Chapter – III

Idealogy of Destruction

This story centres round the lives of two children, Hari, aged 12 and his sister Lila, who is 13. They live in a small fishing village called Thul, near Bombay in India, and life for them is not easy. Lila, though just a child, has the responsibility of looking after their sick mother, who grows frailer by the day, though nobody knows what is wrong with her. Lila also runs the household and cares for their two younger sisters, Bela and Kamal. Hari’s duty is to provide for the family, so he spends his time working in the fields and selling whatever produce he can at the market.

The children’s father used to be a fisherman, but he no longer works. Instead he spends his time getting drunk in the village inns. When he comes home, he is aggressive towards his family and of no help. Hari and Lila struggle to survive and are constantly in debt. They only have each other to share their troubles and worries with. Conditions are made slightly better by the help they get from de Silva family from Bombay, who own a large country house known as Mon Repos next to the hut in which Hari and Lila and their family live.

Whenever the de Silvas come to stay at the house, Hari and Lila are able to earn some extra pocket money, by carrying out chores in the house and garden. The villagers of Thul begin to worry when they hear rumours that a large fertiliser factory is planned to be built in the place of their rice fields and coconut groves. The new factory would mean the construction of new roads and railway lines and the local people feel concerned about the threat of pollution, whether they will have the skills to be able to work in the new factory, and what will happen to the traditional way of life they are used to.
A group of villagers decide to travel to Bombay in order to confront the Ministry of the Environment with their concerns. Hari decides to join them. The prospect of what Bombay might have to offer excites him. He leaves Lila in Thul to cope with the family, helped along by the de Silva family. In Bombay, Hari finds work in a restaurant, where the owner, Jagu, is very kind to him. He also finds a friend in a watch repairer called Mr Panwallah, who works next door to the restaurant. It is in Bombay that the timid Hari finally learns to fight for himself and become a man.

Anita Desai’s seventh novel, *The Village By the Sea* is a departure from her familiar preoccupation with the problems of human psyche. Times’s role as a destroyer is being expressed clearly although the novel. In a special introductory note, she states that the story is based entirely on fact. It is basically related to a real village Thul which is situated on the western coast of India. All the characters in this novel are based on people who live in this village, only their names have been altered. The villagers are poor but contented.

They are hard workers and religious-minded. In most of her novels Mrs. Desai presents complacent, idle people of the middle or upper classes where money is no problem. Their problems are mostly emotional, cultural or those that are related to higher pursuits. But in *The Village By The Sea*, for the first time, she deals with rural life and the lower classes of society.

The novel deals with the impact of modern technological development on a traditional community of fishermen and farmers at Thul. The enthusiastic and poverty-stricken teenagers of the village like Hari, Ramu, Bholo and Mahesh etc., welcome the government’s proposal to construct a multi-million fertilizer-factory at Thul, hoping that they would get jobs in the factory and live a new life of pleasure and good fortune.
But the farmers who never had considered anything beyond fishing and farming react bitterly because in the new industrial set up they will have to lose their land and all the filth of the factories will be dumped in the sea, killing the fish for miles around. The villagers, thus, decide to protest:

"they can’t m take the sea from us—the land is ours, the sea is ours!" The family depicted mainly in the novel consists of an alcoholic fisherman, his sick wife and their four children—Lila, Bela, Kamal and Hari. Lila among women and Hari among men are the central figures. Hari also feels that he must stand beside his fellow- villagers and fight for the right of the farmers and fishermen to earn their living by traditional ways. Hari and Lila’s struggle for survival is economic in nature. Their hard work raises the family from below subsistence to subsistence level. Hari’s father is a jobless drunkard and his mother is sick and bed-ridden. Hari and Lila’s education has ended because of lack of money. There is no provision for purchase of books for Lila and Kamal. They hardly eat anything but “this dry bread, or dry rice, every day” (P.15)

There is “nothing to eat with the Chapatis by a pinch of salt and a few green chillies Lila had plucked from a bush near their hut” (P.15). They earn money only by selling bunches of coconuts to the Malabaris. Hari, being the only son of his parents, understands his responsibility towards his family. He has to do something for the sake of his sisters and family. Although he is helpless, he is not hopeless. He has faith in himself and does not lose his patience. Anita Desai beautifully describes his self-confidence:
“He knew in his heart that he would leave one day. Thul could not hold him for long—at least not the Thul of the coconut groves and the fishing fleet. Perhaps if it really did turn into a factory site one day, he would stay on here, living a new kind of life. Otherwise he and his family would surely and slowly starve, fall ill like his mother, and die. No! He would go away—cross the sea in a boat, somehow find his fortune in Bombay, either with Mr. de Silva’s help or even without it.” Chance favours Hari. When he desires to go to Bombay, he leaves Thul and reaches Bombay with the processionists. Billu, the coconut man, comments on the government’s cruel attitude and tells Hari: “I tell you, the government has only one mouth with which it eats—eats our taxes, eats our land, eats the poor” (P.85)

He encourages Hari and advises him:

“Take my advice and keep clear of the government. Don’t ask it for anything, don’t depend on it for anything. They tell you the government is your father and your mother. I tell you my father and my mother threw me out when I was six years old to go and earn my own living. I don’t need them—I fend for myself—I’m a man and depend on myself. That is the best way to be, boy—free and independent. Don’t say please and don’t say thank you—take what you want. Be a man, Be independent” (P. 85)
Chance brings Hari to Hira Lai, Jagu and Mr. Panwallah and sends Sayyid Ali to Mon Repos in Thul to enable his sister Lila to earn some money. Mr. Panwallah teaches Hari watch-mending and prepares him to change with the time and accept new techniques. He tells Hari:

“Learn, learn, learn—so that you can grow and change. Things change all the time, boy—nothing remains the same....... and if you want to survive, you will have to change too. The wheel turns and turns and turns: it never stops and stands still.” (P.129)

Hari gladly accepts the philosophy of change. His success at earning money by watch-mending provides him self-confidence. He returns home as a better-equipped boy and becomes a successful caretaker of his parents and sisters. At the end he feels quite “confident”, “cheerful and optimistic” because he' plans to become a village watchmender when the factory comes up. Anita Desai’s message of clear-cut optimism is arrived at through Biju:

“One day every one will have to build boats like mine.... Things have to change. Then they will improve. Yes,....... Improve! Change!” (P. 124)

When we analyse the concept of free or new woman in this novel, we take if for granted that Mrs Desai’s unterstanding of feminine sensibility is well exhibited in all her novels. Her protagonists, most of whom are women, battle desperately with, their traditional roles. In The Village By The Sea Lila, the protagonist of the novel, is a young village girl. She is not averse to household duties, yet she breaks away the traditional notions of house keeping and establishes her worth as an independent woman.
She paves new paths for the younger generation of Indian women. She does fulfill many responsibilities. She does these as her share of the household duties, for her mother is an invalid and her father is a good-for-nothing drunk. She assumes the role of breadwinner, continues to play homemaker, and nurses her mother back to health. With the departure of Hari for Bombay, with the arrival of Sayyid Ali Sahib and with the admittance of her mother to the Alibagh hospital, Lila experiences a new sense of personal worth. She knows that if the family is to survive she must work for Sayyid Ali.

The de Silvas have arranged for her to work for him. She is to prepare his meals and keep the house clean. Even then, her loyalty to her home and family does not diminish. She becomes foster mother to her younger sisters and the caretaker of her drunkard father and ailing mother. Since she is the eldest, she believes she is morally responsible for the welfare of the family. Had she remained the traditionally passive Indian woman, she would have suffered total poverty along with the other members of her family. She, therefore, is unwilling to accept the ethos of a traditional woman following the code of the conduct prescribed for her.

Her instinct for survival triggers her sensibility and makes her assertive, enterprising and independent. Like her western counterparts, she begins to gain more privileges and assumes more responsibilities outside the home with the coming of industrialization in the village Thul.

Through Hari’s departure for Bombay, she, being affected by industrialization, proves to be an enterprising, brave homemaker capable of facing all hardships. Lila is certainly like Hira-bai, the only other woman in the novel who exercises her authority over her family. Even though Hira-bai likes to nip toddy from time to time, she has made it certain that she will not tolerate her sons’ drunkenness.
So when her drunken son frightens Lila and her sisters, Hira-Bai’s social and moral sensibilities rise to the surface. When we find the Bombay women very assertive, demanding their rights and freedom, and Hari admiring them for their courage to picket in the streets of Bombay, we are led to believe that it is Anita Desai who wants these women to come forward and fight for more sensible causes and issues, really favouring demonstrations and processions for the just cause.

Their notion of freedom and justice is founded on the lower prices for groceries so that they might feed their ever-growing families. In Indian ethos it is customary to believe that men, not women, are the breadwinners. It is difficult to find women living as true individuals. They are mostly dependent and can not exercise their will. Only when the man is a failure or he is absent or is far away, does a woman assert her will and live independent as true individual.

Such is the case in this novel. As Lila’s father is a good-for-nothing drunk and her mother is an invalid, she has to assert her identity. Like Hari, Lila gets matured. If Hari becomes a man with a profitable skill by going to Bombay, Lila develops a managerial ability even as she stays at home. She can offer resistance to her personality and can defend herself in all circumstances. This is asserted by Bela when she tells Hari that Lila and the girls looked after Sayyid Ali Sahib and themselves. To quote Sudhakar Ratnakar Jamkhandi,
“By pitting Lila’s development with that of Hari’s, Desai makes a subtle comment on the strengths and capabilities of Indian women. Give the opportunity and favorable circumstances, the Indian woman can be as assertive and as enterprising and as productive as the Indian man—and she can accomplish this without relinquishing her leadership role in the home.” (P. 21)

*In Custody* Anita Desai’s eighth novel, she attempts to study the helpless nature of male protagonist, even Sharma, due to poverty, helplessness, personal incompetence and lack of initiative. In this novel Mrs. Desai’s emphasis has shifted from the internal to the external and there is “more of action and story elements with a chain of happenings, one leading to the other, which bring the protagonist on the verge of ruin”. Even comes from a lower middle-class family. He is the son of a debilitated, asthmatic school teacher. As a child, he has watched closely the bitter disappointments of his mother and the “apologetic smile” of his father for his failure in measuring up to her expectations.

He has got his literary yearnings and is swayed by an idea of creating a work of his lifetime, but is defeated by his own helplessness and nervousness. He is a lecturer in Hindi in Lala Ram Lai College in Mirpore, a suburb of Delhi, He is a sort of poet—a lover of urban poetry. He is in love with Nur and Urdu poetry. He seeks to reach out into the wider world in the hope of self-fulfilment. He undergoes experiences of various shades during which he suffers from the problems of marital dissonance. His wife Sarla’s dreams about marriage are dashed after the marriage with a low salaried teacher.
Anita Desai is one of the most eminent and celebrated Indian English writers of the post-colonial era. Her contribution towards the contemporary Indian English novel remains almost unparalleled and hence her acclaim as a literary icon spreads far and wide on shores and beyond the shores. It is quite notable that she discovers new horizons in the world of fiction writing through her innovative approach with which she effectively deliberates on the burning issues in the contemporary Indian society, both rural and urban.

In her writings, Desai effectively captures the conflict between and among her characters who are confronted with the unmitigated realities of life and even more interesting is the way she scans their mindset thus investigating the psychological intricacies of the human being. The objective of this research paper is to examine the thematic structure of Anita Desai’s novel, *The Village by the Sea* which is one of her major literary successes.

It is in a very intriguing way that this novel explores the story of an Indian rural family which survives a period of extreme circumstances to happily reunite in the end thanks to the perseverance of the two heroic children, Hari and Lila. The theme of survival and adaptation comes out for examination as the most important subject that the writer deals with in the novel under scrutiny.

In addition, Desai probes a number of some other debatable issues in the contemporary Indian society through her novel, *The Village by the Sea*. The vitality of her thematic concerns and her strong emphasis on the complexities of the human existence along with her remarkable narrative techniques seem to have contributed immensely to the success of the novel concerned thus symbolizing her excellence and uniqueness as a writer of fiction.
Anita Desai writes the novel, *The Village by the Sea* in order to depict several themes. It is a really moving novel which revolves round the story of an Indian rural family which is virtually crippled by poverty and helplessness. Hari is the only boy in the family and he has an elder sister, Lila and two younger sisters, Bela and Kamal. His mother is a bedridden TB patient while his father is an alcoholic who seems to have completely neglected his responsibilities as a father and a husband.

This situation has forced Lila and Hari to take the family responsibility to their hand thus meeting the needs of their younger sisters and taking a good care of their sick mother. Seeking greener pastures, Hari, the protagonist of the novel along with his beloved sister, Lila almost like angels from heaven toil upward tooth and nail with unflagging courage in order to save their family from the misery they are currently undergoing.

According to the view of Professor G. Vaidyanathan in his book, *The Village by the Sea: A Critical Study*, the most fundamental theme conveyed through the novel is survival accompanied by adaptation. Desai very cleverly and vividly reveals the importance of the need to adapt ourselves to the changing conditions of the environment where we live. Everyone has to further constant learning in order to enhance the necessary abilities to lead a successful life in an environment which seems to undergo revolutionary and almost inexorable changes at an unprecedented rate with the passage of time.
It is mainly through the character of Hari that Desai tries to emphasize the theme of survival and adaptation. They change their mode of life as per the directions of time in a clear manner. They change their mode of life as per the directions of time in a clever manner. Hari is a small boy of twelve years. In spite of being such a youngster, he is intelligent enough to understand his responsibilities towards his family. Seeing no way out of their mounting poverty, Hari is forced to accept it despite his very young age and desperately makes a great effort in earning a living to preserve his family.

Hari cultivates the patch of land owned by them, plucks coconuts, and fishes along the sea belt with his net. Unfortunately, the harvest reaped is not enough even for the consumption of his own family. Even though he tries hard to catch fish, most of the time he has to go home empty-handed. He thought of the times as a hard one. Even when the going gets tough, it is very patiently that Hari, though with occasional reluctance, tries hard to survive the swelling heap of hardships and difficulties. Although a majority of Hari’s attempts to sustain the family are in vain at the beginning, he never quits trying.

At the climax of his dissatisfaction with the father’s drunkenness and the never ending troubles at home, Hari leaves Thul and migrates to Bombay in search of a job and consequently Lila happens to grapple with the family situation all alone. The delightful reunion of the family and the stability that they attain in the end after a chaotic period of extreme difficulties show that no matter how small you are, there is always a remedy ahead of you if you are smart enough and persevere to achieve your goals. This is how the writer expresses the need to fight for the survival. The use of a character of such a young boy who is only twelve to reveal her message, enhances the effectiveness of its appeal. The fact that adaptation is part of survival is a universally acknowledged truth.
We live in a rapidly moving world and almost nothing remains the same as time passes by. Surviving in such a fast changing world is not an easy task because we should possess the necessary capacity to adjust ourselves to the changing conditions of the society. Towards the end of the story, Hari gains the ability to move ahead with the changing circle of life and society. A new factory complex is to be put up in Thul. The villagers are distracted by the feeling that it will be a doom on their farming and fishing industry.

They begin to think of themselves as losers with the new factory to be built up. But Hari, being intelligent enough to learn and adapt to the societal changes in the context of rapid urbanization, doesn’t worry at all. He learns the art of mending watches under the kind apprenticeship of Mr. Panwallah. Having gained a new and commercially valuable skill, now Hari is capable of venturing into the untouched field of watch mending in Thul.

As thousands of people migrate to Thul to be employed at the coming factories, they will want to repair their watches thus paving the way for Hari to become a rich man. He further wishes to start a poultry farm which will provide him with an extra living. It is Mr. Panwallah and Sayyid Ali Sahib who teach Hari to shape his life according to the changing modes of the world. In fact, Hari would have happened to remain a frog in the well “if the shop next door had not proved friendlier” (P. 94).

Mr. Panwallah advises Hari that if a person is unable to suppress the changes from happening he must possess the ability to move with them. Mr. Sayyid Ali emphasizes this message in a vibrant manner by bringing out a really workable example. He says that a few years ago, the jungles where the birds like sparrows and pigeons lived were destroyed under the process of industrialization.
Then, the birds who were threatened with nowhere to live, migrated to the cities and started depending on the leftovers of the people. This indeed is a remarkable example for the theme of survival accompanied by adaptation. The inevitability of the changes in a revolutionary world is also brought to focus through the novel. No one is strong enough to prevent them from happening except adapting to them. The world never halts a single minute for us, and hence we have to move with it. Anybody who goes out of the track will fail. Mr. Panwallah stresses on the changeability of the world as he says,

“Things can change all the time, boy – nothing remains the same. When our earth was covered with water, all creatures lived in it and swam. When the water subsided and land appeared, the sea creatures crawled out and learnt to breathe and walk on land. When plants grew into trees, they learned to climb them. When there were not enough plants left to eat, they learnt to hunt and kill for food. Don’t think that is how things have remained. No, boy, they are still changing – they will go on changing – and if you want to survive, you will have to change too. The wheel turns and turns and turns: it never stops and stands still.” (P. 129)

Thus the writer substantiates the fact that change is inevitable and the sole need is to make our guns ready to face the changing textures of the world. Desai uses the character portrayal of Biju who is the most affluent person in Thul in order to further consolidate the significance of adaptation and survival. Apart from him no one in the village seems to be aware of the need to adhere to the changing faces of the world. They prefer to live as the traditional farmers or fishermen.
But, Biju constantly tries to upgrade his business through his timely adherence to the miscellaneous changing patterns of the commercial world. His new engine boat is equipped with a deep freezer too. Unlike the poor boats of the other villagers, which he refers to as “little matchstick boats” (P. 124), Biju’s will provide him with the ability to go far out of the sea and catch fish for several days with the help of the diesel engine and refrigeration facilities of the new boat.

Biju cleverly makes use of the loss of a few fishermen at sea during the monsoonal rains to demonstrate the value and the grand nature of his boat. It is depicted that almost all the farmers and fishermen of Thul are very much bothered about the forthcoming threat to their livelihood which is a consequence of the urbanization process. But, Biju has no need to repent because he knows that at least he can sail into the distant sea, if the fish living near the sea shoal of Thul are to be killed by the chemical substances emitted from the coming factories.

It is hence clear that Biju will not happen to destabilize his position under the impending circumstances. He seems to have an optimistic view regarding the development process as he declares “Things have to change. Then they will improve. Yes, Improve! Change!” (P. 124). Success through innovation is perceivable in his character as it is obvious that the secret of his progress is his flexibility and innovative thinking.

In addition, Desai effectively investigates the overall poverty of the lower classes in the society through the novel under discussion. A majority of the people in Thul live ghastly lives of abject poverty which has a tremendous impact on their lives. The underprivileged circumstances in which the poor people in remote areas live, are exceptionally brought forth through the story of Hari’s family.
Their hut is in need of being rethatched and it is about to fall down. They are extremely suffering from the disastrous and disintegrating effects of poverty such as limited resources, lack of options, ignorance, malnutrition, and scarcity of nourishment and mental care. Hari and his sisters are not in possession of even a proper dwelling place. They don’t get a breakfast and in place of a meal they drink only a cup of tea in the morning.

Their lunch and dinner consist of a few dried chapatis. Lack of nourishment and malnutrition due to which the poor suffer is profoundly depicted through the pauper meals of Hari’s family. Their mother’s TB and anemia are due to starvation and their poor sanitary condition. She who herself is lying “like a crumpled grey rag” (P. 10) represents the victims of lack of medical care. Lila and Hari have stopped schooling. Lack of education too is an ill consequence of penury.

They have only an occasional income that Hari earns by selling coconuts. So, it is clear that the dearth of options and limited resources of Hari’s family representing those of a thousand poor lives point out that the penurious masses are insecure due to severe instability. Not merely the people in the village but also most of those in the city suffer from the adverse effects of poverty. Cross lights are thrown on the economic hardships of the poor urban dweller through the reference to the zopadpatti where people like Jagu live. The writer creates an awfully pathetic picture when she says,

“All the rain and slush and mud from outside had crept in the door and through the cracks in the walls and the ceiling as well. In fact, the mud floor was awash with rain water and debris it brought along. Jagu’s family was huddled on a string bed as if it were a raft.” (VBS PP. 115 – 116)
Even though Jagu owns an eating house, he lives in a shanty made out of tin cans, plastic pieces and rags because the rents of even the smallest and poorest flats are extremely high. Desai substantiates the insecurity and the uncomfortable nature of their dwelling places as she creates a robust image of the shacks that seem to be “coming loose and sliding into the choked gutter that separated the zopadpatti from the street” (P. 115). It is also revealed that poverty leads to drunkenness and broken relationships. The following lines uttered by Jagu’s wife out of sheer helplessness imply this in a really poignant manner.

“As if I can stop you. That’s all you want – to go to your toddy shop. All you want from me is an excuse. What do I care if you go and poison yourself? Go kill yourself with the poisons the shops sell you – I will come and laugh at your funeral. I will take the children home to the village so we can starve in the fields and let the vultures pick our bones…”

(VBS PP. 116 – 117)

She speaks in an angry voice mixed with frustration and hopelessness. Her words appeal to the common people while revealing the sadness and deprivation experienced by the poor. Poverty has swallowed the blissful lives of the people while making them the most vulnerable and depressing section of the community. Having no way out of their increasing poverty, they are destined to live a hand to mouth existence and are unstable and insecure. Desai’s preoccupation with the common people becomes clear from her keen observation of the life of the poor both in the city and the village.
Moreover, the fact that Jagu has several children is effectively disclosed as the writer describes how “several pairs of eyes peered” (Desai 116) at Hari when he entered Jagu’s house. Here, the novelist highlights another significant aspect of her thematic concerns – the lack of awareness among the people regarding proper family planning methods which is a major issue that has been affecting many countries in the world.

Raising a child is a great process which makes the parents responsible for providing him with shelter, food, clothing, medical care and education. A child who lacks in such privileges is more likely to experience both mental and physical health issues, lower educational attainment and behavioural problems not just in their childhood but in their teen years too.

In a context where the prices of goods and services are rapidly increasing, a poor family who lives in extreme conditions is not stable enough to meet the rising demands of many children. It is hence apparent that due to the lack of knowledge and access to effective methods of family planning, people like Jagu are faced with a long term issue that badly impacts their family life and financial situation. Another prominent theme conveyed through the novel is the helplessness that the innocent children have to undergo at the neglect of parental responsibilities.

Being chronically ill and confined to bed, Hari’s mother is not capable of supporting her family. Also, Hari’s father is a notorious drunkard in the village who never attends to the needs of his poor children and sick wife except aggravating the situation. It is even more pathetic that his family is badly threatened by the alcohol vendors due to the mounting debts incurred by him for buying alcohol.
Consequently, Lila and Hari have stopped schooling and their mother’s condition is becoming acute. If Hari’s father was a responsible person, his family would never undergo such a wretched fate. Thus, the writer successfully examines the detrimental impact of drunkenness on the lives of the children and how it paves the way for negative relationships, broken families and waste of money. As is identified by Professor G. Vaidyanathan in his book, *The Village by the Sea: A Critical Study*, one very significant theme that is brought to discussion through the novel is the inherent goodness of people.

Desai portrays this feature mainly through the character of Mr. Panwallah whom she appreciates as “a benefactor, the kindest and most helpful of all” (Desai 107). In addition, the de Silvas, Jagu, Mr. Syyid Ali and Hira Lal serve as the symbols of loving kindness and compassion in the novel. Mr. Panwallah, the owner of Ding Dong Watchworks is the most kind hearted and benevolent of all. He loves and sympathizes with children like Hari. He is very respectful and refined so that he sets a good example to Hari and is always like a father to him. He often directs Hari on the correct path by moulding the traits of his personality.

He is modest enough to share his art of watch mending with Hari who is a simple and poor village boy. Mr. Panwallah stands for universal love also. It is due to the kind gesture of Hira Lal, the watchman of Seabird that Hari safely goes into the hand of a good person like Jagu who assists Hari by offering him with a job in his eating house. So, it is clear that both Hira Lal and Jagu also are very merciful. If it not for the de Silvas, Lila’s mother will pitifully face an untimely death. Being generous and good hearted, Mr. de Silva takes Lila’s mother to the hospital at Alibagh by his car and pays for her medicine as well as for the running of Lila’s family.
The way he explains Lila the worsening condition of her mother seems very touching and understanding. He further extends a helping hand to Lila by arranging his friend, Mr. Sayyid Ali who is a bird watcher to stay at Mon Repos. Luckily for Lila, Mr. Sayyid Ali is also a very tender hearted person who pays the three sisters generously for running errands for him. It is therefore clear that all of them are symbolical of love, affection and humanity.

Thus, Desai showcases how such commendable human characteristics can serve as a blessing for the betterment of the society. Also, it is in a very effective manner that Desai reports the fearful atmosphere of the city through the character portrayals of Billu, the beggar and the coconut seller. The beggar says that Billu is very dangerous and delinquent though he acts as a person who sells coconuts by day. Paradoxically, the beggar also seems to be engaged in anti-social activities.

What both of them do during the day is just a cover to their criminal activities at night. The people in the city cannot exist on the meagre income earned by just selling coconuts or begging alms since the cost of living in towns is very high. Once they find it difficult to bear up starvation, they tend to steal or murder with which to make a living. Therefore, some people tend to make money by indulging in underhand dealings and criminal activities, while leading a double life which will protect them from the authorities.

It is hence perceived that poverty drives people to be violent and resort to criminal acts. The injustice caused by the unscrupulous industrialists and politicians to the innocent people is another important dimension of Desai’s thematic concerns in the novel. A factory is to be built up in Thul which will grab both the livelihoods of farming and fishing from the hands of the poor villagers.
So, they get together and organize a protest campaign to go to Bombay in order to forward a petition to the Chief Minister. But, unfortunately all their efforts are in vain owing to the intervention of the self-serving politicians. They never ever hesitate to hinder the poor people in the pursuit of their petty selfish desires. The poor are so helpless that they are not strong enough even to raise their voice against the injustices caused to them.

They have always retreated before the powerful entrepreneurs and politicians just as “the mist of the mountain runs before the morning sun”. In many instances of the novel, Desai invites our attention towards the customs, taboos, beliefs and superstitions of the Indian culture. Hari is greatly worried by the problem of earning dowries for his sisters. It is the Indians who are said to be the first people in the world to demand a dowry from the bride’s parents. This is a practice which has been deep rooted in the Indian culture for centuries.

Also, early in the morning, almost every woman in Thul goes to the cluster of the three rocks at the beach to offer kum kum powder and flowers to the sea god. They are of the belief that it is only if they venerate the sea god that their fishermen are able to be safe at the sea. Superstitions play a major role in their lives. This is clearly manifested through the character of the medicine man or the village quack who himself is a product of the mythical beliefs and ignorance prevailing among the villagers.

The efforts made by the quack quite meaninglessly to cure Lila’s mother and the unhygienic, nonsensical and atrocious nature of his medicine indicate that superstitions are only a matter of old age beliefs. Religion is also a vital part of the life of the people hailing from both remote and urban areas in India. Even Bombay people celebrate festivals like Diwali, Coconut Day and perform pujas to the god.
The religiosity of Indian people is well conveyed through such situations. It is thus obvious that Desai’s attempts to represent the cultural life of India seem to have become successful. In the present novel, Desai also goes onto explore the impact of industrialization and urbanization on the society and environment of the country. And how far everything on the earth and under the sky has to undergo a sea change by means of time is delineated in a vivid manner.

And how far everything on the earth and under the sky has to undergo a sea change by means of time is delineated in a vivid manner. It is almost inevitable that under the pervasive influence of industrialization, the society gets widely exposed to the phenomena of modernization, globalization and commercialization. Thus the writer examines the plight of the rustic people in the rapid context of industrialization as she explains how the people in Thul consider the coming factory as a threat to their livelihood. Another significant aspect of this phenomenon of industrialization is the devastating impact that it has on the ecology of the country.

To open up communication lines and put up factories, the land is devastated in an indiscriminate manner. Natural habitats are being destroyed, degraded and depleted senselessly thus causing the loss of wild species including valuable flora and fauna. The once luscious forests are now fast disappearing from the face of the earth. It is the self-seeking entrepreneurs and power hungry politicians who cause such destruction to nature with the intention of feathering their own nest. To point out the detrimental consequences of industrialization, the writer makes use of the vivid comparison between the highly industrialized city, Bombay and the unspoilt village, Thul which is brimming with the breathtaking beauty of nature. Desai very vividly brings to our limeligh the aggressive disturbances of modern urban life marked with its enormous artificialities.
The incessant sounds coming from factories, honking of horns, and the rubbing, squeaking and cracking sounds of the machineries penetrate through the ears. Desai further discusses the obstructing nature of the city as follows, But here there was everything at once as if all the traffic in the world had met on the streets of Bombay – cycles, rickshaws, hand-carts, tongas, buses, cars, taxis and lorries – hooting and screeching and grinding and roaring past and around him. (P. 74)

In the above lines, the writer in an extremely brilliant manner paints out a strong picture of the interferences of the city life. At first, Hari finds it very difficult to get used to the life of Bombay because he has been familiar with a rustic life so far. Though Hari used to village life, it is time which changes him to adapt to the new situation. Thul, still untouched by the streak of industrial strategies is an extremely beautiful village which has no deficiency of the priceless assets of nature.

Though Hari used to village life, it is time which changes him to adapt to the new situation. Thul is a tranquil hamlet where man and nature cherish their relationship with the lush paddy fields, calm waters, dense forests, and the vast stretching majestic sea belt thereby capturing the harmony along the many footpaths. While living in this serene locality one can derive pleasure by experiencing the delicacy of natural objects and listening to the melodious songs of the wild birds.

This natural magnificence and tranquility of Thul contrasts with the artificialities of urban life. The beauty of nature also emerges as an enticing theme of Desai’s novel. She seems to be entrapped by the serenity of nature at the very beginning of the novel where she excellently captures the spectacular scenery of the sandy shore, fragrant flowers and the colourful birds.
Then there were all the birds flying out of the shadowy, soft-needled casuarina trees and the thick jungle of pandanus, singing and calling and whistling louder than at any other time of the day. Flute-voiced drongoes swooped and cut through the air… It was the voice of the village Thul as much as the roar of the waves and the wind in the palms. (P. 9) In the above paragraph quoted from the first chapter of the novel, the writer gives a colourful image of the village Thul which is undoubtedly a blessing of nature. The stunning dance of the fragrant flowers caught in the wind is very attractive. The reader is heartened by the beauty of the “zebra-striped butterflies”.

The loveliest is the birds flying here and there while cutting through the air like “dazzling knives”. The mellifluous chirping of the birds adds a musical rhythm to the dance of their sisters who are the flowers and butterflies. It is striking that lovely nature has lavishly gifted Thul with all these incomparable treasures of tranquil elegance. The very title of the novel, The Village by the Sea also sounds close to nature. Desai’s redolent pictures of the sky in the monsoon and in the evening as well as the giant sea stretching up to the horizon are also really exceptional.

Thus, she appears to be an ardent lover of nature. That is why Anita Desai couples the natural time into human time of their life. However, there may not be any debate for the fact that Desai’s beautiful portraits of nature outshine those of a great poet. Thus, the thematic appeal of the novel, The Village by the Sea is very intriguing, touching and vital. Its themes carry immense importance highlighting the most critical issues pertaining to the miscellaneous layers of the social pyramid. Desai’s acute sense of observation and strong powers of imagination become prominent in her masterly characterization, vivid descriptions of the settings and her fine organization of a pulsating plot which sounds highly authentic.
Also, the novelist’s remarkable ability in the adoption of effective narrative techniques seems to have been immensely helpful in enhancing the richness of the thematic appeal of the novel. So, it is quite evident that this exquisite work of literature explicitly exhibits Anita Desai’s excellence and workmanship as a writer of fiction. Here through this novel *The Village by the Sea* Anita Desai tries to drive home the theme of struggles of life and how far even the hard times have been changed by the young ones as positive. Though they happen to suffer economically the spirit in them never fails and based on the concept of familial time, they turned it to be on their side. The novel is not only based on child psychology but also on managing with time concept. In the inception of the novel, time plays its role as a preserver of a very calm and tranquil village for the denizens, but as the story moves on and on, one can realize the real nature of time as a destroyer of peace of the people of the village by the sea.

On scrutinising the novel *Fasting, Feasting*, seems to be based, as the very title suggests, on the binary opposition, fasting and feasting, which dominate the life of the modern men and women in all sections, groups and societies world over. This dichotomy works in the lives of proletariat and capitalist, servant and master, poor and rich, and above all woman and man. The title itself is ironical, putting the oppressed one before the oppressor.

But Anita Desai has invested something very new and peculiar in this novel; that is, how this dichotomy works between female-female relationships. Thus, primarily the story of human hungers, Fasting, Feasting, merits appreciation from the feminist point of view. Critics like Asha Choubey and Pamela Oliver have made a profound attempt to expose the implicit injustice and strategies of female subjugation in the patriarchal society. However, Anita Desai’s novel, *Fasting, Feasting*, published in 1999, seems to have been influenced by the radical phase of feminist movement.
Radical feminists essentially demand complete emancipation from the shackles of oppressive patriarchal stereotypes. The basic problem faced by such feminists is how to challenge and subvert the norms of patriarchy while, simultaneously, being parts of the same system itself.

“To evade this dilemma, Helena Cixous posits the existence of an incipient ‘feminine writing’ (écriture feminine) which has its source in the mother, in the stage of the mother-child relation before the child acquires the male-centred verbal language”

(P. 97)

Anita Desai is, undoubtedly, one among such radical writers who tend to challenge the stereotypes of motherhood. Therefore, a few critics like Asha Choubey and Aparna Goswami and Bhasker Jyoti Goswami have focused their study on this aspect of Fasting, Feasting. These critics have tried, with genteel enthusiasm, to decipher the ground reality of mother-daughter relationships. Choubey arrives at the conclusion that when daughter does not receive the desired love and affection, and when there is a dearth of understanding between mother and daughter, it leads to alienation and depression in the psyche of the girl child.

The negative side of the time which renders this sort of depression. This renders the daughter vulnerable to the pressures of the world outside. On the other hand, Aparna Goswami and Bhaskar Jyoti Goswami, in their combined paper, approach mother-daughter relationship from a psychological point of view. They consider that a reluctant approach to motherhood, by mothers, is a way of asserting themselves.
Thus these critics have something radically different to present; that is, maternal apathy, indifference and alienation are not negative but instead positive attempts on the part of mothers to get rid of their motherhood at the time of revealing their love towards their child. In which they have been chained. But it seems as if these critics have ignored the fact that such attempts by the mother, however, bring drastic, and more often destructive, changes in the personality of the daughter. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to examine how the mother’s negation of her motherhood poses threat to the growth and development of the child, especially of daughter, and simultaneously focusing on the oscillation occurring in the relationships of mother and daughter in Anita Desai’s novel in question.

Anita Desai’s novel, *Fasting, Feasting*, is not merely a book about woman and her diversified roles as mother, daughter and wife; but it also “recounts human relationships in the language not only of fasting and feasting but of greed, craving, taboo, denial and disgust” (P. 8). Delineating the human hungers, as its title suggests, the novel is about the starving daughters and prospering mothers who are no more concerned with their motherly duties as made necessary by patriarchy.

Though remaining within the threshold of male dominated society, the mother here retains something of her own, a niche for her individual being, divorced from the duties of a traditional mother. In addition to this, “the novel gives an excruciating account of how society can seize control of individuals – especially women – through such practices as eating, and remove them from everything they intended to be” (P. 8). It shows that Desai’s vision is quite different from that of Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur. Here the mother adapts the traditions and values of patriarchy for creating a haven for herself. The haven is nothing but time. The psychological time which makes her to adapt the trading. Aparna and Bhaskar Jyoti Goswami comment,
“Desai’s female characters can often be seen as liberated even from the emotional responsibility of motherhood. They are conceived of as primal creatures, busy in pursuing their own motivations, desires and thriving for the fulfillment of their selves” (192).

She does not bother, in the way of a traditional woman, for children and family, turning her face from the responsibilities of a mother. By leaving her children devoid of maternal care and love, she keeps on enjoying her life with her male counterpart. Here the mother turns the negative side of the time as positive for her pleasure. But the question arises if woman, in the wake of feminist movement, abandons her domestic sphere completely, what would become of her children? How can freedom be earned at the cost of negating motherhood? The reputed American public thinker Camille Pagliuca remarks,

“Woman’s current advance in society is not a voyage from myth to truth but from myth to new myth . . . An awful lot is being swept under the rug, the awe and terror that is our lot.” (P. 208)

Thus it seems as if in the light of the new millennium, the caring eye of the mother has lost its eyesight, leaving the children in the eternal darkness of abandonment where insanity awaits them. Individual freedom won at the cost of assassinating one’s own children’s emotions is worthless. There must be a kind of harmony, some sort of balance between a woman’s two distinct roles- of a mother and of an individual. Otherwise what being sown are mere dry bones of neglect, rejection and hatred; it can be imagined what would sprout from them.
The novel, *Fasting, Feasting*, has been divided into two segments, dealing with two diverse cultures – Indian and American. The first part tells Uma’s story in relation to her mother with the backdrop of her relationships with her sister, Aruna, brother, Arun, and her father. Desai has portrayed these relationships so intricately that it seems almost impossible to understand mother-daughter relationship without approaching them simultaneously. Much like Jane Austen, Anita Desai primarily deals with two or three families as forming the plot of her present novel. Uma’s family consists of her parents and their two daughters, one being Uma herself. The parents have merged into each other so intensely that now it appears quite difficult to conceive them as separate beings. “Mam and Papa. MamaPapa. PapaMama. It was hard to believe they had ever had separate existences, that they had been separate entities and not MamaPapa in one breath” (P. 5). The novelist has not felt the need to give them separate names; instead, they are addressed as MamaPapa in the same breath. In his review of the novel, Andrew Robinson comments,

“In Papa and Mama, the Indian parents, she [Anita Desai] creates two monsters of almost Gothic proportions, locked into inseparable marital disharmony, determined to inflict on their two daughters and only son every ounce of the prejudices and disappointments of their own lives, as a respectable barrister and his wife in an undistinguished town.” (P. 39)

Uma’s father had studied under the streetlight and seems to be infatuated with education; whereas her mother is a housewife who has absorbed patriarchal values to such an extent that she cannot even like to think beyond patriarchal horizon. Herself a victim of gender discrimination, she remembers,
“In my day, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts, good things to eat. If something special had been bought in the market, like sweets or nuts, it was given to the boys in the family.” (P. 5)

Thus conditioned by the gender biased attitude of the parents, Uma’s mother embodies all the feminine traits expected from a girl in a patriarchal society. Pramod K. Nayar aptly observes:

“The woman is thus “naturalised” with the qualities that are granted her. She is never able to be other than this image given her. Male versions of femininity are deemed as the definitive versions – there is no female truth except what the male construes it to be. This is, unfortunately, deeply assimilated into/by the woman too.” (P. 88)

Uma’s mother is also a socially constructed self, a product of patriarchal ideology. The ideology of destruction of time enters through Uma’s mother. Desai describes, “. . . her eyes gleamed with mischief as she tossed back her head and laughed apparently without any thought of propriety. She clasped the cards to her chest and fluttered her lashes coquettishly” (7).

But Uma’s mother lives a double or split existence; she lives both as an individual and a traditional wife. At the initial stage “there is seen a special bond between the mother and the two girls, all of them being the victims of Papa” (Choubey, Mothers 111). But later the mother becomes one with her husband and serving him remains the sole aim of her life. The mother is completely overtaken by patriarchy represented by the father. It is because:
“. . . his thoughts were one with hers. Their opinion differed so rarely that if Mama refused to let Aruna wear a pearl necklace to the matinee at the Regal cinema or Papa decided Uma could not take music lessons after school, there was no point in appealing to the other parent for a different verdict: none was expected, or given.” (P. 14)

Flies . . . her daughters trailing after her, and by the time she arrived at the varanda, her manner had become the familiar one of guarded, restraint, censure and a tired decorum” (P. 7). In doing her duty to serve her husband, Uma’s mother does not pay any heed to her daughters and they are left neglected, bereft of any care and affection. “Mama would sit herself down on the varanda swing, alone, to wait for him, keeping a cursory eye on the little girls as they played in the dry patch of grass . . . She intervened irritably when they quarreled too loudly” (Desai 8). Alva Mrydal and Viola Klein observe:

“Children First’ is the motto writ large over all discussions of the merits and demerits of married women. . . . Our children are our stake in the future; hence their well-being is of vital concern to society as well as to us personally. And as we have brought them into this world, it is our responsibility to make them, as best we can, fit to live in it happily and successfully.” (116)

But these caring words sound true only in regard to a son. In patriarchy, the upbringing of a daughter remains a half-hearted affair to the parents. Uma’s parents’ irresponsible behavior towards their daughters leaves the girls bewildered. “The girls had learnt not to expect divergences and disagreements, and these occurred so rarely
that they might not have recognized them when they did” (P. 14). One day Uma’s mother is found to be pregnant. As a result of an aspiring father, the pregnancy is not terminated and a son is born in the family. In patriarchal system, a mother is made to feel blessed by giving birth to a male heir. Hence the expressions of Uma’s mother also change, “They were acutely aware of the wonder of it. Mama’s face, still tense from the difficult delivery, began to relax and broaden into long-suffering pride” (PP.16-17).

Here for Uma’s mother the clock time offers her a joyful time.

Alladi Uma comments, “A daughter is confident about a mother’s love. She knows she is not a second class member of the family; she is no supplement. She is a necessity in her mother’s life. At times her mother depends on her. It is an interdependence and a reciprocity we cannot miss” (73). But there is no such interdependence and reciprocity in Uma’s relationship with her mother. A hindrance in her daughter’s life, Uma’s mother leaves no room for her daughter to prosper.

Asha Choubey observes, “Desai as a true humanist puts the blame not only on men who are suffering with the complex of male-superiority but also on women who oppress their own kind. It is not only the male-chauvinist that acts as the antagonist force but also apathetic female does more harm in terms of the loss of womansoul” (P. 126). Uma is reduced to the status of a domestic servant. Her mother’s sole aim is to please her husband and she uses Uma to carry it out. Uma is always asked to tell the cook to make this or that for Papa or to take care of her younger brother, Arun. Her mother has risen in status after becoming the mother of a son: More than ever now, she was Papa’s helpmeet, his consort. He had not only made her his wife, he had made her the mother of his son. What honour, what status. Mama’s chin lifted a little into the air, she looked around her to make sure everyone saw and noticed. She might have been wearing a medal. (P. 31)
Therefore, all the love and care is showered on the son and the daughters never even receive their share of attention and, in addition, are treated merely as an obligation by the parents. Uma herself notices, “how Mama and Papa looked upon Arun with an identical expression: a kind of nervous, questioning, somewhat doubtful but determined pride. He was their son, surely an object of pride” (P. 31). Such a gender-based attitude on the part of parents seems somehow unnatural but what Amar Nath Prasad remarks is quite relevant, “Most probably, the reason of their frustration and step-motherly treatment can be sought in the psychology of the parents- such parents who are more interested in a boy child than in a girl child” (40).

Here the psychological time of Uma works and it leads to such imbalanced thoughts over her parents. However like Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, Uma too is burdened with the responsibility of her kid brother even before she can enjoy her own childhood. The eldest sister is made to act as a surrogate mother to her younger brother. The author candidly states, “When Mama came home, weak, exhausted and short-tempered, she tried to teach Uma the correct way of folding nappies, of preparing watered milk, of rocking the screaming infant to sleep when he was covered with prickly heat as with a burn” (P. 18).

Thus, Uma’s mother begins to shape her daughter in the traditions of patriarchal society where a girl is moulded in the role of a housewife and a domestic servant. Anita Desai expresses the value of the past time with its quality and nature. Moreover herself not much educated, Uma’s mother pays no attention to her daughter’s education. Like Kasturi, Virmati’s mother in *Difficult Daughters*, she does not value her daughter’s academic career. Once she snaps, “We are not sending you back to school, Uma. You are staying at home to help with Arun” (P. 18).
Like Virmati and Saru, Uma wants to be educated, but unlike them fails miserably in her attempts. Uma remains, like Virmati, engaged in household chores which consume most of her valuable time. The time plays its amihilating nature. So, it leads Uma towards the destination of her life. No tuition classes are arranged by her parents. As a result, Uma fails in her exams miserably. The novelist states, “. . . in spite of her raging enthusiasm, she was an abject scholar. . . . There was not a thing Uma put her hand to that did not turn to failure” (P. 21).

The issue of education has usually remained a battleground for both mothers and daughters to fight. The influence of education generally results in developing questioning attitude in the daughter. But the mother never likes to be questioned by the creature of her own blood. Uma’s mother is an insensitive, self-centered mother with myopic view and vision. She tries to convince Uma, “You know you failed your exams again. You’re not being moved up. What’s the use of going back to school? Stay at home and look after your baby brother” (P. 22). Uma’s mother fails to be a caring and trusted mother to her children. Aparna and Bhaskar Jyoti Goswami observe, “As far as Uma is concerned, she interferes unduly and negatively by stopping her education after two continuous failures and with cruel selfishness, makes her an ayah to her younger brother, convincing her that it will help her in gaining experience of household duties” (P. 199).

Uma seems to be a mere shadow of her parents, not an individual self. “Reduced thus to a baby-sitter at her earlier days and an unpaid servant for her self-centred parents for the rest of her life, Uma finds no escape from her entrapment” (P. 83). However school is a kind of escape for Uma from her mother’s dominance and where she can feel more safe, secure and a mistress of her own. Even weekends are difficult for her to pass at home. The novelist remarks:
“There were the wretched weekends when she was plucked back into the trivialities of her home, which seemed a denial, a negation of life as it ought to be, somber and splendid, and then the endless summer vacation when the heat reduced even that pointless existence to further vacuity.” (P. 21)

Once Uma takes to the path of rebellion and escapes in the afternoon from the house to school to meet Mother Agnes, so that she can be admitted again in the school. But this attempt of Uma too results in failure. Uma’s mother becomes infuriated at such an independent step of her daughter. She retorts, “See what these nuns do . . . What ideas they fill in the girls’ heads! I always said don’t send them to a convent school. Keep them at home, I said- but who listened? And now- !” (Desai 29). Such a reaction of her mother renders Uma submissive and docile. Uma was in a position to accept the works of time she realised clearly that time is not in favour of her.

However, the plight of Uma raises a significant question in the reader’s mind, that is, in patriarchy the same miserable fate awaits the daughter, no matter she is rebellious or submissive. Here Uma presents a direct contrast to Virmati and Saru. Both these girls suffer in their life because they rebel against patriarchy represented by their mothers. But Uma also is a victim of her mother’s wrath despite being submissive. It suggests that tension in mother and daughter relationship arises not only because of daughter’s rebellious nature but also due to mother’s dominating attitude. Asha Choubey comments:
“Mothers are such strong influences in the lives of their daughters that they have the power to make or mar their daughter’s personality. In a patriarchal world, however mothers instead of protecting the interests of their daughters become instrumental in torturing them.” (P. 111)

Like Virmati, Uma’s school education is curtailed and she is further trained in the duties of a housewife. Uma’s mother wants her daughter to accept marriage as her career instead of education. She asks:

‘What is the use of going back to school if you keep failing, Uma? . . . You will be happier at home. You won’t need to do any lessons. You are a big girl now. We are trying to arrange a marriage for you. Not now,’ she added, seeing the panic on Uma’s face. ‘But soon. Till then, you can help me look after Arun. And learn to run the house.’ (P. 22)

She has to serve her father bananas, oranges, apples and lemonade at the right time and with appropriate gestures on her mother’s behalf. She is, thus, made to feel proud at trivialities. Her mother comments, “Girls have to learn these things too, you know . . . she showed Uma how to pour a little oil on her fingertips and then massage it into the baby’s limbs” (Desai 28-29). Consequently, Uma loses interest in the world around her. This state of Uma reminds us of Laura, the daughter in Tennessee Williams’ play The Glass Managerie. Like Uma, Laura leads a fragile existence. So she cannot face the world of harsh reality and finds escape in her collection of glass animals as Uma usually finds escape in her Christmas cards and bangle collection.
There are unwelcomed guests in MamaPapa’s home and Uma’s mother considers them as bad influences on her daughter. Mira-masi is a widow who has a fascination for pilgrimages and keeps on visiting shrines, temples and distant Asharms throughout the year. “Ever since her widowhood, she had taken up religion as her vocation. Her day was ruled by rituals, from the moment she woke to make her salutations to the sun, through her ritual bath and morning prayers, to the preparation of her widow’s single and vegetarian meal of the day, and through the evening ceremonies at the temples she visited” (P. 39). Uma’s relationship with Miramasi is somewhat spiritual in essence. She listens from her ancient myths of Hinduism and tales of various gods and goddesses.

Such knowledge of religion and spirituality proves a kind of moral support for Uma. She receives love and care from her Mira-masi which is always denied by her mother. This helps Uma to develop again a taste for life that has been lost somewhere. The influence of Mira-masi thus affects Uma’s psyche deeply. “Then Uma, with her ears and even her fingertips tingling, felt that here was someone who could pierce through the dreary outer world to an inner world, tantalizing in its colour and romance. If only it could replace this, Uma thought hungrily” (P. 40).

However, Uma’s relationship with her cousin, Ramu, is totally different from the one with Mira-masi. To Uma, her Mira-masi represents the world of spirituality and divinity; whereas Ramu represents the material world with an urge for pleasure. Whenever he visits Uma’s home, it fills her heart with joy. Once he takes Uma for dinner in some restaurant despite her parent’s constant refusal. He makes Uma drink and dance; and she has one of the best times with him. Uma’s mother cannot tolerate such an influence on her daughter.
“Quiet you hussy! Not another word from you, you idiot child!” Mama’s face glints like a knife in the dark, growing narrower and fiercer as it comes closer. ‘You, you disgrace to the family nothing but disgrace, ever!” (P. 53). Such behaviour of Uma’s mother lacks sensitivity, understanding and even interest in Uma. Simone de Beauvoir rightly comments on women like her:

She systematically takes a dislike to the friends among whom her daughter seeks help against family oppression and who ‘work on her feelings’; she criticizes them, forbids her daughter to see them too often or even to be with them at all, on the pretext that they ‘have had a bad influence’ on her. Any influence that is not hers is bad, but she feels a special animosity towards women of her own age – teachers, mothers of companions – with whom the little girl becomes affectionate; such feelings, she says, are ridiculous or morbid. (P. 535)

Her mother does not approve Uma visiting even their neighbours like Mrs. O’Henry and Mrs. Joshi. In patriarchy, instead of education, it is marriage which is offered to girls as a career. Since their childhood, girls are conditioned to consider marriage as their ultimate destiny. When nothing works for Uma, she is made to plunge into marriage. “It was as if their mothers had been tending them, in their flowerpots, for just this moment when their cheeks would fill out and their lips take on a glisten and all the giggles and whispers would arrive at that one decision – marriage” (P. 67).

Now Papa is so desperate that he himself sends letters to all their relatives asking for marriage proposals for Uma. He writes, “Uma is still young but may be considered of marriageable age and we see no reason to continue her studies beyond class eight” (P. 75). Although Uma was withdrawn from school before she could reach class eight.
Proposals arrive and Uma is shown the snaps of eligible bachelors as a sign of family’s progressive outlook. Three desperate attempts are made to get Uma married but unfortunately all of them end in fiasco. The first suitor likes Aruna rather than the elder daughter of the family. Second suitor’s family refuses to perform marriage after acquiring a pre-marital dowry from Uma’s family. In a conversation with Uma’s mother, Mrs. Joshi, their neighbour, comments:

‘Yes, that is why the Goyals are able to do such things, because of parents being in too much of a hurry. If parents will not take the time to make proper enquiries, what terrible fates their daughters may have! Be grateful that Uma was not married into a family that could have burnt her to death in order to procure another dowry!’ (P. 84)

Even after such warnings, no serious inquiries are made about the third suitor and a hasty marriage is offered. “Since it was clear Uma was not going to receive any other offer no matter what a good job the photographer had done with his unpromising material, Mama and Papa decided to proceed with the negotiations” (Desai 89). It seems as if Uma is a burden for her parents to be released as soon as possible. And finally when Uma gets married, her husband is found to be already married, having a wife and four children. She is brought back to her parental home where nobody is concerned about her humiliation and her ruin. Her parents merely curse the moment of marriage and moan over the dowry and the wedding expenses. After that Uma remains an outcast from the world of marriage, the world that matters above all in patriarchy. “Having cost her parents two dowries, without a marriage to show in return, Uma was considered ill-fated by all and no more attempts were made to marry her off” (P. 98).
Uma’s mother thinks that it was her daughter’s bad looks and uneducated status that never enabled her to find a suitable husband. Uma recollects, “How Mama had always envied Lila Aunty for having a daughter like Anamika, a model of perfection like Anamika. No, that was not for her, she sighed” (P. 77). Uma’s feelings about Anamika have a very strong influence on her relationship with her mother. Uma sometimes try to justify her mother’s rudeness towards herself by observing the beauty and intelligence of Anamika that she herself unfortunately lacks. Uma thinks that Anamika deserves Lila aunty’s love and care because she is a very intelligent and laborious student.

But this is not true in a patriarchal society where every girl, educated or uneducated, is expected to be a good housewife and an obedient domestic servant. Uma’s cousin Anamika presents a sharp contrast to Uma in that she is more pretty and educated than her. “She was simply lovely as a flower is lovely, soft, petal-skinned, bumblebee-eyed, pink-lipped, always on the verge of bubbling dove-like laughter, loving smiles, and with a good nature like a radiance about her. Wherever she was, there was peace, contentment, well-being” (P. 68). She wins a scholarship to Oxford. “To Oxford, where only the most favoured and privileged sons could ever hope to go! Naturally her parents would not countenance her actually going abroad to study – just when she was of an age to marry . . .” (P. 69).

They look upon the letter of acceptance as a trump card which is used to search a husband for her. Anamika never objects or questions her parents’ decision. She is married to a man much older than her and who is more conscious of his superiority. “Anamika had been beaten, Anamika was beaten regularly by her mother-in-law while her husband stood by and approved – or, at least, did not object” (Desai 71). She has a miscarriage as a result of regular thrashing.
And then one day news comes that Anamika has committed suicide. The destructing power of time i.e the natural time awaken to its senses and works on the fate of Anamika. However, Mama’s relationship with her younger daughter, Aruna, is quite different from her relationship with Uma. Like Uma, a victim of her parents’ gender-based attitude Aruna adopts the idea of ‘femininity’ whole heartedly as a survival device. She considers her mother a model for herself and tends to follow on her footprints. Nancy Chodorow points out, “A girl tends to retain elements of her preoedipal primary love and primary identification.

This has been compounded through the years by reinforcement from a more conscious gender-role identification with her mother” (P. 136). Feeling neglected in the male dominated society, Aruna escapes into the feminine universe. She learns very early the coquettish behavior of her mother. “There was already something about the way she tossed her head when she saw a man looking at her, with a sidelong look of both scorn and laughter, and the way her foot tapped and her legs changed position, that might have alerted the family to what it could expect” (PP. 80-81). Aruna adopts quickly all the feminine traits required to become a good housewife. This is just a way for Aruna to assert her individuality. She is not submissive like her sister, Uma. Instead, Aruna has a rebellious nature and she can question her mother. “By the time Aruna was fourteen she was rebelling against the blue cotton tunic and the white hair ribbons” (P. 81).

There are a few advantages that Aruna can enjoy. First she is more pretty and cute than Uma; and second, she does not have to look after Arun. That responsibility is left only for Uma to bear. “When Uma was still watching to see that Arun did not crawl off the varanda and break his neck or put knitting needles or naphthalene balls in his mouth, Aruna was already climbing into bicycle rickshaws and going off to the cinema
– with girl friends from school, she said” (P. 81). Despite her mother’s careless attitude towards her children, Aruna becomes a full grown woman with all the attributes that a girl must possess to survive in patriarchy. She has, in a way, carved out a space for herself by her feminine qualities in the complex family web. “Here was Aruna visibly ripening on the branch, asking to be plucked: no one had to teach her how to make samosas or help her to dress for an occasion. Instinctively, she knew” (P. 87).

Since childhood, Aruna presents a contrast to Uma both in matters of looks and education. Though conditioned by the same mother, Uma and Aruna have formed different personalities. One becomes the victim of that conditioning and can never prosper; and other takes that conditioning as a challenge and carves out a space for herself. Alladi Uma points out, “Even while a daughter may seem to be neglected by the mother, even while she questions the relationship, she cannot totally negate her mother or her influence” (P. 74).

If Uma has learnt her mother’s docility and submission, Aruna has opted freedom and zest for life from her mother. Aruna uses her attractiveness as a survival device. While Mama searches energetically for a husband for Uma, families are already making enquiries about Aruna. Moreover, when after marriage Aruna comes back to her mother’s home with her children, she exactly imitates her mother’s behavior. Most of the time Aruna remains out of the home busy in visiting her old friends and their families as her mother remained in kitty parties and card game. She is as careless and indifferent as her mother in regard to her children. However, Uma’s relationship with her sister, Aruna, does no good but intensifies the tensions between Uma and her mother. Uma usually notices her mother favouring Aruna’s smartness over her own submissiveness. This further makes their relationship problematic.
Now the question arises why these three daughters – Uma, Aruna and Anamika – have different fates despite being conditioned in the same patriarchal norms and values by their mothers. It is because these daughters respond to their mothers’ conditioning differently and consequently develop diverse attitudes and individualities. Uma adopts submissiveness at an early stage to derive some solace from the hazard of her neglected existence. The path of submission and docility appears to her as the only valid way out from the nudging and tirades of her mother. For Aruna her mother’s strictness is a kind of challenge which she accepts and counters in her own way.

She develops a predilection for her femininity and makes the family notice her adroitness in by far adopting feminine traits. As far as Anamika is concerned, her distinctiveness lies in her intelligence and astuteness. She takes to education for creating a separate space for herself in her parents’ patriarchal home. She performs well in studies and earns a scholarship to Oxford. Thus, these girls have espoused three different modes of survival as a result of their distinct individualities. Apart from this fact, it is the role of the parents that has contributed in creating distinction in the life of the daughters. Uma is offered a typical arranged marriage by her parents in which she does not have any say.

The parents solely take it as their right to decide for her and ultimately, Uma has to pay severely for her submissiveness. Although in Anamika’s case it is different. Her education is used as a trap by her parents to ensnare their daughter in a mismatched marriage. It is Anamika’s subservient nature and conformity to her image of the ideal daughter that renders her meek even in her marital home. Consequently, she suffers silently and meets her terrible end. However, Aruna is offered an arranged cum love marriage. “As was to be expected, she took her time, showed a reluctance to decide, played choosy, but soon enough made the wisest, most expedient choice – the
handsomest, the richest, the most exciting of the suitors who presented themselves” (P. 102). Aruna is given the chance to decide for herself by the parents and this results in a successful marriage. Thus, parents’ unnecessary intervention in the daughter’s life is not a healthy affair in that a single wrong decision of the parents can convert the daughter’s life into a hell. Parental role in a girl’s life is the crucial deciding factor of what kind of life she would lead. Alva Mrydal and Viola Klein point out:

“Although deficient understanding of the children’s need at each age level may itself cause emotional and social and perhaps also intellectual underdevelopment, and although a feeling of ‘rejection’ occurs now and then for reasons which have to do with a mother’s personality . . . the risk exists that ambitious mothers may more often cause their children to feel willfully neglected.” (P. 130)

The same happens with Uma who, a victim of her mother’s indifference, can never develop a social self for herself. No understanding ever exists between Uma and her mother. Even the presence of her mother makes her feel a culprit. For her own comfort, Mama burdens Uma with the responsibility of Arun’s upbringing. Uma never receives any encouragement from her mother to study and make a career for herself. Even she is made to quit her school by her mother. Education is required not merely to be eligible for job or career, but it also contributes to the mental development of the individual. As a consequence, Uma lacks independence and confidence even after being a grown up. Meenakshi Raman and Sushil Rathore observe, “Their apathetic and rude behavior has never allowed her to become a mature person. They are responsible in making her a diffident child having no inclination towards creating a separate existence of her own and whenever she has tried to do it they have tried their best to evade it”
(137). When a job is offered by Dr Dutt to Uma, the very idea of it enrages the parents. It is her mother who raises an objection on behalf of Uma’s father. “Our daughter does not need to go out to work, Dr Dutt,” she said, “As long as we are here to provide for her, she will never need to go to work” (Desai 146). Her mother never allows Uma to be independent. She is turned into a mere loyal servant to her whom she does not want to lose. When the offer of job is declined, Mama asks Uma, “And so my madcap wanted to run away and leave her Mama? What will my madcap do next?” (Desai 148).

If a comparison is sought between Uma and Virmati, the protagonist of Difficult Daughters, one finds out that Virmati suffers from loneliness and seclusion after leaving her family and home, but Uma suffers even within her family. Even a few moments of private life are not allowed to her.

She can neither visit her neighbours nor can sit alone in the home. “The biased and rigid attitude of parents, papa always scowling and mama scolding leave no room for Uma to fulfill any of her desires and dreams. Even a few moments of peace and tranquility in her room are denied to her” (P.177). Every time her parents keep her busy in one domestic task or another. She is not even permitted to make phone calls. Once she secretly makes a call to Dr Dutt but forgets to lock the phone after use and is caught. Her father retorts, “‘Costs money! Costs money!’ he kept shouting long after. ‘Never earned anything in her life, made me spend and spend, on the dowry and her wedding. Oh, yes, spend till I’m ruined, till I am a pauper – ’” (P.149). This shows the hypocrisy of parents. On the one hand, they do not allow Uma to do a job outside home, and on the other curse her for not earning anything. Her mother never supports Uma to look for a career even after splitting off her marriage. She never pays any heed to the fact what would become of Uma when they would no longer be in this world.
Thus, such a behavior of her parents, especially of her mother, leaves Uma a baffled child, devoid of any emotional support. Asha Choubey rightly comments on Uma’s relationship with her mother, “This is one relationship wherein understanding and support are most expected but this is sadly one relationship where these ideas are lacking” (P. 113).

This indifference at the hands of her parents makes Uma feel insignificant and she starts losing confidence. According to Marydal and Klein “Parental strictness is often experienced as rejection by children. From these deprivations result many neurotic personalities, insecure, restless, dissatisfied people, both young and old” (P. 130). Uma’s humiliation and disgust with herself has affected her inner world to such an extent that she begins to have fainting fits. She does not have anybody to unburden her heart to. Such a pathetically isolated self, Uma has no source from where she can gain love and attention. In this context, Meenakshi Raman and Sushila Rathore point out, “All her quests and her frustrations are restricted to her thoughts without any outlet” (136). Thus these accumulated frustrations find an outlet through fits. The reader is left with a lump in his throat after viewing Uma’s condition. They are such type of parents who are who are so unkind even to their own daughter.

The second part of the novel deals with Mrs. Patton’s family and her relationship with her daughter, Melanie. The connecting link between these two families is Arun, brother of Uma, who is sent to study further in America. Mrydal and Klein say, “The two grave psychological risks which young children normally run are those of ‘rejection’ and ‘over-protection’” (P. 130). This observation seems quite appropriate in this context. If Uma in India and Melanie in America are victims of their mother’s rejection, Arun is the victim of his parents’ overprotective attitude. Melanie has lost appetite to eat anything else than nuts and candy:
“She sits in the gloom of the unlit staircase, munching the nuts with a mulish obstinacy, regarding him with eyes that are slits of pink-rimmed green. Has she been crying? She looks sullen rather than tearful. It is her habitual expression. Arun reflects that he has not once seen it change.” (P. 168)

But her mother never bothers about her daughter’s losing appetite. A caged bird in her husband’s home, Mrs. Patton herself does not have any choice to eat. She has to eat, along with other family members, the meat that Mr. Patton cooks himself for dinner. No matter whether its India or America, in the patriarchal society a woman does not have any say even in matters of eating. Once Mrs. Patton confides in Arun, “I’ve always wanted to be one myself. I’ve always hated eating meat – oh, that red, raw stuff, the smell of it! I’ve always, always disliked it – but never could – never knew how – you know, my family wouldn’t have liked it. But I’ve always liked vegetables best” (P. 183).

Later in the company of Arun Mrs. Patton has become obsessed with shopping. She is not least concerned about her daughter’s health and never cares what Melanie eats and why. Arun does not see in her a real mother but just a plastic copy of the original. He states, “She smiles a bright plastic copy of a mother-smile that Arun remembers from another world and another time, the smile that is tight at the corners with pressure, the pressure to perform a role, to make him eat, make him grow, make him worth all the trouble and effort and expense” (Desai 198). Much like Uma’s mother, Mrs. Patton has a very detached outlook towards her children. She is concerned only to fill the freezer with food items. “She is not involved in the lives of her own children.
According to A. Goswami and B. J. Goswami, she is not aware of the fact that her teenage daughter, Melanie is practically starving and has developed a habit of vomiting after consuming her favourite peanuts and candies” (PP.202-03). She is never shown to be talking with her daughter personally and in an intimate relationship. Melanie is left all by herself to manage. Once Melanie reveals her frustrations to her mother, “‘I hate scrambled eggs! Why don’t you ask me what I want? Why can’t you make me what I want? What do you think we all are – garbage bags you keep stuffing and stuffing?’” (P. 209-10).

Aparna and Bhaskar Jyoti Goswami observe, “Anita Desai, for the first time, brings it to the notice of readers that there are many more dimensions to a woman’s personality than just being someone’s mother, or for that matter, someone’s wife, or mistress” (P. 199). Mrs. Patton represents a modern version of motherhood and enjoys sunbathing without caring for anything else. Neglected by her mother, Melanie becomes a patient of depression. She eats only candies and keeps on vomiting all day.

Desai aptly describes: Then Arun does see a resemblance to something he knows: a resemblance to the contorted face of an enraged sister who, failing to express her outrage against neglect, against misunderstanding, against in attention to her unique and singular being and its hungers, merely spits and froths in ineffectual protest. How strange to encounter it here, Arun thinks, where so much is given, where there is both licence and plenty. (P. 217) Thus daughters neglected by their mothers often become hysterical. Like Uma, Melanie does not have any outlet to relieve her frustrations. Such isolated daughters have nothing in store but only bulimia, anorexia, depression, withdrawal, compulsive behavior and hysteria. Anita Desai, through her present novel, tends to show that excessive concerns of mothers in case of Arun and complete disinterestedness in case of Uma and Melanie leave the children completely shattered.
Fasting, Feasting is both a plea and warning to those mothers who venture into their own individual worlds by rejecting their children’s right to be loved and cared. Such negation of motherhood would render the future generations crippled. Through this novel Desai brings to light on the workings of life time, familial time and psychological time which determines the lives of the characters. Through Anamika Desai delineates the time of the fate and how it worked on her all on a sudden death. The hard times of the family which is inevitable worked on the death of Anamika. That was something inevitable as a female. At the same time, if she is a male child it won’t happened to her. The time too may be turned as a preserver instead of acting as a destroyer. For Anamika time unfortunately turned as a destroyer.