for the wild aspects of nature is clearly pronounced. As Bande (96-97) notes, unlike normal children, Raka shuns the beautiful aspects of nature like birds, flowers, and butterflies and is irresistibly drawn to the more desolate aspects. This trait in her character prompts her to explore the mysterious surroundings of Carignano. Cliffs, gorges, and "the tip of the cliff and the sudden drop down the red rock-spattered ravine to the plain" (41) fascinate her. Her love for these uncanny places causes the caretaker of the burnt house to call her "the crazy one from Carignano" (91). Raka explores on her own the ravines where jackals prowl and she broods silently on the strange and fantastic landscape she sees. Even Nanda Kaul is strongly inclined to shun those desolate aspects of nature with which Raka blends perfectly.

Jealously guarding her solitariness, Raka lives her own secret life and avoids the people around her. The narrator observes: "She had planned to come to Monkey Point alone, on a solitary afternoon expedition, without anyone's knowing. Secrecy was to have been the essence of it, she relished it so - Raka had all the jealous, guarded instincts of an explorer, a discoverer, she hated her great-grandmother intently watching her ascent, clenching her hands with tension when the goats nearly knocked her off her feet or when she slipped on the loose pebbles" (60-61).

Raka's fearlessness and spirit of adventure gradually win Nanda Kaul's admiration, so that despite herself she feels drawn to the self-willed child. It is interesting to note that their attitudes to nature are opposite and hence at a psychic level complementary. However, as a mature reflecting adult, Nanda Kaul is more aware of the way she is drawn to Raka. She

projects herself onto Raka and slowly her feelings of coldness and austerity give way naturally to feelings of tenderness and love.

Nanda Kaul soon gets caught in conflicting emotions. While she wants to evade Raka, she cannot help being attracted to her. She fails to keep an emotional distance from the child. Even while pretending to shun Raka's company, Nanda Kaul stealthily tries to catch Raka's attention and hold her interest. As the narrator remarks, "[Nanda Kaul] did not really wish to impose herself, or her ways on Raka. Yet she could not leave her alone" (63). As the narrative progresses we learn that Nanda Kaul's attempt to live in an enclosed space is futile. Her resolve weakens. The need to love and to be loved is a genuine human impulse; she is naturally drawn to Raka. Her motherly instinct prompts her to help the child to bed:

Nanda Kaul would sit up in her chair, very stiffly, turning the pages of her book - at present *The Travels of Marco Polo* - and pretending not to see when the child got up and went out and down the passage to her room. Habit would rear its head inside her, make her prepare to follow, tell her to tuck the child in, read her a story and lead her safely into sleep. But she did not go - she sank back and sat still. She would not go. She had not come to Carignano to enslave herself again. She had come to Carignano to be alone (80).

Though her motherly instincts draw her irresistibly to Raka, she tries to banish those impulses and so vindicate her self-imposed exile. At last her impulses get the upper hand and she tries to win back Raka. She begins to mythicise her own childhood and to build up a fantasy world in an attempt to lure Raka. She fabricates stories about her father's trip to

Tibet, the exotic land with mythical wonders, and his adventurous feats: "He was away in Tibet - oh, for years and years. He went every step of the way on horseback, or on foot. The Mustagh Pass, the Baltoro glacier, the Aghil Pass ... a terribly hard, dangerous route." (83). But these attempts to conjure up a utopian past are instinctively rejected by Raka.

The narrative makes it clear that Raka's morbid love of solitariness cannot be easily dispelled since it is attributable to the unusually traumatic experiences of her childhood. Her exploratory wanderings lead her one day to the dance club of Kasauli where, lying hidden, she happens to witness bizarre revelries and macabre dance: "Then the row of bottoms parted to let through a figure in a brown robe that came stalking straight up to Raka as though it saw her there behind the curtains. Yet it could not see for it had no head, only a shawl dipped in blood dripping about its neck. It held its head tucked underneath its arm, grinning like a pot, with too many teeth" (71). As Pathania (112) suggests, the revelry jolts her into memories of her own father returning home from parties at the club and ill-treating her mother brutally.

Somewhere behind them, behind it all, was her father, home from a party, stumbling and crashing through the curtains of the night, his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse - harsh, filthy abuse that made Raka cower under her bedclothes and wet the mattress in fright, feeling the stream of urine warm and weakening between her legs like a stream of blood, and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes and wept. Under her feet, in the dark, Raka felt that flat, wet jelly of her mother's being squelching and quivering, so that she didn't know where to put her feet and wept as she tried to get

free of it. Ahead of her, no longer on the ground but at some distance now, her mother was crying. Then it was a jackal crying. (72)

As Libert (573) observes, Raka's walk to the dance club evidently enables her to face up to those traumatic experiences in her early childhood. The macabre scenes purge her of the burden weighing heavily on her mind. Now we understand that Raka's inordinate fascination for the grim and desolate aspects of nature is a reflection of her own alienation from the perverse and disjointed world of her parents. It is essential for her psychic self-preservation - a way of escaping from the power of those infantile horrors she had experienced. The club scene serves to purge her of an unconscious fear, enabling her to come to terms with her past and to face the challenges of the future. Raka is now more competent to apprehend her own life with a more realistic vision.

Nanda Kaul's estimation of Raka as a recluse by instinct is thus shown to be incorrect. As Pathania (109) notes, "she is the victim of a broken home." At the same time Nanda Kaul is deeply vexed by a growing awareness of the insufficiency of her own isolation. She begins to love the child tenderly. She is in fact attempting to appeal to a faculty in Raka which she claims to lack herself, though she is unable to admit this: "She did not really wish to impose herself, or her ways on Raka. Yet she could not leave her alone" (63). Her incipient willingness to accept life signals a new integration; she has begun to accept herself too.

The education of Nanda Kaul is completed when Raka sets the forest on fire: "'Look, Nani, I have set the forest on fire. Look, Nani - look - the forest is on fire'" (145). Raka

symbolically makes a bonfire of Nanda Kaul's illusions and confronts her with the truth of life. Libert (578) remarks:

It is apt that Raka should be the agent of destruction, for earlier when Nanda Kaul talked about her childhood, the girl detected that the old lady was making up the stories. And when Nanda Kaul and Ila Das dredged up the past as they imagined it, Raka became restless and bored, again aware of their lies. Thus Raka's act cannot be regarded as one of gratuitous violence and destruction, but one powerfully symbolic.

CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY

Set in old Delhi, this novel records the vast changes in a Hindu family since 1947. The narrative moves forwards and backwards in a fixed span of time. Bim is the central character. The story begins at a point where Bim's sister (Tara) and her husband are visiting home after a lapse of time. They have come to attend the marriage of Raja's daughter Moyana. Tara's homecoming provides an occasion for the siblings to take stock of the events of their shared childhood. They find that these past events throw light on present reality. As the narrative unfolds, this interaction between the present and the past takes on a dialectical vigour culminating in a transcendental vision achieved by Bim in which past and present, childhood and adulthood are synthesized.

Jena (56) notes that "the contrast between childhood and adulthood is central to the aesthetic design of the novel". As Singh (191) observes, "The essence of the work is the consciousness of the two sisters, Bim and Tara, and their memories of the past - of their parents, their aunt, their house, and most important, of their relation to each other and to their elder brother Raja." The first and the last (fourth) chapters are set in the present while the second and the third are set in the past. The chapters set in the present interpret past experiences of childhood from an adult perspective while those set in the past view the experiences through the perception of children. "The characters as they move in the present are constantly looking back at the past, observing, examining, evaluating themselves in the perspective of time" (Jena, 56). Finally the childhood experiences are subsumed by a truly adult response so that a synthesis is achieved.

On her return, Tara is surprised to find that nothing has changed in her home for years and that the same dull state prevails. Bim feels that Tara finds the home boring because of her wide travel with her diplomat husband and her life in big cosmopolitan cities. Bim also extrapolates Tara's boredom to Old Delhi generally: "Old Delhi does not change. It only decays" (4).

Sensing that Tara has some obsession with her childhood, Bim curtly asks her whether she would really like to return to those childhood days. Bim finds that Tara is really shocked by the possibility, and pursues the matter further; she asks Tara whether she knows anyone who "would - secretly, sincerely, in his innermost self - *really* prefer to return to childhood?" (4) Tara, bewildered, responds with the question, "prefer to what?", to which Bim replies, "Oh, to going on - to growing up - leaving - going away - into the world - something wider, freer - brighter" (4). Tara's answer is, "But you didn't, Bim." (4). Tara is under the impression that Bim chose to stay back of her own accord. Bim lets her know that she is mistaken and the continuing debate between the sisters entails looking back on their childhood experiences and evaluating their impact on their present adulthood.

At first it seems to Tara that "the dullness and boredom of her childhood, her youth were stored here in the room ... behind the yellowed photographs in the oval frames - everything, everything that she had so hated as a child and that was still preserved here as if this were the storeroom of some dull, uninviting provincial museum" (20-21). She feels that even the very spirits of their dead parents who did not care for them haunt the house and its surroundings. Tara and Bim remember how their parents lost themselves in the game of

cards, how they as children were ignored by them, how Raja their younger brother was inspired by romantic ideals, how aunt Mira took care of them, how the death of their parents distressed aunt Mira, who became a hopeless alcoholic, how Raja went away to fend for himself, leaving the burden of looking after the ailing aunt and the retarded brother Baba to Bim, etc.

It begins to appear that Tara has come to her old decaying house to shed the ghosts of her unhappy childhood and adolescence. Memories of guilt and betrayal intermingle in her mind; she is not at peace with herself despite the materially comfortable life she shares with her diplomat husband. Her mind is haunted by images of decay and destruction as she watches Bim growing to an old maid, trapped in the old house looking after her retarded brother Baba.

Bim and Tara realise how the dullness of their household weighed heavily on their minds. Their parents' separate world of card games created a chasm between them and the children. Added to this was their anxiety over the hopeless future of Baba, the mentally retarded brother. Even life at school was dreary for Tara: "Forced to go back to school, she accepted with a weak abandonment of hope that these grey, wretched days would stretch on forever, blighting her life with their creeping mildew" (127). One day Tara happened to see their father administering insulin to their diabetic mother. Tara could see the acute pain on her mother's face. She fancied that her father was killing her mother. Even after aunt Mira, Bim and Raja explained to her what it was her father did, Tara continued to be overwhelmed with fear.

When asked one day what she would like to be on growing up, Tara chose to be a mother, much to the amusement of Bim and Raja. On the other hand Bim and Raja, who had much in common with each other, were inspired by romantic ideals and vaulting ambitions: "Bim of course, worshipped Florence Nightingale along with Joan of Arc in her private pantheon of saints and goddesses ..." (126). Raja and Bim wanted to go away into the wide world, leaving their old decaying house. Tara, on the other hand, was content to remain, desiring only the security of her house and the warmth of aunt Mira's bed.

Raja and Bim, as children share more or less the same kind of romantic aspirations and dreams; however, as Bim grows to an adult she desperately clings to those dreams while Raja outgrows them and becomes a successfully pragmatic materialist. Bim feels disappointed in Raja's philistinism and feels cheated by his deviance. As Gupta (118) remarks, "The childhood closeness is lost gradually as the children grow older, became aware of their different dreams and aspirations, and seek fulfilment of these dreams".

"[Raja's] desertion of old Delhi, the old house, Bim and Baba in search of a new world, his marrying Benazir, Hyder Ali's daughter, and then adopting their life-style creates a chasm between Raja and Bim that had begun to appear much earlier" (Gupta, 121). Bim also takes offence at a letter written by Raja permitting her to live in his house and keeps it for many years as proof of Raja's rudeness to her.

As Bim and Tara discuss their past experiences they remember how they as children enjoyed intimacy and love with each other. They discern how such an intimacy becomes vulnerable to the flux of time and how each passing event therein had left its indelible imprint on their

selves. However, at this point, their reflections as conscious adults fail to bring about a sense of unity and order to the memories of their childhood experiences. "But cracks begin to appear as they grow up and acquire more individual personalities. The partition of India and Pakistan brings a break up in their family too and becomes a powerful image of their feeling of estrangement" (Gupta, 122).

Life has upset their dreams. Raja goes away, of course, not to become a hero but to become a complacent business man, and he raises a family. Tara becomes not only a mother but also a sophisticated woman of the world. Bim, on the other hand, does not marry and stays at home. She takes up a teaching job in a college, and becomes slightly eccentric in her manners. She ignores the family business, letting Mr. Sharma run it and ignores the upkeep of the house. It is as if the house has become a prison for her. She lives here, alone and unhappy, caring for the retarded and helpless brother Baba who spends all his time listening to old songs.

"Bim, who takes Tara's marriage so gracefully and happily, reacts violently when Raja leaves" (Bande, 146). Bande (146) further remarks that her indignation is righteous since Raja as the eldest son of the family, does not carry out his family responsibilities. Hence, Bim, who originally admired and adored Raja as a prospective hero, now tends to blame him with bitterness. Tara notices that Bim is considerably irritated when Bim complains that Raja is "selfish" and "he is too rich to be interesting any more..." (143). As Tara reflects on the situation it dawns on her that Bim has not come to terms with her own life. She realizes that Bim's own vexation stems from her "being left alone" in the family (Bande, 147).

So, while at first Tara thought that nothing had changed in the family, on closer observation she realizes that everything has altered. She and Bim take stock of events and realise how their significance was lost on them as children. Bim is fond of quoting a line from *Four Quartets*, which says that, when young, they "had the experience but missed the meaning". Now that they have become adults they are mature enough to recreate the experience in their memory and appreciate its meaning in relation to the present. Desai's juxtaposition of the past and present, childhood and adulthood enables this reconstruction to take place in a particularly vivid way. The remembrance may be painful, but the reconstruction leads to a better vision of reality and enables them to integrate the past with the present in a responsible way, leading to a meaningful synthesis. As the past is explored with new angles of vision, the present is illumined more, and its light in turn reveals more of the past, enabling the sisters to achieve an integration of the past and the present.

The Lodhi Garden episode represents a vital stage in this development. Bim, who has a vivid perception of events in the past, doesn't bear any malice towards Tara for having abandoned her to the attack of bees. Instead her reaction is, "you couldn't help it". Bim is here trying to achieve an integration of her own self threatened by external events by restoring her sense of connection with her brothers and sister in love, but as Gupta (126) remarks, "she lacks as yet the full imaginative vision that can unite them once again with the same closeness." She feels torn apart in "loving them, accepting them and not accepting them" (166).

The storm raging outside symbolises the turbulence of Bim's emotions. (Gupta, 126). "She makes a brave effort to come out of the mesh of prejudices, anger and resentments in which she was caught to achieve a greater integration and unity" (Gupta, 126). As a major step

towards achieving this, Bim tears Raja's letter which she has kept for so long as a proof his rudeness to her. This signifies the end of her rancour and bitterness, as it were, towards the whole past. Once this major positive step is taken, she can restore her affinity with Tara also.

Tara also gives expression to her guilt feelings about leaving Bim to face the family problems alone, and about seeking marriage as an escape from family problems; "marriage was the completest escape" (157). The past cannot be wiped out; Tara realizes that "Nothing's over...ever" (174). But through the articulation of her own grief, Tara purges herself of her guilt feelings about her past and she secures a victory over the past by coming to terms with it. Bim can appreciate Tara's suffering because she can now recognize her own pain in it: "her own despairs. They were not unlike. They were more alike than any other two people could be" (174).

The recognition of her own meaningful connection with Tara's pain and suffering is an important step forward on the part of Bim, who had never in the past accepted Tara as her equal (Gupta, 127). Though with Tara, Bim realises that "Nothing's over...ever" (174), they become aware of the possibility of continuing their past closeness. Bim recognises the significance of this new dimension of mutual love and understanding when she says, "there could be no love more deep and full and wide than this one, she knew. No other love had started so far back in time and had had so much time in which to grow and spread. They were really all parts of her, inseparable, so many aspects of her as she was of them..." (165). This higher vision provides a sense of fulfilment which is equally shared by Tara.

CONCLUSION

Unlike Mammachi, who conforms to the traditional ideal of Indian womanhood, Ammu flagrantly violates those cultural strictures that demand absolute conformity to the ideal when she seeks fulfilment in the love of Velutha, the outcaste. Her confession at the police station is an open declaration of her love for him. Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and Chacko, who have never seriously considered the potential power of "the unsafe edge" about Ammu, feel outraged by the "sudden eruption" of her revolt against convention. Ammu's defiant posture is a vindication of women's right to fulfilment and self-actualisation. Roy depicts complex structures in society that are inimical to this fulfilment. The density and multiplicity of these structures enhance the value of Ammu's struggle, and impart a heroic dimension to it.

The price for violation of the ancient "Love Laws" is death, but, despite her foreknowledge of this, Ammu pursues her desire. And the structures of power arrayed against Ammu seem to dissolve in the face of her struggle. Though Ammu succumbs to the forces of tradition, her wilful embrace of death as the penalty for her violation of the "Love Laws", vindicates her. This determined pursuit of her desire, as Bose (61) remarks, "appears to reject finally any truth that would grandstand over and above the validity of the process itself."

In *The God of Small Things*, the children too are oppressed by the traditional structures of the adult world that seek to erase their unique identity as children. Estha and Rahel live through terror and deprivation broken by brief interludes of unvitiated joy and happiness in

a world jointly created by them and Velutha. The feelings of rage and despair aroused by their experience at the hands of the adult world remain with them and continue to influence their subsequent development and behaviour. With their world of dreams and fantasies broken, the twins drift apart, but as they attain maturity they are able to transcend their respective torments by uniting in love. This resolution of their agony and pain through a consummation in love is - like several adult relationships in the novel - an infringement of ancient "Love Laws", which prescribe "whom to love and how much". The twins' love for each other enables them to reinvent themselves and face life with renewed confidence.

Anita Desai's novels, like Roy's, delineate the agony of the female protagonists' existence in a hostile, conservative and male-dominated society. The sense of insecurity they feel in their lives and the traumatic psychological distress they undergo are due to the decadence of the value system of the structures that tend to marginalize women and thwart their quest for self-actualisation. The tormenting situations in which they are caught reflect on the socio-economic-cultural forces arrayed against them, but Desai's main emphasis is on her protagonists' mental adjustment to those forces; their search for an alternative value system leads them to a perception of the spiritual dimensions of existence.

Nanda Kaul and Bim in *Fire on the Mountain* and *Clear Light of Day* respectively develop a higher consciousness of life's realities that may enable them to transcend the conflict and discord which marked their earlier years. The unity of vision and integrity of selfhood they achieve conform at least to some extent with the classic ideals of Indian womanhood,

which discourage the sort of vigorous pursuit of individual desires that might threaten the harmony and cohesion of society. As Mukherjee (29) remarks,

The fulfilment of oneself, however desirable a goal according to the individualistic ideals of western society, has always been alien to Indian tradition, especially when it is achieved at the cost of duty to the family. ...Sexual love and personal happiness, those two prime concerns of the western novelist, do not have such central importance in the Indian context. The classic ideals of the god-like hero and the patient heroine extol the virtues of the extinction of the ego whereas the novel in the western world often focusses upon the achievement of selfhood or personality.

In their transcendence of the individual ego, Desai's novels come close to reaffirming traditional values, whereas Roy comes closer to western individualism.

And so it is with Desai's children as well. Through an encounter with her repressed painful experiences, Raka, the child in *Fire on the Mountain*, is able to purge herself of the past that weighs on her. The club scene in the novel effects her psychic self-preservation, and, exorcised of her infantile horrors, she is able to come to terms with her past and equip herself to meet the challenges of the future. She has become competent to apprehend her own life with a more expansive vision.

In *Clear Light of Day* the memories of childhood have a great bearing on the development of the children as adults. Through the reconstruction of their past experiences as children, Bim and Tara achieve a unified vision of the past and the present as well. As the past is subjected to new angles of vision, the reality of the present is illumined, which leads to a

more integrated vision of life as a whole. The key note of Desai's novels seems to be the valorization of a sense of fulfilment that derives from an expansion of consciousness.

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