

The Representation of Women in Anita Desai Novels

DR. Rajeswari Sangoju

Professor, SCERT, Andhra Pradesh

Woman has been the focus of many literary works down the centuries. In an age of development and fluctuation in every field, one cannot easily ignore half the population. Indian writers in English have also come out of their shells of "non-attachment" and have started acknowledging the stature of the Indian woman in a male-dominated society. The concept of Indian womanhood is as divergent as the country itself and has undergone drastic and dramatic changes from era to era. India has travelled from her glorious past to degeneration; from spiritual ascendancy to communal clashes; from captivity to independence; from agrarian revolution to cyber technology. The role of the Indian woman has also changed from that of deity to *devadasi*, from *shakti* to *abala*, and from homebound creature to a professional outfit.

Here it is important to mention that the Indo-Anglian fiction too presents a consistent picture of the changing social realities during this eventful century. Those interested in categorizing may find it convenient to divide the Indian English Fiction into two broad categories as - the Pre-Independence and Post-Independence groups of writers.

The Post-Independence period in the recent Indian history corresponds suitably with her concept of the "nodal period" when a number of Indian writers of fiction in English try to explore and manifest Indian reality. In these writers one does not find either the commitment of the earlier period or even the amused narration of the trials of the middle class, trying to unite the past traditional outlook with the fast emerging realities of the modern living conditions. In this effort, the writers of the post-Independence phase move inward. They get more and more psychologically planned and try to evaluate the sociological effect on the psyche of their characters.

This movement, from the outward gross realities to inward complexities, found as its mouth-piece, a number of women novelists who, by the peculiar situation of their existence, have been able to see the Indian complexities from close quarters, where constraints of varied hues and shades work upon the sensitive individuals. Fiction by women writers provides insights, a wealth of understanding, a reservoir of meanings and a basis of discussion. There has been a growing interest on women's issues and women writers focus on these issues. Many creative writings in English and many writers including Nayantara Sehgal, Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De have dealt with such issues.

There is a galaxy of women writers who have contributed to the development of Indo-English prose and verse. Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu were the pathfinders and made way and inspired the new generation of men and women writers. There is a fine incorporation of Indian artistic sensibility and western literary types and genre in their poetry. The Indo-English literature has presented the political, social and cultural crises in India. Social hypocrisies, ugly social practices of caste-system, and superstitions in Indian society have been analysed thoroughly in Indo-English literature. The synthesis of the Eastern and Western literary modes have given a comprehensive perspective to the Indo-English writers and

they have successfully analyzed the psychological, emotional and spiritual crises experienced by the Indian intellectuals as well as by men and women representing the different strata of Indian society.

Women writers comprise a sizeable segment of Indo-English writers. They present the age-old problems of Indian womanhood. As Indo-English literature has absorbed the new trends from the western literature, its theoretical foundations range between Greco-Roman theories of literature and Marxist and existentialist, psycho-analytic and other avant-garde movements in the world of literature. The English language has given the most direct access to the ever growing horizon of human knowledge. The Indo-English writers could easily bypass the hurdles of race and culture, perhaps with ease, as compared to the writers in the regional languages. From Raja Ram Mohan Roy to the youngest Indo-English writers, the continuous absorption of the spirit of modernity, science and rationality, and the stress on forging a balance between tradition and modernity can be found and this has brought forth the new awareness towards the archetypal themes and national ethos.

Of the different colours and shades of the women novelists, Anita Desai is one of the many voices of the modern Indian English fiction. She is a recorder of the dilemma faced by a person in the Indian urban set up. She introduces a new age of psychological realism in this genre with her novel *Cry The Peacock* (1963). Anita Desai, like Kamala Markandaya, has made human relationship as a centre of her fictional subject. She is mainly concerned with the journey within her characters, the main protagonists being female characters. Therefore, the repeated theme that we come across in her novels is the agony of existence in a hostile and male-dominated society which is conservative. The physical world attracts the writer to the mental apprehensions and the feeling of insecurity in the life of her protagonists who are undergoing traumatic psychic experiences due to the collapse of value-system and lack of satisfactory alternatives. Despondency, frustrations and failures do not give rise to complete chaos and anarchy in human relationship. One sees the struggle of the protagonists as heroic attempts that finally bring glory to the individual and add dignity to the spirit of freedom. As K.R.S. Iyengar has described it as

“.....the exploration of sensibility - the particular kind Of Indian sensibility that is ill at ease among barbarians and the philistines, the anarchists and the amoralists”.(Iyengar: ‘Indian Writing In English’ P. 3)

The women writers of the present century have the same thematic concerns but the treatments are their own. All of them are chroniclers of the tension in the wake of India's emergence as a developing nation. One also finds a conflict between tradition and modernity. In the novels of women writers one comes to know about women who are traditional in their way of living but modern in their outlook and have the capacity to retain their individuality. There is a clash between awakening individuals and the dominance of the conventional social fabric where the individual finds his vulnerability.

Kamala Markandaya is deliberated to be a pioneer in treating this theme in her novels. If traditional women, who still hold their individuality, make their appearance in the novels of Kamala Markandaya, women who face challenges in their quest for self-fulfillment are seen in the novels of Ruth Prawar Jhabvala. The women characters of Markandaya are generally conformists and traditionalists. In two of her novels, *Possession* and *Two virgins*, the central consciousness is that of a woman. Her women characters possess an admirable strength to face the calamities of life and are adept at the wisdom of compromise and adjustment. Her novels present a sample of the whole Indian society. She depicts the change in the rural areas. Her novels, *Nectar In ASieve* and *A Handful of Rice*, portray the harsh economic reality in rural area. The ravages of nature and hunger for millions have been treated sensitively by her in these novels. As H. M. Williams has rightly observed:

“Yet Markandaya's picture is not despairing. Human dignity survives especially in the passionate and loyal Rukmani, a brilliantly conceived character who changes from dignified stoicism to acts of near lunatic madness when goaded beyond patience are made vividly credible. The dignified religious sense of fate in the Indian peasant is portrayed with sympathy”. (Williams ‘Indo-Anglian Literature’: P. 84)

A post-Independence writer, Kamala Markandaya, draws her canvas on the changing socio-economic scene, making her novels a wonderful kaleidoscope. She shows dexterity in her selection of characters and situations. Her characters represent a wide spectrum - peasants, queens, and concubines, rural and city-breds, English officials in India, and Indian émigrés in England. From the first to the last, Markandaya's novels present women who prove themselves to be as resistant and resourceful as the earth. The positive attitude of these women is an outcome of their inner strength which can withstand social oppression. Their strength does not lie in their muscular power but in their inherent capacity for compassion, sacrifice, nurturance and acceptance of the inevitable. Chronicling the experience of the Indian woman, Markandaya shows her as the pillar of the society - supporting, strengthening and enduring everyone around her, Markandaya's fictional canvas, thus, portrays certain social conventions and attitude that victimise women.

Another outstanding woman novelist is Ruth Praver Jhabwala whose six novels deal with the middle class family of Delhi. She is mainly concerned with the family life, the personal relationship and the social problems. Political issues come up only when her characters and their turmoil have any relation to it. She maintains a sympathetic but ironic tone, seeing Indian social problems objectively and coolly.

“She takes an amused look at arranged marriages in India. She observes the metropolitan variegated life in Delhi in her novels, *To whom she will* and *The Nature of Passion*, with objectivity which made K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar rightly call her novels, "exquisite comedies of urban middle class life in the nineteen-fifties and sixties". (Iyengar: 453) Another well known novelist belonging to same cadre is Nayantara Sahgal who wrote novels mostly concerned with the political affairs of India. Her novels take a stand against the vital relationship like marriage going sterile. Her female characters opt out of it and find fulfillment in extra-marital relationship. They want to establish a new order with changed standards where women can be their true selves and there is no need for hypocrisy. But Sahgal seems to have avoided going into the depths of woman's mind. Seema Jena remarks on this:

“The tension and anxiety of being modern in traditional society have been overlooked by most of these writers who have devoted their attention to broad social features that emerge in course of the gradual metamorphosis of the old order, so intense was their devotion to the physical aspect of this change that they failed to properly take note of and project the psychological reality.” (Voice and Vision of AnithaDesai: 8)

Nayantara Sahgal and Ruth Pravar Jhabwala (both born 1927) have explored different dimensions of marriage in India. While Sahgal strikes a strong key-note in showing her female characters breaking away from unhappy marriages, Jhabwala takes an amused look at arranged marriages in India with her Jane Austinian tongue in the cheek style.

Sahgal's novels take a stand against a vital relationship like marriage going sterile. Her female characters opt out of it and find fulfilment in extramarital relationship. All her novels, viz. *A Time to be Happy* (1958), *This Time of Morning* (1968), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) and *A Day in Shadow* (1971), portray this theme, with major political events as backdrop. Many critics have called her novels political, because of vast and recurrent references to political happenings in the country. However, what makes them stand apart is her bold proclamation of freedom for women, especially in their personal lives. In a

society which views any relationship outside marriage as violation of an accepted ethical code, Sahgal's novels make a strong plea for women to have equal opportunities to find fulfilment. Though contemporaries, Anita Desai and Sahgal are virtual contrasts in the portrayal of female characters and their attitudes to marriage. While Anita Desai's female characters desperately struggle to make their marriages a success, however unfulfilling they may be, Sahgal's heroines opt out of it.

Another well-known feminist woman writer is Shashi Deshpande. She not only forthrightly articulates a thematic and technical maturity but also effectively communicates an intensely apprehended feminine sensibility. She has apparently injected a new consciousness, offering varied interpretation of imperishable Indian values as well as highlighting our cultural heritage. Deshpande has added a new depth and dimension to the Indian English fiction.

In Deshpande's two novels, *Roots and Shadows* (1983) and *That Long Silence* (1989), although the women protagonists achieve 'Personhood' yet they do not negate the family or the society. They go beyond what Elaine Showalter calls the "Female Phase" which is a phase of self discovery, a turning inward freedom from the dependence of opposition, a search for identity. They, no doubt, discover themselves; but the quest does not end there. It could be observed that they are not feminists in the first stage but in the second.

"The second stage cannot be viewed in terms of women alone but also in terms of the separate personhood or equality, with men. The second stage involves coming to new terms with the family, new terms with love and work". (Showalter: "A Literature Of Their Own" P. 13)

It is a kind of enlightened reintegration into the society where they find their own voices; no longer being 'other directed'. On the surface, the concern of their writing seems to be akin to the work been done by men.

Shanta Rau's *Remember the House* is a search for her Indian roots, an expression of patriotic emotions. Sahga's male protagonists are also in an euphoric mood after the country's independence. Marriage is a concern only for Jhabwala's heroine, Nimmi. The heroines are caught in an ambiguous situation between two cultures and are preoccupied with existential concerns. These early novels - part confessional, part autobiographical - are beginning expressive of tentative trainings. Markandaya turns to rural India and the theme of poverty, thus moving out of her own actual experience (Markandya had moved to England in 1948).

In order to place Anita Desai in proper perspective, it is necessary to see her along with the other women novelists who have more or less the same thematic concern and who, in their own way, deal with the commonly shared theme of human relationship. All of them are chroniclers of the tension in the wake of India's emergence as a developing nation. For a better and easier understanding of this aspect of modern Indian women fiction writers in English one may look for general tendencies which unmistakably point towards certain commonly shared themes in their fiction.

One of the themes recurring in the novels written during the post- Independence decades is the individual's nostalgia in treating the joint family. Often the central figures in the novels, in order to seek their own identities consciously, try to break away from the kind of life they are nostalgic for. The institution of the joint family gives opportunity for group human behaviour. It symbolizes an expansive pre-industrial way of life, and it represents a deeply entrenched form of orthodoxy, against which, the individual may find himself helpless. It gives way to presenting the conflict between two sets of values - one standing for the supremacy of social hierarchy; and the other, for that of the individual. The treatment of the theme by women novelists is a three-faceted affair. A personal story slowly develops

into a wider conflict in which are involved the individual's identity for supremacy and the social demands. The personal story, thus, is used as a springboard to explore social change in India in all its complex manifestations. They seem to examine the transition from a traditional society to an urban industrial metropolitan society in its comprehensiveness.

In sum, it can be said that the fictional world of the Indian women writers encompasses a whole range of themes and trends related to the freedom struggle, partition holocaust, social evils in the form of caste, religion, low status of woman, poverty, and corruption and so on. More modern themes like man's sense of alienations depicted in newer modes of narrative techniques, in what has come to be termed as "The Psychological novel", also present clear contrasts to the earlier modes of simple narrative techniques. The fresh crops of writers have adopted varied themes and styles of narration and more confident approach to novel writing. With it, the Indo-Anglian literary tradition has come to acquire a new character, and wider acceptance.

The comparative achievement of Anita Desai becomes clear when one notices that her fellow women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabwala, Nayantara Sahgal, and Shanta Rama Rau seldom try to portray the psychic elements involved in these themes in their fullness. The tensions and anxieties of being modern in a traditional society have been overlooked by most of these writers who have mainly devoted their attention to broad social features that emerge in the course of gradual metamorphosis of the old order. So intense is their devotion to the physical aspects of this change that they fail to take note of and project the psychological reality which must, of necessity, be allowed an upper hand in the face of the world undergoing a rapid change with the advancement of scientific and technological knowledge and rapid progress of communication and industrialization.

Anita Desai adds a new dimension to English fiction by concentrating on the exploration of this troubled sensibility a typical modern Indian phenomenon. In contrast to her, in Jhabwala's works, the social background is rather more important than the characters, in Kamala Markandaya's works the emphasis is as much on the principal characters as on matters - economic, political, social and cultural. Nayantara Sahgal, while dealing with social problems, confines herself to a particular social class, namely the upper class and the aristocracy.

Anita Desai is an Indian novelist and short story writer. She is known for her sensitive portrayal of the inner feelings of her female characters. Many of her novels explore tensions between family members and the alienation of middle-class women. In her later novels, she wrote on varied themes such as German anti-Semitism, the demise of traditions, and Western stereotypical views of India.

Born as Anita Mazumdar on June 24, 1937 in Mussoorie, Anita Desai's mother was German and her father was Bengali. Anita Desai completed her schooling from Queen Mary's Higher Secondary School in Delhi and graduated in English literature from the University of Delhi (Miranda House) in 1957. She has taught at Mt. Holyoke and Smith Colleges and was a member of the Advisory Board for English in New Delhi. Presently she lives in United States where she is John E. Burchard Professor of English at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA.

She grew up during World War II and could see the anxiety her German mother was experiencing about the situation and her family in Germany. The congenial aesthetic environment at home contributed a great deal to fertilize her creative; and her grassroot level experiences helped in consolidating the maturity of her vision. When she was a child, her parents, sisters and brother used German for conversation. She began to write prose, mainly fiction, and published some small pieces in children's magazines when she was seven. Her first story was published at the age of nine. When she realized that

the Germany she had known was devastated, her mother never returned there, nor had any desire to return. Anita herself did not visit until she was an adult.

Anita Desai worked for a year in Max Muller Bhawan, Calcutta and then she was married to Ashwin Desai. She has a family with four children. She has been living in various cities like Calcutta, Bombay, Chandigarh, Delhi and Pune; some of which are well described in her novels.

Anita Desai made her debut as novelist in 1963 with *Cry, The Peacock*. It was followed by *Voices of the City* (1965) - a story about three siblings and their different ways of life in Calcutta. Her novel, *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), won the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize. Anita Desai's other works include *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984) *Journey to Ithaca* (1995) and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), each of which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Besides these, she has also published collection of short stories, viz. *Games at Twilight and Other Stories* (1978) and *Diamond Dust and Other Stories* (2000).

She is the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel *Fire On The Mountain*. Her novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer* has won The Federation of Indian Publishers and Author's Guild Award for Excellence in Writing in 1979. She was awarded the Neil Gunn International Fellowship for 1994. *In Custody* was made into a film by Merchant Ivory productions in 1993, starring Shashi Kapoor, Shabana Azmi, Om Puri; and screenplay by Anita Desai. Her children's book *The Village by the Sea* (1982), won the Guardian Children's Fiction Award. Her most recent novel is *The Zig Zag Way* (2004), set in 20th century Mexico.

Anita Desai is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London and she has been a member of the Advisory Board for English of the National Academy of Letters in Delhi and a member of the American Academy Art and Letters. She has been Visiting Fellow at Girton College Cambridge (England) and has taught writing at Smith College and also has been the Purington Professor of English at Mount Holyoke College in the United States.

The Indo-German aspect of Desai's background is the centre-piece of all her writings and no worthwhile study of her work can be made without taking notice of her parent's past and their influence on her sensibility. She has been writing since the age of seven. She tried her hand at short stories, illustrated them diligently and sewed them into covers so as to make them look as 'proper books'. These little pieces got published in the children's magazines. She occasionally contributed a short story to the college magazine. In her twenties she started writing novels on small scale. The writers who have made a significant impact on Desai's thinking and writing are Emily Bronte, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, Henry James, Proust Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Kawabata, Rimbaud and Hopkins. She was only nine years old when she first read *Wuthering Heights* and although she could not have understood half of it, it struck her:

“with a gale force, it set my hair on end, I vibrated to that experience and reality has never again seemed to me half as intense, significant and overwhelming as the world of books . . .” (Showalter: “A Literature Of Their Own” P. 13)

In this way, these Western novelists and poets greatly influenced her. They suited her purpose and, like them, she has made use of the techniques like flash-back and stream of consciousness in some of her novels. She was furnished with the charm of rhythms and style by the poets of the East. Whatever she heartily welcomed was deeply and successfully entrenched within to enrich her creative perspectives.

Anita Desai has always been inspired and encouraged by Ruth Praver Jhabvala. She has been influenced more by European and American literatures:

“Anita Desai's achievement would appear significant if we remain mindful of her problems of devising the proper metaphor to express the working of the inner mind. Though she has had the models of the Bronte, she had few Indian models to follow and thus it is her own that she succeeds in evolving a technique and suitable style to communicate the critical ordeal in which the individual is placed in her novels.” (Gopal: “A Critical Study of The Novels Of Anita Desai” P.4)

Among the women Indian-English novelists, Anita Desai is the one and the only writer who has discussed the art of fiction most cogently and comprehensively. The critics have come to accept her as the imaginative contemporary of the European, American and Commonwealth modernists, like, Iris Murdoch, Saul Bellow, Patrick White, Margaret Attwood; and that she has the same kind of aesthetic aspiration.

Anita Desai has tried to adapt to the traditions of American and English novels in her work. Like the American writers, she sees more deeply, darkly, privately; and like the English writers, her stress of voice is on an appreciation of reality with an aim to bring order in disorder. Her fiction takes its tone and form polarities, opposites and irreconcilable:

“oddity, distortion of personality, dislocation of normal life, recklessness of behaviour, morbidity of temperament, malignancy of motive - these together with the profound poetry of disorder, radical forms of alienation, maladjustments and contradictions seem to have persevered as the best of the great traditions”. (Asnani: “Desai’s Theory and Practice of the Novels”; P. 6)

Anita Desai's fiction is untransparent and unpredictable, unlike the fiction of R.K. Narayan and Kamala Markandaya. Writing, for Anita Desai, is a process of discovering truth, but this truth, for her, is not metaphysical, nor is it the superficial reality. Life has infinite variety and it may take any form according to the individual. Her notion of reality of life seems to be greatly influenced by Virginia Woolf who maintains that:

“Life is not a series of big lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end”. (Woolf: “The Common Reader First Series” P. 177)

Anita Desai chooses the inner reality to the outer. She is interested in the social or political themes, the outer weather, the physical geography or the visible action. Her forte is the exploration of the interior world, plunging into the limitless depths of the mind and bringing out the hidden truths of human psyche. Her purpose of writing is to discover for herself and then, to describe and convey the truth. She takes ‘Truth’ as synonymous of ‘Art’, not ‘Reality’. She says “Writing to me is a process of discovering the ‘truth’ - the truth that is nine-tenth of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath, the one-tenth visible portion we call ‘reality’”. (Vinson: Anita Desai’s Comments ‘On Contemporary Novelists’ 348)

She expresses at another interview -

‘Reality’ is merely the one-tenth section of the iceberg that one sees above the surface of the ocean, ‘Art’ – the remaining nine-tenths of it that lies below the surface. That is why it is more near ‘Truth’ than ‘Reality’. Itself ‘Art’ does not merely reflect ‘Reality’ - it enlarges it.

(Desai, Kaktiya Journal: 1)

In her fiction Anita Desai has continued to seize upon the shapelessness and meaninglessness of life and impose a design on them. She believes that literature ought not to be confined to the portrayal of outer or inner reality. It should deal with life and death. Anita Desai finds the novels, when one reads them, have the power to convey truth far more vividly, forcefully and memorably than any other literary form. It is because the artist knows how to select from the vast amount of material and present the significant

of things. She must seize upon that incomplete and chameleonic mass of reality around her and try to discover its “significance by plunging below the surface and plumbing the depths, then illuminating those depths till they become a more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of visible world.” (Desai, Kaktiya Journal: 2)

Anita Desai has sought new techniques to articulate the newly experienced outer and inner realities. She has used a style which is supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness, to record the eddies and currents in the stream of consciousness of her characters. The interplay of thoughts, feelings and emotions is reflected in language, syntax and imagery for her, “it is depth which is interesting, delving deeper and deeper in a character, a situation or a scene, rather than going round about it”. (Jain: “Interview With Anita Desai” P. 68)

Anita Desai captures the psychological realism as intensified impressionism; and she, thus, tries to introduce a modern psychological vein, which is generally not encountered in any other Indo-Anglian writer of fiction. She subordinates the background to the characters in order to convey an intimate expression of the inner world of her characters. She portrays her characters as individuals ‘Facing, single handed, the ferocious assaults of existence’. The story is important for her only in so far as it reflects the obsessions of her characters.

Anita Desai's characters are generally neurotic females, highly sensitive and sequestered in a world of their own, of dream and imagination; and as a consequence, they are unwilling to adjust with the reality. Anita Desai is not a believer of feminist movements; and she makes it clear that her interest is with individual man and woman,

‘Only the individual, the solitary being, is of true interest.

One must be alone, silent, in order to think or contemplate or write’. (Dalmia : ‘Interview With Anita Desai’, Times Of India)

Her characters embark on a long voyage of contemplation in order to find a meaning of their existence: “I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated or driven into some extremity of despair, and so, turned against and made a stand against the general current. It is easy to flow with the current; it make no demands, it costs no efforts. But those who cannot follow

it, whose heart cries out the great No; who fight the current and struggle against it, they know what the demands are and what it costs to meet them.” (Dalmia : TOI)

These women characters live in seclusion with their material needs taken care of but their emotional needs remain unsatisfied. Most emotional effects in Anita Desai's fictional world are produced through tied images, conveying the streams of impulses flowing through the mind. These are more difficult and complex than free imagery which consists of visual images. She introduced new images, packed with freshness, intensity and unsurpassable evoking power. Her perception and understanding of the extraordinary queerness and mysteriousness of the world in which she lives enables her to make physical details indicate varying state of mind. Her protagonists, endowed with a heightened imagination and sensitivity, are complex, confused, irrational individuals as they are aggressively unrealistic about human limitations, having rejected the choices of salvation and fulfillment offered by religion and society.

Exploring their consciousness and bringing their conflicts to surface, Anita Desai uses images, which are surcharged with much deeper reverberations of unconscious meaning. She presents gestures and movements to suggest inside revolutions and concentrates on human action with a view to understanding the reality of associations floating in the mind. The correspondence between imagery and thought is very

essential. It implies that images arise from psychological depths and are born out of context. In Desai's fiction, an image, a metaphor, or at times just a simple reference to something can be understood solely; as it functions within the novels as a whole. Thus, image groups are not merely theme supporters but theme carriers.

Like Yeats, Desai too sought a landscape that is symbolical of some spiritual condition. Imagery also enables this novelist to present her theme and ideas effectively. With the help of imagery Anita Desai is able to give concrete, visual expression to the most elusive thoughts and render her most subtle, baffling themes in a comprehensible and persuasive manner. The imagery of light and darkness enables her to bring out forcefully the dualities and ambiguities of human experience. She uses imagery also as a predictive, foreshadowing device. There are numerous examples in her novels to show that image foreground certain crucial events, changes in the attitudes of characters and also portend the conclusion. Imagery also, at times, brings out the narrator's or the writer's attitude towards the character; and thus help in establishing the tone and point of view.

Imagery brings to light aspects of Anita Desai's personality and art. Her tragic vision of life is established through a number of prey-predator images but there are also some comic and grotesque images showing the novelist in the role of a humourist, a role in which we are not usually inclined to see her, as she is essentially a tragic writer.

Stylistically, imagery makes Mrs. Desai's descriptions and analyses more vivid and introduces an element of concreteness and sensuousness in her writings. Through the use of reciprocal images which compares not only man to nature but also nature to man, Anita Desai is able to relate man of various orders of animate as well as inanimate nature.

Desai takes good care in using images that are fresh and alive with insight and evocative power. Only occasionally she employs images which seem forced and trite. They go away, being artificial and far-fetched. Sometimes they are commonplace and stereotyped, but usually her images are marked by accuracy of observation and unusual insight in proving the hidden relationship of thing. Thus, they not only enhance our understanding but are also artistically satisfying.

Anita Desai lays no special stress on the plot with the traditional notion of a beginning, middle, and an end. Story emanates directly from the characters she writes about. It is born out of their dreams, wills and actions. She feels that a story imposed from outside simply destroys their life and reduces them to a string of jerking puppets on a stage. She allows the character to grow and develop, and the narrative is allowed to move freely, and is not clogged by blocks. The plot is always simple and neat and never impedes the psychological revelation of the character. She says:

“My novels don't have themes, at least not till they are finished, published or read, do I see any theme. While writing, I follow my instinct, I follow flashes of insight, I veer away from or even fight anything that threatens to distort or destroy this insight and somehow come to the end and look back to see the pattern of footprints on the sand.” (Sharma: “World Literature Written In English” P.101)

Coming to her themes, Anita Desai seems to have opted for portraying various themes at a time in her novels; and in each individual novel these themes seem to be occurring again and again. She usually starts by presenting persons who are cut in different grains from others. They resist the demand of society and turn out to be rebels. Not finding a proper channel of communication they become alienated and brooding on their lives. All their wanderings and reflections finally bring them into new vistas of understanding which they had formerly ignored or rejected. Anita Desai's themes are, thus, original and entirely different from those of other Indo-Anglian novelists. Her novels are not political or sociological

in character; but are engaged in exposing the labyrinths of the human mind and in indicating the ways to psychological fulfillment. Thus, her themes tend to wedge off the tracks of other novelists. Each aspect merges with the other and sometimes one finds a number of themes woven together. Using these themes as a foundation, the writer is able to build up her characters into a significant whole.

Anita Desai depicts life in her novels as it really is, life of the upper middle class society which she knows very well. She doesn't draw upon secondhand information. She gives authenticity and validity to her work by writing of life as she really sees it. The profound sensation of truth she feels is provided through artful and expert transitions and dexterity of the composition. Dostoevsky too says, "to write a novel, there must be one or more strong impressions that the author has really experienced to the depth of his beings". (*Dostoevsky: 76*)

Anita Desai has said in an interview that minor scenes and characters are based on real life but the minor characters and events are amalgamation of several characters and happenings or entirely imaginary.

Anita Desai shows close affinity with Virginia Woolf who also entered the consciousness of the characters and showed little concern for the actual outside action. The themes of Desai's novels are human nature and human relationships, like the novels of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. The central theme of man-woman relationship, with which Anita Desai deals in all her novels, is governed by existential tones. The main themes dealt by existentialists are alienation, despair, frustration, anxiety and emotional life of the individual. Desai, too, deals with these themes as she is concerned with 'human condition' and explores the 'emotional life' of the people. Her central theme is the acutely sensitive wives and dismal, callous, inconsiderable, ill chosen husbands. She has opted for portraying various themes at a time in her novels and in each novel, this theme seems to be recurring. She usually starts her novel by presenting persons who are sensitive and very different from others. They are not able to follow the general current and turn out to be rebels.

As a result, they become alienated, living a closed life on their own islands. Being sensitive, these characters start brooding on their lives. In the end, either they realize the truth or reality from which they had tried to escape and come to a new understanding. But, in certain novels, the characters are unable to face the reality and take refuge by killing themselves or others. Thus, her themes tend to wedge off the tracks of other novelists. Each aspect merges with the other and sometimes one finds a number of themes woven together. Using these themes as a foundation the writer is able to build up the characters into significant whole.

A novel is the author's views of life. As Henry James says, novels are "a personal impression of life". (James: 508) A theme can be called the central idea of the novel. It is the unifying and controlling factor in the organisation of his material. The central idea or the theme of the novel is the mother idea and this is the governing factor from which all the rest flow in the novel. One may say that a theme is the very nucleus of the whole design. All the other components of the novel, i.e., plot; characterization, description, setting, narrative-method and style etc. are its shaping pressures. All these things come within the magnetic field of the theme and become an organic whole. It is all pervading essence, embracing the entire length of the novel.

Anita Desai dealt with the theme of complexities of human relationships - mainly man-woman relationships, in her novels. She has given depth by treatment to this common theme which is unimaginable in the other Indo-Anglian novelists. She explores the depth of her characters minutely and analyses them thoroughly. She has also dealt with the themes of loneliness, East-West encounter, vehemence and death, decadence and reality and illusion - the themes pertaining to the stressful modern

life. She has written eleven novels till date. She has been “an authentic cartographer of the inward terrain” in her earlier novels from *Cry, The Peacock* (1963) to *Clear Light of Day* (1980). Her later novels show a marked thematic shift. As Shanta Krishnaswamy rightly points out:

“Her novels constitute together the documentation, through fiction, of radical female resistance against a patriarchy defined concept of normality. She finds the link between female duality, myth and psychosis intriguing; each heroine is seen as searching for, finding and absorbing or annihilating the double who represent the socially impermissible aspects of her femininity.”(Gopal: P.13)

Anita Desai's first novel, *Cry, The Peacock*, broke new ground in Indian English fiction and is said to be a trend-setter. It has been termed as ‘a poetic novel’ by the critics. *Cry, The Peacock* is about marital disharmony, lack of identity, escapism, and a sense of meaninglessness of life. Much has been written on the themes and style of Anita Desai's novels. Different attitudes to fate and fatalism presented in her novels are also considered in this work. Maya, the protagonist of the novel, is a highly sensitive woman who suffers from neurotic fears caused by the predictions of an albino priest about her untimely and possible death, four years after her marriage.

She is married to a practical, unsympathetic, rational, down to earth man. She suffers from incompatibility in her married life and tries to escape into a world of imagination and fantasy. Maya also suffers from father-fixation. She looks for her father in twice her age husband. Having virtually nothing in common, they are bound by matrimonial bonds. For Maya, freedom is impossible unless she removes Gautama, her husband. She pushes him from the parapet in a fit of fury and to transfer the albino's prediction about death to Gautama. Anita Desai has successfully shown the transformation of a sensitive woman into a neurotic person.

In her second novel *Voices in city*, (1965), Anita Desai is not concerned with the physical aspect of the city, Calcutta, but on its influence on the three characters of family. The novel is divided into four sections, namely, 'Nirode', 'Monisha', 'Amla' and 'Mother'. All these sections are devoted to the characters as named by the title. The first section 'Nirode' is about the alienation and conflict in the mind of Nirode. He is an artist who is struggling with art form and his life. He brings out a magazine *Voice* but is not happy with its success and ultimately sells it.

He is a person who loves anonymity and runs away from success and prosperity. Nirode also suffers from Oedipus complex, like Maya; and like her, he too, wants to destroy the figure of his obsession, his mother. He believes that his mother has an affair with Major Chadha, her neighbour. Nirode wants to forget this episode and so alienates himself from his mother. The novelist has probed into psychic working of the disturbed artist, who has lost his faith in life. Madhusudan Prasad feels that, “Desai delves deep into human psyche and tries to explore very adroitly the dim domains of the conscious of the major characters in this novel.” (Prasad: “Anita Desai : The Novelist”P. 22)

Monisha, like many heroines of Anita Desai, is sensitive and suffers from an ill-matched marriage. She lacks understanding and love from her husband, and finds it difficult to adjust into the joint family. She takes to diary writing and alienates herself from everyone. She is an example of maladjusted woman who is an introvert. Monisha is unable to bear the charge of theft by the family members and even by her husband. She commits suicide by self-immolation. Amla, her youngest sister, a commercial artist, too suffers from conflict in her life. She rises above the complexities of relationships to realize the destroyer. She is described as an onlooker, not getting involved with the affairs of her children.

The third novel *Bye, Bye, Blackbird* (1971), depicts the plight of Indian immigrants in London. The novel has the theme of East-West encounter. It has three parts – ‘Arrival’, ‘Discovery’ and ‘Recognition

and Departure'. Dev arrives in England for higher studies and stays with his friend Adit and his English wife Sarah. He is perturbed by the insults and humiliations Indians have to face in public and private places. Adit is happy with his peaceful life in England. But in the second part of the novel, a gradual change comes over. Adit feels nostalgia for his country and realizes the superficiality of his life in England. He returns home in the end, whereas Dev is struck by the charm of this land and stays on. Anita Desai has also described the difficulty faced by Sarah, the English wife, with an Indian husband. The title of the novel refers to England's bidding farewell to an Indian - a 'black bird'. Though Anita Desai has 'disowned' this book, she has created a lively picture of immigrant Indians. Desai has also portrayed the conflict of the immigrant who cannot sever his roots and yet makes an effort to strike new roots in an alien country and eventually becomes alienated.

Her fourth novel *Where Shall we Go This Summer?* (1975) depicts the tensions between a sensitive wife, Sita, and the rational and worldly husband, Raman. The story is about Sita, who has four children and is reluctant to abort or give birth to the fifth child. She is a sensitive person, sensitive towards violence and death prevalent in the world and things that by giving birth, she would be doing an act of destruction. Sita is not happy and satisfied with her married life. Her husband is busy with his work and has no time for his wife.

Sita feels betrayed and lonely and goes to the island of Manori - her childhood home. She is looking for peace on the island. Instead she feels alienated. As she has adjusted herself on the island, her husband comes to take the children. Sita is angry and disturbed at first but realizes the futility of escaping from her duties. She reconciles to the realities of the life and returns with her husband. Madhusudan Prasad considers the novel

“a wonderful poetic tour de force singularized by her intense lyrical fervour and wild poetic imagination which do not run riot but instead remain under a certain curious discipline.” (Prasad: P. 27)

Anita Desai's fifth novel *Fire On The Mountain* was published in 1977. It won the Royal Society of Literature's Winfred Holtley Memorial Prize and the 1978 National Academy of Letters Award. The novel is almost the story of Nanda Kaul, wife of the one time Vice-Chancellor of Punjab University who withdraws herself to a lonely, secluded house 'Carignano' in Kasauli. Nanda lives her life all by herself in her old age; and she does not want to be disturbed by anyone or anything. Even the postman is an intruder. Nanda is upset and disturbed by the arrival of her great grand-daughter, Raka.

The novel is divided into three parts - 'Nanda Kaul at Carignano', 'Raka comes to Carignano' and 'Ila Das leaves Carignano'. In the first part, the author describes the arrival of Raka and the disturbance it causes in the life of Nanda. In the second part, Raka, a sensitive and an introvert girl loves the life at Carignano. She is a lover of nature and spends her time roaming in the surrounding places. Ila Das, a childhood friend of Nanda, who is a welfare officer in the nearby village, comes for a visit. Anita Desai has described her barren life and her tragic death in the end of novel. She also makes Nanda realize the truth of her life from which she is trying to escape. The end of the novel is sudden and unexpected. The title of the novel refers to Raka, setting the forest on fire. R.S. Sharma says that it is “expressive of Raka's resolve to destroy a world where a woman cannot hope to be happy without being unnatural.”(Sharma: P. 127)

Anita Desai has depicted the theme of alienation and relationships in this novel. Anita Desai's next novel, *Clear Light Of Day*, was published in 1980. She has described the book as a 'Four dimensional piece'. Time plays an important role in the novel as she herself says 'about time as a destroyer, as a

preserver and about what time does to people'. She makes it clear in the novel that time passes but things remain the same except that the pattern changes.

Clear Light of Day is a family drama about the Das family, mainly the four children - Bim, Tara, Raja, and Baba. The story is narrated from the point of view of Bim, the protagonist of the novel. Bim and Tara are sisters and their mother suffers from diabetes and dies. The parents had no time for their children and had led busy life playing cards. Bim has to shoulder the responsibility of her brothers and sister. She sacrifices her life for her siblings, educating them and marrying them. She also takes the responsibility of mentally retarded brother Baba, senile Aunt Mira Masi, and the decaying house.

Tara marries Bakul, a foreigner diplomat and goes abroad. Raja, too, leaves Bim and his house and goes to Hyderabad to Hyder Ali. He marries his daughter and settles there. Bim is hurt and feels neglected by everyone. She is unable to accept Raja and Tara. Bim refuses to go to Hyderabad on the occasion of the marriage of Raja's daughter. In anger, she thinks of sending Baba to the marriage but realizes her mistake. In the end she is aware of her weakness and repents of the wrong done towards Raja, Baba and Tara. In *Clear Light of Day*, she sees the truth and matures to forgive everyone.

Her next novel, *In Custody*, was published in 1984. This novel is about the plight of Urdu poetry and an Urdu poet. Deven is a lecturer in a private college in Mirpore. He aspires to be a writer and has great interest in Urdu poetry. He belongs to middle class, striving hard to make ends meet. He is in a pitiable state, unable to stand against injustices. He is married to Sarla, an uneducated girl, who is miles away from literature. Here again, we see maladjustment in marriage. Deven gets an opportunity to interview Nur Shahjehana-babi, a renowned poet of old days. Deven comes to see the disparity between Nur's poetry and life. He sees the decadent life of the old poet. Somehow he records a part of interview, which is almost useless. He has to play it in the college as he has received a grant from the college for the purpose. Deven is also pestered by the old poet and his wives for money.

However Deven gets the courage to face everything in the end, and the novel ends at a positive note. The title suggests that Nur's poetry would be 'in safe custody' of Deven, but the irony is that he is in custody of Nur's personality. The poet himself is a prisoner of his circumstances. Changed times are not favourable to Urdu poetry and poets; and flatterers and self-seekers take the place of connoisseurs of poetry and appreciative audience.

Baumgartner's *Bombay*, Anita Desai's next novel, published in 1988, is about the plight of a displaced person. Hugo Baumgartner, a Jew, has to leave his country, Germany, at the rise of Nazism; and comes to the British India before the Second World War to begin a new life. The story revolves round the life of Hugo in Germany and in many cities in India. It is a story of familyless, rootless and homeless man, always trying to belong, wanting to be accepted, but never being accepted anywhere. The pathos of the novel lies in the fact that after living for fifty years in India, Hugo is not accepted by the Indian society.

He is a 'firangi'. He picks up stray cats from the street to give them shelter. Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca* (1994) may be described as a story of multiple journeys undertaken by various people at many different planes of existence. These travellers are like so many pilgrims - one lighting his/her torch from another's light and giving the same to some other sojourner in his/her turn.

This novel is a manifestation of the wisdom of Oriental philosophy as Desai turns to Vedanta and Upanishads to convey her vision of spirituality. In this novel, the novelist transports the readers from India to Italy, Egypt and America while narrating the experiences of Mattoe, Sophie and the Mother – all foreigners. It is a moving story of the spiritual quests of Mattoe and the Mother who are directed towards India while the mundane search of Sophie starts from India. Born in a luxuriant Italian family, Mattoe

leaves his home and journeys to India with his wife Sophie in search of something which is beyond his understanding. Right from the beginning he was a problem child to his family, though he was given formal education. Fabian, his private tutor, introduced him to Herman Hesse's *The Journey to the East* which instilled an interest in him about the mystical East. "It was the book that opened my eyes" (*Journey to Ithaca*: P.80)

In the summer of 1975, Sophie and Matteo left for India, dressed in identical blue jeans and T-shirts and sports shoes, carrying identical rucksacks on their backs, as did so many of their generation in Europe. In order to search for its "spiritual experience" they also joined the other foreigners who were "busily collecting saints as 'gurus' as earlier travellers had collected gold, spices or shawls" (*Journey to Ithaca*: P. 34) Shuttling throughout, seeking one guru after another, Matteo finally reaches an ashram in the hills which is unique, for, 'the head is a woman' - the Mother, who exercises a strange hypnotic power over those who encounter her. In her speech, Matteo feels

'an experience of unity, the unity of the spiritual with the physical, the dark with the light, the human with the natural'. (P.24) He becomes so obsessed that he feels that 'any time spent away from the Mother, without her, was wasted time, empty time, dead time.' His family life deteriorates. He surrenders himself before the power of the aged woman. Matteo's search for the spiritual integrity ends with the Mother because he does not have the confidence to pursue his search. With the death of the Mother, Matteo's journey of transformation is stalled midway. His search for spirituality is unfulfilled and the divine remains unrealized. His anguish and frustration over Mother's death knows no bounds. He does not eat or drink and weep so much. Then, he just gets up one day and tells his fellow-men that he would travel north to the mountains where the Mother received enlightenment, and he leaves.

On the other hand, Sophie seems immune to Mother's charisma. Neglected by Matteo, and enraged by his devotion to the Mother, Sophie sets out on a quest of her own, seeking to trace the Mother's life history, in order to expose her as a fraud. Sophie's journey uncovers the story of another quest: that of the Mother, alias Laila, whose fiery spirit sought expression in an intense blend of creativity, amorous desire and spirituality. The trail leads from Egypt, where the 'Mother', as young Laila, grew up in Alexandria after the First World War, the daughter of a French schoolmistress and a Westernized Egyptian academic. As a schoolgirl, Laila fell in with a group of young Islamic anti-imperialists.

Drawn by their seriousness and lack of frivolity, she took to wearing a headscarf and attending classes in the Koran. Her parents were horrified and packed her off to her French aunt in Paris, where she is swept off her feet by the beauty and spirituality of an Indian dance performance. She begs Krishna, the handsome leader of the company, to accept her as a pupil. Krishna teaches Laila how to dance with sincerity and devotion. He carries her off on a tour of Switzerland, Venice and the United States, and in a few weeks Laila becomes so proficient that she replaces the leading lady. During these tours, unconsciously an amorous relationship seems to breed somewhere underneath in the heart of Krishna and he gives a new dimension to the dance of Radha and Krishna, called Hindu wedding. It shows Laila as a coy bride. Laila worships him and becomes his mistress. Krishna partners her in glamorous erotic dances, and discourses on the religious nature of Indian dance, and the inseparability of sacred and profane love. He demonstrates his ascetic commitment by refusing meat and alcohol, though not sex.

Laila is quick to sense that this dance had nothing to do with 'any religious belief or spiritual exercise, Indian or otherwise'. She feels betrayed as she wanted to dance not for displaying her physical charm or emotions, but for her, dance is the symbol of the union of the worshipper and the worshipped. She gets sick of performing at various places as she does not get spiritual contentment after these performances.

She suffers disillusionment, accompanied by physical and mental break-down; and one day, she says to Krishna that she will leave and will not go on. Krishna leaves for India with Laila. After reaching India, Laila leaves Krishna and single-handedly embarks upon her spiritual quest. A diary records Laila's arrival in India, and her eventual adoption of the spiritual role through her encounter with a sage who becomes 'my Lord and my Beloved'.

Retracing Laila's footsteps, Sophie finds herself back at the Indian ashram. The Mother, meanwhile, has died, and Matteo has vanished. No one knows where he has gone. This is the beginning of another quest, for; Sophie knows that she must now seek out Matteo. Now she knows why the Mother went on that pilgrimage, and why she must go too.

The novel begins with Cavafy's poem "Ithaca", translated by Rae Dolven which ends thus: "*You must surely have understood by then what Ithacas mean.*" (*Journey to Ithaca*: 34) The plural word 'Ithacas' in the last line of the poem points out the symbolic nature of Ithaca. In the novel, India, more specifically, spiritual India appears as a kind of Ithaca. 'Ithaca' - the name of an imagined place in Greek mythology - means home, but home in a very different sense, which is almost like homelessness. It is a homecoming, but without the promise of domestic comfort, hearth and family. India and Ithaca become the same, one merging into the other. It is the home for the long-wandering, longsuffering, searching soul.

Anita Desai's next novel, *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), as implied by its very title, is a novel that forges a contrast between two cultural varieties - the Indian, known for its pious and ritualistic custom representing 'fasting'; and the other, American, a country of opulence and sumptuousness epitomizing 'feasting'. The plot is unfurled through the perceptions of Uma, in India, and of Arun, in America. Both of them are entrapped, irrespective of the culture and enveloping milieu, by oppressive bonds exercised by their own parents.

The novel has two parts. The first centers on Uma, the eldest daughter of an ambitious, conventional and conventionally ambitious lawyer and his equally conventional wife. The parents are known as Papa Mama, because they always agree, especially in disagreeing with almost everything their children may do or want to do. They are 'enemies of abandon', and regard even the convent school to which they reluctantly send their daughters as a sink of modernity. Uma adores school, though she is a dismal failure there, being plain, short-sighted, clumsy, and not very bright. She is seventeen and her sister Aruna twelve when their mother becomes pregnant again: a terrible embarrassment at her time of life, until it turns into a triumph - this late child is a son!

Uma is immediately removed from school to help the ayah look after little Arun: what's the point of school, say PapaMama, when she fails all her exams; and anyway, it's time she was married. Although Uma is allowed to see photographs of possible suitors, as a 'sign of family's progressiveness', terrible humiliations follow. The first suitable boy comes to visit and prefers pretty twelve-year old Aruna; the second goes through with an engagement, but breaks it off and his father refuses to return the dowry. At the third attempt Uma is married and packed off to live with her in-laws in a strange town. They treat her like a servant, and she never sees her husband again after the wedding.

He is on business in Meerut, his parents say; but it turns out that that is where he lives with his another wife and children: Uma has married a bigamist. She returns home with another dowry lost and in permanent disgrace. So she becomes the family house-keeper, exploited and criticised, though efficient enough.

Her sexy sister Aruna, on the other hand, is clever and pretty, and has no problem finding a husband. Her main attraction is that his family lives in Bombay, a shopper's paradise. So, Aruna is happy, shops

till she drops and goes to lots of parties. When she comes to visit her family, Uma has to look after her babies while she goes out with her friends. There is a poignant moment when Uma glimpses a possibility of escape. Dr. Dutt, the daughter of a former Chief Justice, arrives on her bicycle. She runs a department at the hospital, and has come to ask Uma to help out in a crisis: the newly established Institute of Nursing needs a domestic supervisor to run it for the twenty two trainees who have already moved in. Would Uma do it? 'Papa was quite capable of putting on a progressive, Westernised front when called upon to do so - in public, in society, not within his family of course - and now he showed his liberal educated ways by rising to his feet when Dr. Dutt dismounted from her bicycle', but that is as far as his liberalism goes. Of course, Papa Mama refuses to allow their daughter to go out to work. So the prison gates close, and the closing coincides with the suicide - a traditional Indian suicide with kerosene and matches - of Uma's beautiful, talented cousin Anamika after twenty years in an unhappy arranged marriage, for which her parents forced her to renounce the Oxford scholarship she had been offered. Part one of the novel ends with Uma among the mourners watching Anamika's ashes being scattered in the sacred river. After that, Uma disappears from the story as completely as her cousin.

Part Two is less than half the length of Part One. Compared to the subtle, atmospheric, perceptive first part, the second part is crude: a familiar caricature of small-town America. The central figure is young Arun. He is not autistic like the brother in *Clear Light of Day*, but almost an uncommunicative and withdrawn. His life is 'a deep well of grayness', a never-ending academic grind from his earliest childhood on. Ambitious Papa coaches him daily after school. The Papa keeps reminding his son that his own parents were so poor that he had to do his home-work under a street lamp.

Arun duly wins a place at an East Coast college in U.S. He doesn't mix with the other students or talk to his equally taciturn room-mate. When the vacation comes, he goes to stay with a 'normal' American family. The Pattons are a cartoon family. The son is loutish health freak, his only interests being fitness, games, exercise and jogging. The daughter is bulimic: she stuffs herself with peanuts and chocolate, and then vomits it all up. Occasionally, she emits an obscenity, but otherwise refuses to speak. The mother is a shopaholic, not for jewellers, like Aruna, but for food. She takes a shine to Arun and makes him accompany her on her daily expeditions to the overpowering super-market where she stocks up the overflowing freezer. There are no family meals of the kind that cheer the Indians. The Patton family help themselves to snacks from the fridge. There is plenty of tension just the same - 'on the other side of the world, Arun is caught up again in the sugar-sticky web of family conflict'. When the hot weather comes, Mrs. Patton gives herself up to sunbathing, and toys with yoga; astrology, numerology, gemmology, karmic lessons. Arun is relieved when the vacation draws to its end.

So, through Arun's eyes, and to some extent as a result of his culturally challenging presence, Anita Desai presents a picture of middle class American life that is utterly dysfunctional. But it is again the women who are most deeply affected. Mom does all the shopping and cooking to feed the unappreciative men and the daughter who cannot eat. She fantasises about Arun's cultural authenticity, sees in him qualities for which she yearns. The daughter is a complete head case. She is fat - wanting to be thin, eating too fast, stuffing sweets until she vomits. And, Arun witnesses all of this. Eventually, in his deformity, he is the only presence that is not self-obsessed.

The title is important. "Fasting, Feasting" presents apparent opposites, two contrasting, if imbalanced scenarios, India and the USA. It offers two deformed observers, Uma and Arun. It unpicks two contrasting cultures and finds that women are slaves in both. The opposites are thus ultimately similar, hardy opposed.

The more the things change the more they remain the same. It doesn't matter where you live, how much you earn, what you do. The viciousness and lack of purpose that can pervade our lives, will do so, irrespective. Neither in excess, nor in deprivation or denial, is there happiness or peace of mind.

Anita Desai, being the daughter of a Bengali father and a German mother, and born in India, can write with authority about conflicts between cultures and about the presence of the past, as she did in novels like *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), *the story of an elderly German Jew in India*, and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), in which an Indian student tries to adapt to the lifestyle of a Boston family.

Anita Desai's eleventh and the latest novel, *The Zigzag Way* (2004), is the story of twentieth century Mexico, through the turbulence of the revolution and personal calamity; and of the exploitation of the Mexican Indians. Eric, a Harvard graduate student, is a misfit in his family of hearty fisher-folks. Uncertain he will ever complete the book on immigration he has been funded to write, he impetuously decides to follow his scientist girlfriend to Mexico.

There, he is seduced by the magnificence of the country and its history, and stumbles on an astonishing discovery - his grandfather was one of the Cornish miners who, with his first wife, had gone out to Mexico and worked in the silver mines more than a hundred years ago. At a lecture on the Huichol Indians of the Sierras, given by the mysterious, exotic Doña Vera, Eric suddenly realizes that the place names she mentions are those he once heard from his Cornish grandfather, who once worked in the Mexican silver mines. Eric promptly travels into the Sierras, finds Doña Vera, and begins to ask questions about the mines and the miners. Eric seeks to learn more about his grandfather who made an improbable journey from Cornwall, England to the silver mines of Mexico. Through this story, Anita Desai tries to understand Mexico.

In the second part of the novel, the author abandons Eric in order to explain how Doña Vera rose from prostitution to her present status as a wealthy grande dame. The third section of *The Zigzag Way* again plumbs the past, this time telling the story of Eric's grandfather, Davey Rowse, and the other Cornish immigrants, who ended up either dying, being killed, or having to leave Mexico.

The novel ends in the present, when at a local celebration called "*La Noche de los Muertos*," Eric encounters a ghost from the past and sees his own path into the future. As in her earlier works, in *The Zigzag Way* Anita Desai has again demonstrated her mastery of craft and her understanding of human nature.

In the title of the novel, 'zigzag' is used by novelist with reference to the path the miners with their heavy loads had to take, to descend and ascend from the bowels of the earth from which the ore must be extracted. They walk in a zigzag direction because they have found from long experience that their respiration is less impeded when they traverse obliquely the current of air which enters the pits from without.

"The Indian tenateros, the beasts of burden in the mines of Mexico, remain loaded with a weight of 275 to 300 pounds for a span of six hours. . . . They carry the minerals in bags made of the threads of pite. To protect their shoulders (for the mineros are generally naked to the middle) they place a woolen covering under the bag. We meet in the mine some 50 or 60 of these porters, among whom are men above sixty and boys of ten or twelve years of age. In ascending the stairs they throw their bodies forwards and rest on a staff. They walk in a zigzag direction because they have found from long experience that their respiration is less impeded when they traverse obliquely the current of air which enters the pits from without". (*The Zigzag Way*: P. 81)

The novelist has found a similarity with this in Eric's zigzag journey which he takes to trace the history of his grandfather and other stories connected with it like that of Doña Vera. Anita Desai has tried to present her themes organically with appropriate adjustments and adaptations in spheres of style and point of view. The result is her comparative superiority over other Indian women novelists writing in English.

In Indian Fiction in English (1999) J. G. Masilamani talks about feminism in Anita Desai for him Anita Desai is obsessively concerned with the fate of married woman in Indian society today. The society is in a state of transition with its cultural values in the melting pot. One could sense in Desai's novel a compelling urge for a way of living which would respond to the innermost yearnings of women for freedom and self-dignity. He observes that in Desai's novels Indian husbands are preoccupied with themselves. They possess an image of a provider' around whom the wife orbits effacing herself completely. Giving the example of Sita and Raman in *Where Shall We Go This Summer ?* as recognizable mythic figures Masilamani says, "Sita's sojourn to the Island of Manori is impelled not only by the desire to free herself from her husband but from an entire civilization of which he is the representative figure." Her fiction is not just Indian but global. This article shows that women have started to look for their place in the institution of marriage.

The present study seeks to focus attention on the way imagery operates in each novel. In the following chapters the novels are taken in chronological order and an attempt is made to identify and analyze the images that are integral to an understanding of the theme as it develops, and the characters in their varied mood.

The next chapter focuses on the theme of "Man-woman relation-ship". Anita Desai defines and expresses this theme in majority of her novels beautifully. Practically speaking, it is in the novels of Indian English and regional women writers that one gets more realistic portrayals of women. The focus in these novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Nayanatara Sahgal, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala and Anita Desai is on the woman's point of view. Even among these writers, it is only in the novels of Nayanatara Sahgal, and those of Anita Desai and Raji Narasimhan that we get a feminist consciousness. According to K. Meerabhai, in 'Tradition and Modernity': 'The Portrayal of Women by Women Writers':

"If traditional women who still retain their individuality make their appearance in the novels of Kamala Marandaya, women who face challenges in their quest for self-fulfillment are seen in the novels of Nayanatara Sahgal. Likewise women who opt for modernity for convenience and not out of conviction are presented by Ruth Pravar Jhabvala. Women who use modernity as a license for licentiousness too can be seen in these novels ..." (K. Meerabhai, 'Tradition and Modernity' P. 36)

Markandeya's women characters reveal strength of character that enable them to face hurdles in life. They suffer heroically, though they are strong willed. Some of them sublimate their desires in religious faith. She describes the pulls that an Indian woman has to face between tradition and modernity. Shanta Krishnaswami in her book *The Women in Indian Fiction in English* writes:

"She (Ms. Markandaya) advocates a compromise in the elevation of her need for love, caring and autonomy into the larger concept of the sisterhood of man. The quest of autonomy for the self leads to nurturance of the family which in turn progresses to imaginative sympathy for the human race ..." (P. 354)

Markandeya points out in her novels how economic and social problems affect women more adversely than men. Ruth Pravar Jhabvala expounds the problems of the white women in India. She describes women who profess to be modern only because it is fashionable to be modern. They are seen to tread a

new path for a while, returning to their traditional ways afterwards. She delineates the hypocrisy of nonconformists in a sarcastic but sympathetic manner, she does not deal with the feminist consciousness in women seriously.

Nayanatara Sahgal's women characters include divorcees, and suffering wives who herald a new morality. But the helplessness of the heroines comes through. Maya, in an article 'On Woman Coming into Their Own' comments about Mr. Sahgal are thus:

"She (Ms. Sahgal) has a mind of her own and her novels point an accusing finger at smug, chauvinistic Indian society that refuses to recognise the identity of woman as individual, ... Sahgal's women are mostly educated, aspiring individuals caged within the confines of a conservative society. The social institution of arranged marriage is a trap that curbs their development And chains them to the responsibilities of home ... The urge to escape from frustrating marriages is therefore a constant craving in Nayanatara Sahgal's women characters ..." (On Woman Coming into Their Own' P.9)

Maya continues her assessment of Ms. Sahgal:

"What Nayanatara pleads for is not the kind of 'Women's Lib' that Western feminists advocate, but the rightful place for a woman in a man – woman relationship. She does not reject the institution of marriage, but dictates the new terms by which it should be constituted. The image of the New Indian woman that emerges out of her novels is a voice to be reckoned with. She reflects the slow but successful feminist revolution working its way through a conservative male centered and husband oriented society." (P.10)

Besides the problems of frustrated wives and divorcees, Ms. Sahgal is one woman writer who has introduced and described the effect of politics in the life of the individuals concerned. In writing her fiction, Ms. Sahgal is better equipped in her technical skill and mastery over the language tone than in the thematic content. There are no themes comparable with those of the women writers in this study, except in the voicing of the feminist consciousness of women.

In Anita Desai's novels, particularly in *Cry the Peacock*, one gets a glimpse into the disturbed psyche of the modern Indian woman. The predicament of Maya, the heroine in *Cry, the Peacock* is comparable to Dimple in Mukhejee's wife. But the way they delineate the problem of the suffering wife is quite different.

As K.R. Sreenivasa Iyengar comments in Indian Writing in English:

"Over the whole narrative in *Cry, the Peacock*, the Peacock, which is really? Maya's effort to tell her story to herself, to discover some meaning in her life, and even to justify herself to herself, over the whole narrative there hovers an uncannily oppressive sense of fatality." (P.465)

This is because Maya, married to the prosaic and practical Gautama, is influenced by a prophecy by an astrologer who predicts death for either husband or wife in the fourth year of marriage. This prophecy preys upon the ultra sensitive mind of Maya, there is a communication gap between the husband and wife, each engrossed in their own different worlds. Gautama could never understand Maya's obsession with the quality of existence, her father-fixation, and the hysterical longings for understanding in her, her wish to revert to a state of childhood innocence, her increasing sense of loneliness and fear of death. Maya never gets involved with Gautama's life and desires. This creates a spiritual chasm in which Maya flounders. She finally thinks that, for the fulfilment of the prophecy, her own death is not necessary, but that it might be Gautama's. Thus she waits for the opportune moment to murder him and soon after pushes him off the parapet one day. He is oblivious of Maya's intentions till the end. Three days later, Maya chooses to commit suicide, killing her mother-in-law in the process, by embracing the

older woman when she plunges down to her death from the top of the house. Just before her death, she has been recognised as insane and both Gautama's mother and sister decide to admit her into a mental asylum.

Chapter - II

Man and woman relationship in the novels of Anita Desai

The work of literature is really something amazing. Literary manifestations of the specialization process create a different linguistic experience and environment for male and female characteristics generally. Especially, in the novels, one gets the scope to move much closer to the female experience. Novels, therefore, are seen as structured and extended statements about reality. They reveal a lot of practical things those exist in the society. A closer study of Anita Desai's works reveals her struggle for female autonomy, played out against the backdrop of the patriarchal cultural pattern. At the outset, it seems that she is asking a new and very different question. Her writing can be viewed as a self-conscious reaction to overwhelming masculinity of privileged dominant gender. One can identify in her characters an insubordinate tone of voice in asserting the personal and the subjective. Her emphasis is more psychological rather than sociological. Her profound intellectual maturity provides a frame work based on gender (female) as the ideological scheme for the analysis of society in general. Anita Desai is a lot concentrated in terrifying isolation, finding it hard to reconcile with the world around "self". Her protagonists, therefore, are constantly confronted with the stupendous task of defining their relation to themselves and to their immediate human context. Acceptable behavioral pattern is alien to them. The root is not far and distant to find. Her central characters, by and large, have strange childhood from which they develop a negative self image and aversion towards the existing society. The immediate result is - their fragmented psyche to view moving but their movement is always on the periphery. If they are placed within the female space, they are shown as threatening presence. Thus, the principle male characters in her works play negative roles in their relations with the females.

Anita Desai is the main advocate of the psychological novels dealing with the complex nature of woman. She has explained in detail the inner disturbances of her characters in a very better-quality manner. Her novels deal with the contradictions and predicaments faced by the individual in the struggle for existence. She belongs to the group of Indo-English writers who have studied in detail the actual problems faced by the individual politically, and culturally leading their life in this very society.

Anita Desai has chosen to deal with the particular event which threatens the normal tempo of life. She has explained the effect of emotions and sentiments about the behaviour of a man and a woman and how they react to different situations. She has explained the behaviour of people under strain and suffering.

Anita Desai has become a recorder of dilemma faced by the Indian urban set up. She and Kamala Markandaya have taken human relationship as their main fictional object. Since human relationship describes the mental and emotional springs, therefore an artist can weave a story out of it. The innermost psyche of the protagonists is revealed through their interaction with those who are emotionally related to them on the basis of kinship. For this reason one finds in Desai's novels relationships are based on emotional idealism.

Other women novelists have also dealt with the same thematic concern of human relationship, but in a totally different perspective. Almost all of them are historians of the tension in the wake of India's emergence as a developing nation. Desai insists on loneliness which is the characteristic of modern times. The main thematic motif of loneliness leads one to describe the contributory factor to it.

Anita Desai emphasizes it so much that many times it appears to be the main theme. There is a breakdown of channels of communication between husband and wife, mainly by the incompatibility of temperament between the two. This phenomenon of dissimilarity in attitudes and resulting in unsatisfactory relationships occupy almost all her novels. This theme, though as old as the English novels itself, can be found in the novels of Richardson and Fiddling on one hand and in the novels of D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Hemingway and Faulkner on other. D.H. Lawrence points out, "The greatest relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and woman. The relation between man and man, woman and woman, parent and child will always be subsidiary." (Lawrence: "Morality And The Novels" P. 130)

Anita Desai has an independent approach to women's problems in Indian social life and life in general. She does not believe that marriage is as strong as all human relationships are. Some of her heroines have the idea of a blissful, happy conjugal life, but the idea seems to remain only a rainbow dream. In most of the male-dominated families the concept of marriage as a union of two different minds has not been realised. Women's individual identity has not been openly realised in Indian social life. She is taken for granted and this casual attitude is the cause of her suffering and miserable life. The difference between make-believe supernatural horror and modern horror world of conjugal lives is just this, that the former can be wished away, but the latter demands the heaviest price from the married woman to preserve the semblance of social Prestige. Uma Banerjee believes that,

"The hypocrisy of the institution of marriage is increasingly taking the shape of a dead albatross around the necks of the modern, emancipated, self respecting women."

(Bannerjee: "Morital Relationship In AnitaDesai's Novels" P. 123)

Most of the studies on marital happiness indicate that homo-geneity, i.e. persons having similar tastes, interests, values tend to form stable relationship. This way marriage is said to be merger of two selves or marriage of two minds. In most of her earlier novels, Anita Desai has written on the theme of man woman relationship. As marriage is a union of two different minds and there is bound to be adjustments or maladjustment. According to her, most marriages prove to be union of incompatibility. Men are apt to be more rational and women - emotional and sentimental. Their attitudes and interests are different and their outlook and reaction towards the similar things is quite different. The woman is expected to adjust with the changing family ways and surroundings. In a marriage, adjustment for the woman only means deleting her individuality, herself, her conscience. It affects her entire psyche and behaviour which destroys her sensibility and her very self. She feels tied down.

The result is that there is a gradual erosion of marital relationship; and, for a woman marriage comes to symbolise nullification of everything she has come to cherish. Uma Benerjee rightly says,

"Mrs. Desai believes that one Nora will not makr much of a difference and women will continue to play the supreme price for meal tickets". (Bannerjee: P. 155)

All the marriages in Anita Desai's novels are business transactions. In each of her novel, there are traumatic experiences of married lives. Anita Desai indirectly suggests women to either remain unmarried, unfettered, and unaccented by the society; or, marry and be damned to everlasting private hell.

In her novels, there is a definite sequence; and in this pattern, can be traced the growth and her attitude towards the theme. Anita Desai gives a new dimension and vision to the theme of relationship.

Anita Desai's first novel, *Cry, The Peacock* (1963), follows the theme of the marital discord and its impact on women. Maya and Gautama, and all the other couples around them, are the victims of the

poignant problem of maladjustment in marriage. The novel presents the story of a young hypersensitive and neurotic woman named, Maya. The novel begins with a gloomy atmosphere with a description of Toto's death, the favourite dog of Maya. This incident upsets her so much that she finds it impossible to endure the psychological strain. The sad demise of Toto produces a terrifying sense of doomsday in her. She suffers from prescience. A cosseted and mollycoddled daughter of a wealthy Brahmin, Maya, suffers from acute father-fixation. As a result, even after her marriage, she looks for the father image in her husband. Maya's marriage to Gautama is more or less a marriage of convenience. It 'was grounded upon the friendship of the two men and the mutual respect in which they held each other, rather than anything else'. (*Cry, The Peacock*: P.40) It was a match between two different temperaments and there was not a single link in the physical or mental outlooks to bring them to a close tie. Maya with her : round, childish face, pretty, plump and pampered the small shell-like ears curling around petty ignorance, the safe, overfull lips - the very, very black brows, the silly, collection of curls, a flower pinned to them - a pink flower, a child's choice of a posy. (P.105) and Gautama with his tall, thin, stooped form, graying hair, pallid skin nicotine stained long, bony fingers, practical, matter of fact approach and clumsy mannerisms. It was a match between two different temperaments without a single close tie. Meena Belliappa remarks, 'The incompatibility of characters stands revealed - Gautama who touches without feeling and Maya who feels even without touching'. (Belliappa: P. 26)

"The matrimonial bonds that bind the two are very fragile and tenuous 'neither true nor lasting' but broken repeatedly: and repeatedly the pieces were picked and put together again as of a sacred icon with which, out of the pettiest superstition, we could not bear to part." (P. 40)

Maya is sentimental and is full of grief over the death of her pet dog Toto but her husband is detached and takes the incident as a matter of fact:

"It is all over, he had said as calmly as the mediator beneath the Sal tree. You need a cup of tea, he had said, showing how little he knew of my misery or of how to comfort me." (P. 9)

Maya was very much in love with Gautama and needed his companionship and understanding; but these were very much missing in their marriage. Again and again the reader finds Maya turning towards her husband for support and love but to no avail. Their tastes, likings, thinking are different:

"I tried to explain this to Gautama, stammering wit anxiety for now, when his companionship was a necessity. I required his closest understanding. How was I to gain it? we did not even agree on which points, on what grounds this closeness of mine was necessary.

'Yes, yes'; he said, already thinking of something else, having shrugged my words off as superfluous, trivial and there was no way I could make him believe that this, night filled with these several scents, their effects on me, on us, were all important, the very core of the night, of our moods tonight". (P.19-P20)

Maya again turns towards her husband for help when his Sikh friend was talking of palmistry and prophecy. Gautama alone was like a 'rock in the wild sea-calm, immobile. But he too turned to me with an expression that displayed surprise at my vehemence.'(P.79)

The meaninglessness of their relationship again and again dawns on Maya. She realises that :

" We belonged to two different worlds; his seemed the earth, that I loved so, scented with jasmine, coloured with liquor, resounding with poetry and warmed by amiability. It was mine that was hell". (P. 102)

The title of the novel, *Cry, The Peacock*, is about Maya's cry for love and understanding in her loveless marriage. Maya rejoiced in the world of sounds, sense, movement, odours, colours etc. She was in love

with living contact, relationship and communion, which were the warm tender sensations in which she wanted to bask. Unfortunately, this involvement is opposed to Gautama's philosophy of detachment. Gautama could see no value in anything less than the ideas and theories born of human, preferably male brains. She hungered for his companionship and spent sleepless nights. She could not accept this unsatisfactory life, as taught by her father, because it told upon her nerves. She would be awake at night, stifled by the hunger she felt, not only for Gautama but for all that life represented.

In the second part of the novel, one finds Maya grumbling about Gautama's heartlessness. These are the early symptoms of marital discord. She discovers she has no saviours to cling to. She experiences a damaging blow. Gautama is least interested in her world of senses. Although he is normal in every sense, he seems averse to physical nearness. Like Maya, he too is a product of his early life-experiences. Desai has suggested that childhood experiences leave an impact on the future of the man.

Unfortunately for Maya, her early life proves to be a handicap; but for Gautama, if not a handicap, it is a seed of future discontentment in his life. He is afraid of showing his emotions. He avoids intimacy as it leads to the disclosure of the self. He remains disinterested about everything other than the matters of his concern. He is well aware of his nature, which, at moments of vexation, comes out with his underlying complex. He cannot appreciate Maya's sensuousness.

Actually, his name suggests that he is an ascetic. Naturally Maya always causes him tension as he thinks that she is a "wayward and high strung child". Maya's mental structure too is underdeveloped to follow the serious problems of the life. Hence they continue to exist in two separate worlds, never realising each other's difficulties. The world of one is extremely romantic and dreamy and of the other is rational. Maya is a helpless child and she has a morbid longing for love. Gautama is a practical man and cannot stand this romantic nature. The novelist reveals Maya's desire for communion - physical and mental; while Gautama thought the peacock's dance to death and the coupling call of pigeons. What Maya sought in the name of love was to relieve herself from the pressures of anxieties. Psychologist Coleman says about relationships that :

“The need to love and be loved is crucial for healthy personality development and functioning. Human beings appear to be so constructed that they need and strive to achieve warm, loving relationships with others. The longing for intimacy with others remains with us throughout our lives and separation from or loss of loved ones usually presents a difficult adjustment problem”. (Coleman: “Abnormal Psychology And Modern Life” P. 73)

Maya had three difficult problems of adjustment because she always felt that she was not loved enough by her husband. She felt neglected and remained a captive of her own thinking. For Maya, love means a close physical contact, and missing that, she feels depressed; whereas for Gautama, love cannot be an ideal in real life to crave for, and it leads to worldly troubles. These differences clearly show that they did not have similar ideas about love. Throughout the novel, one can feel the procrastination is made by the albino priest, and Gautama's indifferent demeanour only increasing the neurosis of Maya.

Many critics have pointed out this incompatibility. Usha Pathania, tracing the cause of disharmony between the two, remarks:

“Marital relationships are established with the explicit purpose of providing companionship to each other. However, this element of companionship is sadly missing in the relationship between Maya and Gautama.” (Pathania: “Human Bonds And Bondages” P.14)

Whatever marriages have been referred to in Cry, The Peacock, they are not happy in the true sense. Maya's mother has not been mentioned in the novel. Gautama's parents also lived an unnatural married

life. There is an apathetical approach between them as they keep themselves busy with their own vocations. Lila, Maya's friend, married a tubercular patient for love. She rages and raves at the mockery of the marriage, yet forbears all childish vagaries of her husband. Mrs. Lal, the Sikh wife, publicly denounces her husband as a charlatan and an opportunist, revealing the deep-seated antipathy for maladjustment in marriage. Nila, a divorcee, declares,

“After ten years with that rabbit I married, I've learnt to do everything myself.” (Cry, The Peacock: P. 162)

All these marriages point out those similarities between the attitudes of both husband and wife to life and things, in general, play an important role in making their conjugal life successful. Marriage is a union of two souls. Women who are treated casually become victims of clashes, desperation, separation and loneliness. They struggle against strong, negative, soul-killing circumstances, but in vain. They find solution in committing suicide or running away or living separately.

In Anita Desai's second novel, *Voices InThe City*, the same theme continues. In this novel one sees faulty adjustment in the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Ray, the father and the mother. It was a marriage of convenience, the husband priding himself in his family name and title, and wife on her tea-estates and a house. Both of them have a soul-destroying hatred and terrific fury towards each other. The father transforms into a drunkard, debased, and dishonorable creature; whereas the mother changes into a practical, possessive woman, losing all her womanly and motherly charm and warmth.

She is polished and balanced, yet very cold, with a frosty love of power - like a concealed fluorescent bulb. Their marriage was something of a financial settlement. Amla, the daughter, says to Dharma about her father whether he regretted it later on because

“he hadn't quite bargained for mother, just for her houses and tea-estates.” (*Voices in the City*: P.205)

The father did nothing except that he spent his life sleeping, drinking and idling. Only thing he did with his sons was he taught them play cricket and he loved horses.

“He was always drinking and smiling, his knowing, spiteful smile, with an emotion in him that must have been very violent to show at all in his face, even so faintly”.(P. 207)

There was hardly any common liking among the couple. The mother loved music, nature and all the fine things of life :

“ My father always got on her nerves by simply never doing anything. I always see him lying back indolently, like an overfed house cat, against mother's embroidered Tibetan cushions, toying with a cheroot or a glass of whisky or both.” (P.206)

So, it is clear that there was hardly any common liking among the couple. The wife loved music, nature and all the fine things of life. The musical soirees arranged by her were of no interest to the husband. The sweet music would affect all the guests and even the children, but the husband would remain immune to it. He lay against a bolster, smiling a vacant, feline smile and drinking; and with the passing of hours he fell asleep - his head drooping forward and his mouth open and wet. The sweet '*shehanai*' was no better than a noisy pipe, a piece of plumbing to him. Wife, too, had contempt and resentment for him. Husband had the same hatred and malice towards her:

“When he came to Kalimpong and saw her wandering about her garden, touching her flowers, he never followed her. He used to lie back against his cushions, idle and contented - contented I think, in his malice. (P.207)

He had contempt for his wife's love for nature. He used to taunt and make fun of her when he tells his daughters to look at a butterfly and 'Forget yourself in that study. Then you will be fortunate - like your

mother.’ (P.207) The truth was that the wife had deliberately forgotten him; shut her mind to him by concentrating it on flowers and music and fine food, and things he shunned. This hatred between the father and mother leaves a scar on the mind of the children. They are the real sufferers. The private hell of the couple is enveloping and destroying their lives and pursuing them step by step. Monisha, the elder daughter, is childless and is a victim of a ill-matched marriage. Jiban and Monisha had nothing in common between them and were married because he belonged to a respectable, middle-class Congress family which was safe, secure and sound. Her father thought that

“Monisha ought not to be encouraged in her morbid inclinations and that it would be a good thing for her to be settled into such a solid, unimaginative family as that, just sufficiently educated to accept her with tolerance.” (P.199)

Monisha changes after marriage from a sensitive, mild, quiet, sensible girl into a barren, distant, without any compassion, neurotic, diary writing woman, which she herself hates. She is happy neither with her husband nor with his family members. Monisha's ill-matched marriage, her loneliness, sterility and stress of living in a joint family with an insensitive husband push her to a breaking point. Her life is:

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

Jiban is present at home but ‘Jiban is never with us at all’. Monisha feels trapped in Calcutta and in the house with the thick iron bars:

“I am so tired of it, this crowd. In Calcutta it is everywhere. Deceptively, it is a quite crowd-passive, but distressed. Till there is reason for anger and then a sullen yellow flame of bitterness and sarcasm starts up and it is vicious and mordant . . . This boil erupts, every now and then, now that the weather is so hot, the heart so parched.” (P.118)

This view of the city expressed by Monisha shows that she has a loveless life and misunderstood by everyone. She feels she is like the bleeding heart doves:

“wounded and bleeding, but scurrying about their cages, picking up grain, these stay on the ground, restless, in flux and bleeding.” (P.121)

She faces the trauma of living in a joint family, where there is no private life. She wishes to do work in privacy, away from the aunts and uncles, the cousins and nieces and nephews. She has no privacy even in her own room.

It was first regarded as bridal room, but now no longer, as her fallopian tubes were blocked. "The sister-in-law lies across the four-poster, discussing my ovaries and theirs". They make fun of her, as in her wardrobe, instead of saris, there are books. Monisha is the intellectual type who carries her own personal library to her in-law house. However, nobody bothers about the books she has in her library. Anita Desai has presented the picture of women as daughters-in-law in typical middle class Indian families who are not at all happy. All their ambitions, talents, potentialities are reduced to be mere housewives and they can do nothing beyond mundane household chores. Jiban tells Monisha,

‘Be a little friendly to them. That is all they ask of you - a little friendliness.’ (P.118)

Amla feels sorry for Monisha and wonders how and why it was that she had been married to ‘this boring non-entity, this blind moralist, this complacent quoter of Edmund Burke and Wordsworth, Mahatma Gandhi and Tagore, this rotund, minute-minded and limited official.’ (Voices in the City: 188) Jiban was dull and prolix. He worked in a dull Ministry and he would go on talking about his work.

Monisha is accused of theft by everyone in the family. She had taken Jiban's money to pay the hospital bills for Nirode. She had to suffer the humiliation from men and women who are mean and low. The mother-in-law shouts,

‘the servants will be dismissed, all of them. I will not have a thief in my house. . . After all, you were the only person who was in the room all day.’(P.137) Monisha ‘is willing to accept this status then and to live here a little beyond and below everyone else, in exile.’(Voices in the City: P. 136)

But she is not able to bear this for long and commits suicide by self immolation. The maladjustment is menacing by the adverse attitude of the family members and hostile social traditions and background.

The other marriages referred to in the novel are also not happy and satisfactory. Dharma, the painter, bears his marriage as it has become his habit. He expresses his idea of marriage to Amla:

“Our relationship is not all so straight-forward and pat, married relationship never are. There is the matter of loyalty, habit, complicity . . . things I couldn’t talk to you about till you married and knew for yourself”. (P.229)

Dharma and Gita Devi are almost like strangers. Their daughter had married her cousin, who lived with them for fifteen years. They leave Calcutta and come to live in the suburb, where nobody knew of this incident. Amla feels that Dharma has committed a terrible sin of casting out a young daughter from himself. He says,

‘nothing that concerns my daughter concerns me.’(P.229)

His wife prays the whole day, isolating herself even from her husband as if she was repenting in the bubbling prayer of a sinner in despair.

Amla, who was attracted towards Dharma in the beginning, now feels revolted on seeing his other part. She had willingly let herself be lured toward him. The glamour of mystery, his uncanniness, the eeriness about him had lured young girls to his studio. Amla had changed after meeting Dharma. She had grown pale and worked very poorly in the office. She faces swings in her mood after going to Dharma's house, she would become another Amla, "a flowering Amla, translucent with joy and overflowing with a sense of love and reward." She would like to hear the details. It was only during these hours she felt she was alive. She wanted tangibility and permanence in the relationship which she could not receive from Dharma :

“The understanding between them was an interior volcano, colouring the water of his existence and splashing on to his canvas the tints of the upheaval within him.” (P.212)

Now, at times, Amla wondered whether Dharma saw in his model anything more than inspiration which offered him rescue from the complexities of nature in which he had enslaved himself. Amla gets no peace from this relationship. Her aunt, too, advises her to leave him as ‘he uses you, something in you that he needs. But the rest - what does he care for that?’(P.221) At last Amla breaks away from Dharma. She realises that Gita Devi was the base of all Dharma's actions, ‘the spread lotus that bore the weight of the god absorbed in his meditation and the spinning out of his Karma.’(P.231)

Nirode, too, has no faith in man-woman relationship. He hates his mother as he believes that she has an affair with Major Chadha. He is repulsed to see the pretences and show between Jit and Sarla. This couple belongs to the upper class of society. They have no love for each other but live together as it has become a status symbol. Jit is aware of the many admirers of his wife but doesn't say a word about it. Sarla doesn't want to go and meet her in-laws back in south. Nirode feels revulsion for this relationship.

He says:

“Marriage, bodies, touch and torture . . . he shuddered and, walking swiftly, was afraid of the dark of

Calcutta. All that was Jit's and Sarla's, he decided, and indeed, all that had to do with marriage, was destructive, negative, decadent. (P. 35)

All the characters in this novel have distrust for marriage. Aunt Lila hates men - particularly her fat, self-centred, long-dead husband. Her opinion is that "women place themselves in bondage to men, whether in marriage or out. All the joy and ambition is channelled that way, while they go parched themselves." (P.221) She learnt it the hard way. Her daughter, Rita, is also a victim of maladjustment in marriage. She is divorced and working with some of the finest physicists in Paris. Thus, in all the menwomenm relationships mentioned in the novel, we see a picture of desolation and emptiness. They illustrate that marriage, at best, is a farce, at worst, it is a malignancy that destroys body, mind, and soul completely.

The strain of maladjusted marriage continues in *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* also in the garb of social problem. Adit and Sarah, Samar and Bella are victims of alien culture, as this is a novel based on immigration problem. There is utter confusion and escapism in their marriage. Adit marries an English girl Sarah and incurs the anger of the white society. But it is not Adit who suffers most but Sarah, the docile wife. By marrying a brown Asian she has broken the social code of England and is subjected to taunts not out of her colleagues but also of the young pupils of the school where she works as a clerk. Her pupils ignore her and taunt her. She heard them scream, "Hurry, hurry, Mrs. Scurry." (*Bye-Bye, Blackbird*:P. 32)

Sarah had long been fascinated with India. That she wants to know India more, is shown by her interest in India stamps. But she does not want to disclose this part of her characters to everyone. She faces identify crisis for this reason:

"When she briskly dealt with letters and bills in her room under the strains, she felt an imposter, but, equally, she was playing a part when she tapped her fingers to the *sitar* music on Adit's records or ground spices for curry. She did not have little command over these two charades she played each day, one in the morning at school and one in the evening at home, that she could not even tell with how much sincerity she played one role or the other". (P. 34)

The strains of interracial marriages are so much on her that they affect her daily life. She even goes for shopping in big departmental stores to remain an anonymous buyer. The super market was a soothing place to her. Here she would wander about unnoticed, in absent-mindedly happy way and she could buy anything without acquiring the distinct personality. These purchases could have marked her with:

"But inside the sparkling halls of the supermarket where walls of soap and corn flakes hid her from strangers eyes, she could be eccentric, as individual as she pleased without being noticed by even a mouse. (P.39)

Both Adit and Sarah pretend the facade of happily-married life. The tension between pretension and actuality, appearance and reality is always there which tell upon her, resulting in schizophrenia. She is constantly under tension which makes her life unreal, that is why, she is affected by tortures of anxiety and insecurity. She herself feels,

"who was she? . . . Both these creatures were frauds, each had a large, shadowed element of charade about it.

Her face was only a mask, her body only a costume." (P.39)

Sarah is a different person at home. She tries her best to adjust with her Indian husband. She makes 'Charchari' curry with different spices and even wears a Benarasi sari of Adit's choice. Sarah bears the tantrums of Adit, to save her marriage. Sarah feels over-decked when she puts on a heavy sari with heavy chain of golden mangoes sent by his mother as a wedding present. Adit

flares up in anger, “you feel like a Christmas tree! I suppose all Indian women look like Christmas Trees, perhaps like clowns, because they wear saris and jewellery.” (P.38)

Sarah doesn't get spice powder in the house as Adit hates it and would throw it out. Sarah is more like Indian girls in her docility; whereas Adit is a typical Indian male when he expresses his opinion to Dev:

“These English wives are quite manageable really, you know. Not as fierce as they look - very quiet and hard working as long as you treat them right and roar at them regularly once or twice a week. (P.39)

Adit was attracted towards the shyness and quietness of Sarah. He told her, “you are like a Bengali girl. Bengali women are like that – reserved, quiet. But you are improving on it - you are so much prettier”. (P. 40)

Sarah, formally, had the problem of emptiness in her life.

“She had jettisoned most things out of it when she had married - childhood, family, friends: all the normal ordinary things with which an ordinary person must fill and adorn his life.” (P.205)

She was attracted towards Adit's so many relations and attachments, pictures and stories, legends, promises and warnings. She tries to fill her life with these colourful things. At the time of making a decision of going to India, she is filled with apprehension about her future. She had inflated these dreams, making them screens with which to surround and protect her. Sarah finds it difficult to adjust to the voyage, the uprooting, and the child in one stride. In spite of doubts in her mind Sarah readily accepts to leave her country. She says,

“I think when I go to India, I will not find it strange after all. I am sure I shall feel quite at home very soon.” (P.219)

In reality, Adit and Sarah are afraid of rejection, vicious distrust and mocking pity from their own people, transforming them into escapists. Sarah, finding the world around her hostile, submits to Adit - the very cause of her alienation and isolation. She never protests and is ready to sacrifice anything for her marriage. The symbolic nature of relatedness of Sarah and Adit can be expressed in Erich Fromm's words:

“Both persons involved have lost their integrity and freedom, they live for each other and from each other, satisfying their craving for closeness, yet suffering from the lack of inner strength and self-reliance which would require freedom and independence, and furthermore, constantly threatened by the conscious and unconscious hostility which is bound to arise from symbiotic relationship.” (Fromm: “The Sane Society” P. 22)

The marriage of Samar and Bella is identical to the marriage of Adit and Sarah. They are also the victims of separate culture mal-adjustment. The novelist has presented a highly volatile situation:

“Two Indian, two English women frozen in the stances of players on the stage who had not been told what to do next. Somewhere in a locked closet, a slab of marble like a black grave stone awaiting and engraving a grave, a bunch of flowers. (P. 188)

Their differences are marked from the beginning:

“But Bella and Sarah sat in stiff silence, their Anglo-saxon faces impassive. They had learnt exactly how much of this foreign world was theirs to tread and had given up their early attempts, made out of curiosity and desire to join, to interpret jokes.” (P. 25)

The marriage of Mala and Jasbir is also a farce. Each partner has changed to his worst due to disharmony. Jasbir has changed into an over loud, careless clown; whereas, Mala is a dishevelled, impractical, impolite, idle young woman. Both have longing for physical comforts and good living. Mrs. and Mr. Roscommon-James also present a very loathsome picture of marriage.

Sarah identifies the cause between egoistic tendencies of her parents. Mrs. Roscommon-James scolds her husband bitterly,

‘She scolded him in tone that would lead anyone not present in the room to think she was speaking to an unusually, naughty, and tiresome dog. He never answered.’ (P.14)

Anita Desai has commented on the marital disharmonies existing not only in the lives of Indians but also in the lives of English people. She expresses her views about Indian married couples with Adit's retort to Dev, “the married couples in India are not in parks, they are at home quarrelling.” The marriage of Sarah and Adit, on the whole, is satisfactory.

In her next novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), Anita Desai returns to the theme of alienation and lack of communication in married life - the theme of her first novel. But, here, the treatment is more controlled and the wife's loneliness is the loneliness of the woman, wife and a mother - loneliness conditioned by the society and family; whereas, the childless Maya's anxiety is existential and temporal, Sita's ache is domestic and temporal.

It is the story of a middle-aged woman, Sita, who is sick of the mundane routine of meaningless existence. She feels suffocated in her well-ordered, posh flat in Bombay, and struggles to break away from it all. The course open to her is to go to Manori Island, her maiden home. She wishes to recapture some of her past. She escapes to the island in order not to give birth to her fifth child.

Sita's predicament is similar to that of Maya of *Cry, The Peacock* and Monisha of *Voices In The City*. She too is obsessed with her loveless marriage with Raman. It was difficult for her to understand that though they lived so close together, Raman could not know the basic fact about her that she was bored with life. It was shock to her to realize the emptiness of her marriage. The mal-adjustment between Raman and Sita is based on values, on principles,

on faith even or between normal or double standard. Uma Bannerjee has rightly pointed out :

“This is not simply a case of an emancipated woman, revolting against the slavish bonds of marriage. It is much more than that. It is a question of the basic truth that is bitter and naked and can neither be hidden nor be halved to suit individuals. (Bannerjee: P. 153)

Sita's neurosis springs from the dull, monotonous existence of her daily life, that denies her any sense of active involvement.

“Life had no periods, no stretches. It simply swirled around, muddling and confusing, leading nowhere.” (Where shall we . . . P. 155)

She becomes actually conscious of what she was missing in life after witnessing the tender scenes in the magical island where she had spent her childhood with her father. The maladjustment of the marriage had changed her completely. She had ‘lost her all feminine, all maternal belief in childbirth, all faith in it and again to fear it as yet one more act of violence and murder in a world that had more of them in it than she could take.’ (P.56)

The fortyish woman who faces Raman at the Manori house is a stranger; the long years of marriage had ravaged her soul and body:

“He stared at her with distaste, thinking her grotesque. It was the face of the woman unloved, a woman rejected . . . But whereas her beauty had turned haggard through nerves and neglect, her fire had turned on him and even on the children, he felt, in spite and ill temper.” (P. Nos.134-135)

Raman is a businessman, practical, faded, stooped with the responsibilities of life that he takes so seriously. His expectations are ordinary and sensible. He is puzzled at the irrational behaviour of Sita. He is considerate and tries his best to make her happy. Raman's is a traditional Hindu family where even

men do not smoke openly, but, Sita, just to spite the in-laws smokes openly. Things become really bad, so Raman shifts to a flat to avoid daily tensions. But, even here, Sita is not happy. Raman is at a loss to understand the reason of her boredom. He thinks himself a dutiful provider of the family. The subtle difference between union of bodies and communion between souls do not strike him as an important part of his life. He is incapable of understanding the vital necessity of Sita. Life makes strangers out of them who live under the same roof without sharing the essential communion of hearts.

Anita Desai's next novel, *Fire On The Mountain*, is the story of the agonised cry of Nanda Kaul, an old woman, who has had too much of this world and longs for a quiet and secluded life. Her life is another example of marital disharmony. Her husband, Prof. Kaul, the Vice Chancellor, carries on a life-long affair with Miss David, the Maths teacher. But, she being a Christian, he could not dare break social code and marry her. The marriage is again based on physical lust and circumstantial convenience for the husband, who lives a double life. Outwardly, the Kauls were an ideal couple to the university community but from inside it was all empty and the whole social role and socializing was a sham:

“Not that 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. (*Fire on the Mountain*: P.145)

Nanda looks on and bears this affair with a frozen smile on her face. She looks after the family, his house, his children, shutting the doors, supervising the cooks and servants, entertaining the guests very efficiently with a maintained poise. But she loses her individuality and identity in the process.

Nanda Kaul is not very happy in her heart in coping with the large family and stream of guests. Her relationship with her husband was nothing beyond the duties and obligations they had for each other. The same is true of her bond with her children:

“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 was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing. (P.145)

She seeks solitude not because she favours it, but to rest her pain-filled mind. She has shut herself away from the world, her children, and grandchildren, because she is afraid to be hurt again. Her frozen, granite-hard exterior is only a facade to hide the scars of wounded self inside. All through her life, she had only been pre-tending, wearing a persona, acting a role which is imposed on her.

Her granddaughter, Tara, also suffers from nervous break-down as a result of maladjustment in her marriage. She is forced into marriage with a diplomat, practical, worldlywise man and has accepted the vices of the modern society. She is the wrong type of wife for a man like him. The strain of the marriage and brutality of Rakesh, the husband, is reflected on the twisted personality of their daughter Raka. This is the most fearsome outcome of marital maladjustments. Raka enjoys ugliness, devastation and death-like solitude and repulses from society. She does not grow into a normal healthy child. She is a child who has never experienced the warmth of loving arms around her fragile body and is, therefore, unable to either give or receive love.

Even the two married couples, who resided in Carignano, present a confused and maladjusted married life. Finally Ila Das emerges as another legacy of a broken marriage whose life is bitter irony of her face. *Clear Light Of Day* is a novel about relationship of two brothers and two sisters. The elder brother, Raja, is a poet and married to a Muslim girl, and lives in Hyderabad, keeping a tenuous relationship with his brother and sister who live in Delhi. The novel is not without the theme of maladjustment in marriage.

All the marriages described in the backdrop of the novel are unsatisfactory. The parents have no time for their children. They were always busy playing bridge at home or at club or always ill. The mother was suffering from severe diabetes and had to be attended to by the husband, as it was his duty. She passes into coma and is hospitalized. Instead of going to the club, the father goes to the hospital every evening. She is not remembered after her death, least of all by her husband. Her marriage and her life is a card house.

The marriage of Tara and Bakul is also a marriage of convenience. She marries Bakul as she wanted to escape from the dark, forbidden house to a life of laughter and gaiety. Bakul needed a wife who would adjust according to his needs. Tara felt the house to be ill and that anyone who lived in it was bound to be ill. She also wanted to escape from the college,

“just down the road. No further. And the high walls and the gate and the hedges - it would have been like school all over again.” (*Clear Light of Day*: 156)

She confuses that she didn't think it that way then:

“At that time I was just - just swept of my feet. Bakul was so much older and so impressive, wasn't he ? And then he picked me, paid me attention - it seemed too wonderful and I was overwhelmed. (P.156)

Bakul has moulded Tara according to his likings. It disturbs him that she becomes the old Tara of her youth as she enters her old house. She has turned into the "hopeless person" she was before he married her. (P.17) Love is not the major criteria for their marriage, and both accept it as form of biological need. Bakul, being in foreign services, looked for a wife, not as a companion, but a thing to take pride in, like a show piece. At times, Tara felt that 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.’(P.18)

Still she, like many others of her type, manage to preserve that facade of a successful marriage. Aunt Mira's marriage is a portrayal of social taboo. She had been married at twelve years of her age and was a virgin when she was widowed. She was blamed bitterly for the death of her husband and then was treated as a servant. She washed and cooked for them. She massaged her sister-in-law's legs and nursed wakeful babies. When she became aged, it was time she was turned out, ‘another household could find some use for her : cracked pot, torn rag, picked bone’.(P. 108)

She was searched out and brought to Das household, as she was a useful slave. The daughters of Mishra's, Sarla and Jaya, also have an unhappy marriage and are divorcees. The novel is about the relationship of the brother Raja and sister Bim. Bimla is unmarried sister who is free from the traumas of an incompatible marriage. She devotes her life for the care of her mentally retarded younger brother, Baba, and old Mira masi. Bim is very close to her younger brother Raja. She identifies with Raja and tries to be his equal, intellectually and emotionally. Raja has great interest in Urdu poetry and his enthusiasm increases in Urdu verses as he goes to his neighbour Hyder Ali's house. Bim and Tara are attracted towards English romantic poets, especially Byron. But Bim, with her sharp mind, did not give in easily to romance and romantic feelings. She is more interested in ‘fact, history and chronology.’(P.121)

She starts reading Gibbon's *Decline And Fall* in search of knowledge. She is unable to digest the heavy sentimentality of expression of her brother's compositions. Raja also admires her intellectual interests. During the Independence movement, the country is rocked by violence all over, and Raja becomes a suspect for Muslims. Raja falls ill. Bim nurses him like a mother and expects that one day he would take their father's place.

But Bim is shocked when Raja leaves for Hyderabad and marries Benazir, Hyder Ali's daughter, and then adopts their life style. Bim feels cheated and nurses a grudge against him. She finds fault with everything Raja did, building up her resentment against him. They have seen a 'gap between them, a trough or a channel that the books they shared did not bridge.' (P.121) Left behind in the house, Bim feels bitter with Raja and Tara, who, she thinks, have broken apart from their childhood closeness and become very different. She feels rejected, deserted and needs a renewed sense of self justification.

Now Bim feels unwanted and isolated. All these years she had felt herself to be the centre. . . Bim, who had stayed and became a part of the pattern, is inseparable. She feels that she, the house, and old Delhi are all parts of the past which is decaying and dead; and rest of the family have moved far ahead in new direction. She tries to have her spite on Baba but he would neither sulk nor wishes to punish her. He knows neither grudge nor punishment. It was Baba's peaceful sleep and in her night long vigil of violent turbulence of emotions within her that she comes out of prejudices, anger and resentments in which she is caught. She realises that Raja, Tara and Baba were part of her. They all made a complete whole:

“There could be no love more deep and full and wider than this one, she knew. No other love started so far back in time in which to grow and spread. Nor was there anyone else on the earth whom she was willing to forgive more readily or completely or defend more instinctively or instantly. (P.165)

Bim realises the inspiration for selflessness and a move towards others. This is a growth and development on the part of Anita Desai's attitude towards man-woman relationship. In this novel, she has come to the conclusion that there is no cause for despair. This novel shows the clear light of day i.e. the realisation which is the ultimate wisdom of life, the intuitive understanding, and with it, Bim forgets her bitterness and achieves peace.

In her novel, *In Custody*, One finds the marital disagreement between husband and wife. In this novel Deven, a lecturer teaching Hindi in college in a small town, aspires to become a poet in Urdu poetry. He thinks, his wife Sarla, is an obstacle, because Deven's marriage was against his choice. Sarla used to live in the same locality. Deven's mother and aunts had observed Sarla for years and found her suitable in every way – 'plain, penny-pinching and congenially pessimistic'. (*In Custody*: P. 67)

Deven was more a poet than a professor when he married Sarla. Sarla was also a person of high aspirations. She had wanted to be rich and to be surrounded by luxurious atmosphere. She was attracted by various advertisements and aspired for 'the magazine dream of marriage : herself stepping out of a car, with plastic shopping bag, full of groceries and filling them into the gleaming refrigerator.' (P. 68)

Sarla's dreams were not fulfilled with her marriage with Deven because they had to leave Deven's town to a smaller town. The thwarting of her aspiration 'had cut two dark furrows from the corners of her nostrils to the corner of her mouth, as deep and permanent as surgical scars.' (P.68)

Both, Deven and Sarla, are dis-appointed with each other. Both of them understood each other's disappointments. Deven and Sarla avoided each other. They don't bear together their "joint disappointment". Deven expresses his disappointments by taking extreme measures and thus avoids his wife's accusations. He becomes annoyed on simple ground. At home he is very aggressive but outside he is quiet and humble. Sarla is a typical Hindu woman. She never complains about injustices done to her by her husband. 'Deven knew that she would scream and abuse only when she is safely out of way, preferably in the kitchen, her own domain.' (P.146)

Deven too behaves as a typical superior Indian male. He cannot share his defeat and share his disappointments and woes, as they are degrading for him. In the views of psychologists the behaviour of Indian male is:

“Social conditioning definitely has a big role to play in their desire to dominate. Right from the very beginning, the patriarchal society, he is brought up in, implants an inherent sense of superiority and gender bias in the men. (P.9)

Sarla, too, has ways of expressing her anger and disappointments. She suspects Deven of going to another woman in Delhi. She, being illiterate, cannot think beyond it and Deven, too, doesn't try to explain the truth to her. Sarla would put the fold of her sari over her head as if she was mourning or at a religious ceremony. This makes Deven further weak, looking for escape. But there is no escape for him. Deven is presented as a defeatist here:

“He felt aged and mouldy. He was sure his teeth had loosened in the night, that his hair would come out in handfuls if he tugged it. That was what she might well do, he feared, to teach him not to venture out of the familiar, safe dustbin of their world into the perilous world of night-time bacchanalian revelry and melodrama. Now he would sink back on the dust heap like a crust thrown away, and moulder. (P.Nos. 66-67)

Both of them try to hurt each other with actions or words. Sarla accuses Deven with her expressions of sullenness. Deven gets irritated by her shabbiness, her hunched, twisted posture, her untidy hair. At times, he thinks of putting his arm around her and tell her that he shared all her disappointments and woes. But this would have undermined his position of power over her, "a position which was as important to her as to him : if she ceased to believe in it, what would there be for her to do, where would she go?" (P. 194)

The condition of Nur Shahjehanabadi, the renowned Urdu poet, is also somewhat similar to Deven. Nur is an old poet who has decayed with the changing times, not only in the field of art but also in his personal life. He has two wives. The older wife is an old creature with a commanding face, 'so straight in its lines, so military in its firmness.' (P.89) She lives in an inner courtyard of the house. Nur married a dancing girl later, for a son. His second wife, Imtiaz Begum, was from house for dancers, and was quite famous for her singing. She takes advantage of the poet and his position:

“She wanted my house, my audience, my friends. She raided my house, stole my jewels - those are what she wears now as she sits before an audience, showing them off as her own. They are not her own, they are mine! and she sent my secretary away too. (P. 87)

The lines express the frustration and anger of the old poet when he sat silent, neglected, and uncelebrated in a corner in the birthday celebration of his wife. At these times, he feels cheated and very old and weak; whereas Imtiaz begum is the centre of attraction of the function.

“ . . . a powerful and pointed creature in black and silver, coquetting beneath a shining veil which she held in place over her forehead while she turned her face from side to side, flashing smiles at her audience and making the ring on her nose glint with delight. She sat cross-legged and comfortable on the rug, her redpainted toes wagging with pleasure at the scene of which she was the undeniable centre. (P. 79)

She dominates Nur and he is afraid of her anger, “Nur began to cringe, his lips to pout, his glass to tilt and spill.” (P. 88) He rises with a 'pathetic resignation' to her call, “She, being a dancer, is capable of creating melodramatic scenes, feigning to be ill to get Nur's attention. The two wives fight like ferocious felines to "devour the helpless quaking flesh of the poet.” (P. 117)

Nur is in a pathetic state unable to take care of the situation. He is caught between an uneducated country wife, with her crude speech and manners; and the melodramatic, shrewd dancer girl, with flowery Urdu. Nur, at the end, only wishes for 'the primordial sleep'.

The novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* concentrates on the life of two who were separated Germans, without family and country. Hugo Baumgartner, the protagonist, is the main character and Lotte is a female cabaret dancer. Both of them are alone foreigners in India and uprooted from their own culture.

Baumgartner, a German Jew, is living his last life in solitude in a duty flat in Bombay. He lives lonely life by himself. Lotte is an old lady who has lost her youth and beauty. She had a false marriage with one of her admirers, Kantilal Sethia, and is left alone after his death. She is hated by Kanti's sons from his former marriage. Both, Baumgartner and Lotte, are alone and their frustrations, agony lead them to choose each other as companion. There is a soft bond between them. Lotte has no other place to turn to except Baumgartner:

“He visits her, understands her, sympathises with her, and the two make an island of mutual understanding, reciprocal tenderness, insulating themselves from the harshness, bullying and cruelty of the world around.” (*Baumgartner's Bombay*: P. 10)

In this novel, Desai's treatment of the relationship between man and woman is very different from her earlier novels. Here both are interdependent because both are alone in a different country. Lotte becomes channel of belonging to the place of Baumgartner's birth and upbringing. She fills the gap to a certain extent which is caused by his uprootedness. She is left alone after the death of Baumgartner. Her reaction on his death expresses the intensity of their relationship.

In Anita Desai's next novel, *Journey to Ithaca* (1994), female protagonists yearn for harmony and fulfillment in human relationship; whereas the male protagonists do not command themselves to the sensitive minds. The novel is a moving account of Matteo's nagging sense of alienation and his quest for spirituality. He is a portrait of loneliness and alienation. He is always lonely and ill at ease in the world in which he lives. Detachment and alienation are inherent in his temperament from the very beginning. An introvert by nature, he is neither free with anyone nor does he want to share his feelings with others. His answers to the questions of his parents are sullen and monosyllabic. His attempts to keep clear of others reveal his desire to escape from real life and his disgust with his immediate human context. Matteo is withdrawn from the school. His father engages a tutor, Fabian, to teach him English. But his sudden spring like motion on looking at the title of the book in his tutor's hands, *The Journey to the East* by Hermann Hesse is a turning point in Matteo's life.

In this simple, mesmerizing prose, Hermann Hesse tells of a journey, both geographic and spiritual. The participants traverse both space and time, encountering Noah's Ark in Zurich and Don Quixote at Bremgarten. The pilgrims' ultimate destination is the East, the 'Home of the Light,' where they expect to find spiritual renewal. Yet the harmony that ruled at the outset of the trip soon degenerates into open conflict. Each traveller finds the rest of the group intolerable and heads off in his own direction.

The tutor and Matteo become good friends as they understand each other's needs. Fabian, in fact, turns out to be his friend, philosopher and guide. But, Matteo's parents, especially mother, do not approve the closeness of Matteo and his tutor with the book. Matteo is sick of his parents' involvement in his present and future.

Sophie, a confident journalist, a very 'normal' only child of affluent parents enters the scene at this turn. Matteo and Sophie marry after a brief courtship and immediately set out for the shores of India. Matteo's alienation and escape from his parents and community affect his matrimonial equation also. Due to ideological polarities, Matteo does not find satisfaction and happiness with his wife Sophie. Their marriage undergoes the bitterness frustration- trauma soon. Sophie is unable to adjust to Matteo's way of life and thinking because he rates the world of Gurus as more real and true than the world of Sophie or

his parents. A down to earth, materialistic and practical Sophie wants to keep the primary ties strong. She had come to India with no intention to find Truth or God or guru. She came out like just another adventurer bent on enjoying the exotic beauties and delights of India. She had never shared Matteo's dreams about India. Like an ideal wife, she wants to lead a life full of care and understanding. She does not want that Matteo should stay away in *ashram* after he recovers from his illness. But Matteo gets infuriated with the suggestion. He thinks spirituality is something very easy to achieve.

Matteo moves from *ashram* to *ashram* and from one *Yogi* to another but the peace of mind and inner happiness elude him. All these futile ventures affect his health. Sophie takes pity on his condition and feels dismayed at his ridiculous predicament. Matteo's hunt is not yet over. From a magazine stall, he is able to get a book entitled *The Mother*. The photograph of the Mother becomes an epitome of eternal bliss to him. As Matteo reaches the Mother's Ashram, his joy knows no bound on hearing the Mother speak to the devotees.

For the first time since his departure from Italy, he experiences a sense of unity between the worldly and the divine. He falls under the spell of the holy Mother, an engaging old woman of unknown origin, wise, formidable, practical, highspirited and possessed of a mysterious spiritual attraction. He describes to Sophie what he experiences of unity of the spiritual with the physical, the dark with the light, the human with the natural.

Matteo is so deeply absorbed in the work of the *ashram* that there is little or no time left for family life. Sophie questions him as why home, family; a child is not enough for him! Sophie misunderstands Matteo's love and devotion for the Mother. Her comments about the Mother hurt him emotionally. He insulates himself to such an extent that he fails to achieve a close affectional relationship again with Sophie. She is constantly jealous of the Mother. Sophie was even keen to know if the Master and the Mother had a sexual relationship (*Journey to Ithaca*: P. 136-137). 'Did they marry?' she asks.

Her informant, Montu-da, is embarrassed. 'We are not speaking of – of ordinary beings, please. We are talking of supramenial beings and the union of the divine,' he replies. But Sophie persists. "Did they live as man and wife? . . . As man and wife - physically?" Montu-da flushes purple, takes out a large handkerchief to mop his face. 'As body and soul are one, yes,' he replies. This incident highlights Sophie's attitude towards Mother. Earlier, she taunts Matteo: 'What is she anyway? . . . Looks Indian, sounds Indian, but not Indian. Well, what is she then?'(P.131) Ultimately, Sophie walks out with their two small children, dumps them on Matteo's parents in Italy, and sets off to investigate the Mother's provenance and career, presumably intending to discredit her.

Matteo and Sophie have a basic difference in their respective approach to life: Matteo represents all that comes from the heart, while Sophie represents all that comes from the mind. Sophie resents the country, the people, the holy men and particularly the Mother, who, she believes, has snatched away her husband. Predictably, India that emerges to Sophie is harsh and pitiless : its skies brassy, its heat searing and the countryside nothing more or less than mud, screeching and fighting crows and cattle dragging themselves across the fields.

The people are rather ridiculous or simply obnoxious. Sophie and Matteo's departure from Italy to India, their apparent contradictions for the East-West encounters, their arrival at an *ashram* in Bihar and again their aversion towards the activities of the *ashram*, Matteo becomes perceptible when he begins to learn Sanskrit here but Sophie, on the other hand, feels suffocated and always complains to Matteo against the unsavoury atmosphere of the ashram.

From the very beginning of the book, differences between Matteo and Sophie is highlighted; even simple things like Matteo's long hair and Sophie's short 'manly' cut hair. Matteo is weak-willed and has surrendered himself to Indian spirituality. But Sophie is sceptical about it. The spiritually-inclined Matteo is running after *Gurus* 'to understand India, and the ways that is at the heart of India'. But, the materially disposed pragmatic, rational Sophie only "wants to go and eat shrimp, to go to Kashmir and live on a houseboat; and lie in the sun and shampoo her hair and eat omlets all day". In fact, Sophie constantly criticises both Matteo and things Indian. She could not accept the superstitious behaviour of Indian devotees like the woman in the novel who is going to the shrine to ask the saint to spare her eighth child (seven are already dead) who has fallen ill, rather than taking it to hospital.

In *Fasting, Feasting*, the tenth novel by Anita Desai, the claustrophobic feminine existentialism has been well exemplified through the character of Uma. After the attempts at arranged marriages have ended in humiliation and disaster, Uma has nothing to look forward to, only that she is at the beck and call of her parents. Aruna, Uma's younger sister, is married off in a jiffy. Being headstrong Aruna went against her parents' wishes in choosing a groom, and in insisting about the details of marriage preparations. (*Fasting, Feasting*: P. 101)

She was always on the lookout for perfection. She tended to ostracize her middle class parents and uncouth sister. She is a typical example of unsuccessful cultural hybridization. The portrayal of Anamika, Uma's cousin exemplifies a deep-rooted evil rampant in the traditional Indian society. Apparently she was happily married but her marital existence is an indescribable tragic affair. One day news arrives that Anamika was dead. She had poured kerosene oil over her body in the early hours and set herself ablaze.

All this happened after twenty-five years of married life. She was the first tender lamb of the family to be meekly surrendered at the altar of marriage. (*Fasting, Feasting*: 150) Mira-Masi is, perhaps, the only woman character who feels emancipated, though in a different sense. She has denounced the material world, pilgrimages were the sole source of comfort for her, and she knows the real value and meaning of freedom.

But, at the same time, Mira-Masi does not denounce her familial relationships. In fact, she relishes gossiping and carrying tales from one family to the other, yet she does not neglect the spiritual side of her life. Thus, by renouncing materialism, ignoring the covetous attraction of the material and the social commitments and yet not completely surrendering her interaction with the external world, she has gained inner freedom and tranquillity. (P.54)

In her eleventh and latest novel, *The Zigzag Way*, Anita Desai describes vividly the man-woman relationship of a miner family. Betty Jennings of Delabole, Cornwall, Liverpool had come to Mexico alongwith the Hammer family in the capacity of a maid of their children. In Mexico, she is proposed by Davey Rowse which she accepts and writes to her father informing this:

"Now Davey has come to fetch me and my bag is all packed again and we are to take the train north. We will go straight to the chapel from the boarding house and be married there. Davey says the chapel is just like the one at home and we will have his Cornish friends as witnesses." (*The Zigzag Way*: P.123) Betty did not say if what she saw awed or frightened or enchanted her but she did, in every line, express her trust in Davey and her joy in being with him. In a letter to Miss Frances at the chapel school in Cornwall, Betty describes her new home in detail :

"We have moved into our own home in a row on the hillside amongst the other miner's cottages. They are not so unlike the ones at home in Cornwall, except they have red-tiled roofs and the walls are as

coloured as a rainbow . . . there is a stone trough for washing in, and along the wall are trees with lemons and oranges and a dark fruit like a pear that they call the *avvycado*. The kitchen is quite small and a bit dark, but Davey has put in all the shelves I need and pretty painted tiles around the sink so it is a treat to do the dishes here.” (P.125)

Those who read Betty's letters might have thought her as a child playing at keeping house, but that was because there were aspects of her life she omitted to mention. She did not write of watching the miners' harsh lives, the drunken brawls in town or, on Sundays, the miners' revellery with the money they had made, spending it at cock-fights and in the taverns for drinking uncontrollably. There were aspects of their world that were too strange to be conveyed to those at home.

To conclude from the above study of Anita Desai's novels is that family and familial relationship play a very important part in her imaginary world; but more often the relationships are not harmonious. Husband and wife alienation in her novels is the result of the hyper-sensitive nature of her women and their inability to establish a point of contact with their partner. Her women are in eternal quest for meaningful life.

Anita Desai never shows a trace of biased or prejudiced outlook in this inner struggle between husband and wife. Her women either yield to or survive the existential problems within the family. Her character Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is an improvement over Maya in *Cry The Peacock* and Monisha in *Voice In The City* is that she finds a settlement a meeting point between Maya's involvement and Monisha's noninvolvement and her realisation that there is no freedom and fulfillment without enchantment. In her novels, on one side, one finds Sarah *Bye Bye Black Bird*, who, in spite of being an alien woman; understands her husband, his family and country which she would accept one's in India; on the other hand, one finds Sarla in *In Custody*, though the wife of Hindi lecturer has absolutely no interest in literature or her husband's profession.

It can be concluded that Anita Desai has explored different aspects of feminine psyche and its effect on the human relationship and she has definitely given a new depth and meaning to the theme of man-woman relationship in her novels. The reader also experiences the reality in this man-dominated society where women are treated as mere commodities.

Chapter - III

Familial relationship in the contemporary Indian society

Anita Desai has tried to present her themes organically with fitting adjustments and adaptations in spheres of style and point of view. The result is the comparative superiority, which is clearly visible in her novel, over other Indian women novelists writing in English.

In this chapter woman in relation to her family, assuming different roles has been discussed. Anita Desai has explored different aspects of familial relationships. It is but natural for a writer like her to make family the centre of her novels; and this applies to her almost every novel, although the degree may vary. Her novels focus on the position of woman in India.

Power relation between man and woman, and the relationship between two women of the same household, are intertwined with the structures of social hierarchy, such as, class and caste. Familial relations are also characterized by hierarchy of age. Group and family identity is emphasized in the Indian culture. Family ties are further complicated by the tradition of extended family.

Since group identity is given priority, battered women may hesitate to make decisions to end abusive relationships before they consider not only their parent's wishes, but those of their grandparents and other significant relatives. Arranged marriage is still a norm in these cultures. The relationship between the families, separation, divorce and remarriage may not be considered for fear of shaming and dishonoring the family. In addition, there may be pressure from the family to reconcile and continue living with the batterer.

Within Indian families, there are strict rules about privacy, intended to maintain family honour. Family matters are not shared with individuals outside the family. Neighbours and friends may, however, gain the status of relatives by establishing kinship with a family:

“Man and wife do not, as a rule, live together; they only breakfast together, dine together, and sleep in the same room. In most cases the woman knows nothing of her working life (he calls it her home life)” (Shaw: “The Complete Prefaces of Bernad Shaw” P. 11)

Relationships between women are also explored in these connections, sometimes in remembrance between women of different generations, also presented is a realistic range of the difficulties between mothers and daughters, and particularly between mother-in-laws and daughters-in-law, that is a central theme in Indian popular culture. Almost all of the stories reflect on the conflict between doing what satisfies oneself and carrying out one's obligations to others, a theme which can be expected to become more prominent in Indian culture as more women become educated and politically aware. The frustrations between women's desires for more autonomy and the restrictions imposed by family relationship are experienced more intensely by elite women because of their education.

For many in the West, gender roles in Indian society is a paradox : on the one hand, devotion to a Mother Goddess, the election of a woman Prime Minister; and on the other hand, numerous limits on women's autonomy and empowerment. But the informal habits women often display in exclusively female surroundings vary ill at ease.

“We recommend that women should stop delivering children altogether because conception stands in the way of women enjoying personal freedom”. (Ramaswamy: “On Women’s Rights” P.45)

The fear of being isolated from the family is one of the greatest barriers for Indian women to overcome. Their fear of loneliness and isolation keeps them tied to abusive relationships. The absence of a protective support system composed of family, friends and neighbours increases women's social isolation. It also intensifies their dependency on the abusive relationship. In addition, many women are forbidden by their husbands to contact friends and family or to develop friendship. They may be denied access to postage, money, telephones and transportation.

Indian womanhood has to be explored, experienced and under-stood in all its vicissitudes, multiplicities, contradictions and complexities. Indian woman's journey from the cradle to the tomb passes through different stages, playing familiar roles. Yet she remains an enigma. Misfortunes, loss, and social sanctions restrict her freedom, but they can never destroy the spirit within. This elevated outlook is the result of her heroic struggle and mute suffering. She stands as the symbol of all encompassing, loving and forgiving mother figure. Kate Millett points out :

“Under patriarchy, the female did not herself develop the symbols by which she is described. As both the primitive and the civilized worlds are male worlds, the ideas which shaped culture, in regard to the female, were also of male design. The image of woman, as we know it, is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs. These needs spring from a fear of the "Otherness" of woman. Yet this notion itself presupposes that patriarchy has already been established and the male has already set

himself as the human norm, the subject and reference to which the female is 'other' or 'alien'". (Millet: "Sexual Politics" P.46-47)

Due to all these reasons woman feels choking. She finds herself alone and aloof. This feeling takes the form of alienation.

In earlier times, it was believed to be a mental illness, as Marx has described it as a "dehumanization of man and his estrangement from other fellow men". For Erich Fromm, the term "meant a mode of experience in which a person experiences himself as an alien" (Fromm: P. 122)

Broadly, one can say that it is man's estrangement from someone, something with which he was attached to his family, his group, his society and even his own self. Alienation, loneliness, isolation, withdrawal and lack of communication, in some ways, these problems are interrelated or exist as 'a corollary of disruption of good human relationship.' (Srivastava: "Perspectives On Anita Desai" xxvii) "The twentieth century has been termed as the 'Age of Anxiety' and the 'Age of Alienation' by some." (Murchland: "The Age Of Alienation" P. 28)

Now man has become more conscious of his role and responsibility and the psychological impact on his life. He is engulfed with the feelings of loneliness, doubt, value conflict etc. which are spreading like an epidemic. Now man is in a state of bewilderment as the old traditional values are breaking apart and he himself lacks faith; and the truth is that he cannot rely on faith alone. The modern man is doomed to suffer the ills of the age in the form of generation gap, the compartmentalization of life and the meaninglessness of life. This condition is aggravated by the 'crisis of the present'. Edmund Fuller suggests,

"In our age, man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but from inner problems . . . a conviction of isolation, randomness and meaninglessness in his way of existence." (Fuller: "Man In Modern Fiction" P. 3)

There is an atmosphere of uncertainty and the modern man is languishing in confusion, frustration, disintegration, disillusionment and alienation. He becomes restless in search for peace and tranquillity. There is a gap in what the individual aspires for and what he achieves, what he really is and what he would like to be taken for. This leaves his life crumpled. As Jasbir Jain puts it,

"Alienation, a main concern of modernism, is an urban phenomenon; and at odds with the Indian belief in religion, the social life style of a joint family and the absence of the concept of privacy. Alienation is linked with the growth of individualism and with Western thinking". (Jain: "The Plural Tradition" P. 66)

There are several inter-related situations responsible for this condition of modern man, of which some are - powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement. Melvin Seeman is of the view that these situations 'can be profitably applied in conjunction with one another in the analysis of given state of affairs.' (Melvin: 789) The tensions and anxieties of being modern in a traditional society is the area of exploration of Anita Desai. She has been concentrating on the exploration of the troubled sensibility, a typical modern Indian phenomenon. Her main concern is the depiction of psychic state of her protagonists. Dr. N.R. Gopal is of the view that Anita Desai's themes are based on existentialist philosophy:

"Its emphasis on the alienation of man from an 'absurd' world and his consequent estrangement from 'normal' society and his recognition of the world as negative and meaningless - presents the sensitive individual, fragmented and spiritually destroyed by the particular social conditions of life, a life complex enough to make him obsessed". (Gopal: 5)

The favourite subject of Anita Desai, which she has treated in almost all her novels, seems to be alienation. She writes,

“all human relationships are inadequate . . . basically everyone is solitary. I think involvement in human relationships in this world invariably leads to disaster.” (*Cry, the Peacock*: p. 36)

There are several kinds of alienation. We can broadly divide them into two kinds – ‘Social alienation’ and ‘Self alienation’. ‘Social alienation’ is a result of breaking-off or a seeming breaking-off a relation between an individual and society. ‘Self alienation’ is loss of contact of an individual with himself, with his own desires. This alienation has worse effect on the individual, of being emotionally and spiritually alone. The inner yearning of the lonely ones for understanding and affection is a recurrent theme in the novels of Anita Desai.

One finds both kinds of alienations in her novels, but mainly 'self-alienation'. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, Nirode and Monisha in *Voices In The City*, Nanda Kaul in *Fire on The Mountain*, Sita in *Where shall we Go This Summer ?*, Sarah in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* and Sarla and Deven in *In Custody*, all are suffering from one or the other kind of loneliness. Anita Desai has described their physical as well as mental trauma. She has dwelled deep into the minds of these characters to bring out their sufferings. These people suffer from estrangement, not from lack of company, but companion-ship. They find themselves alone in the world in which they are unable to establish close, satisfying social affinities.

Characters like Maya and Sita suffer as they do not see things as a whole; and as a result, disrupt their relationship with others. They feel pathetically and tragically alone in a world which they do not understand; and are not understood by them. It has a horrifying effect on them. Characters like Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* lose their mental balance; whereas Sita in ‘*Where shall we . . .*’, a more balanced person, accepts the changes in the world around her and returns back to her home. Desai has clearly shows that the moments of crisis in life are linked with the defense mechanism of the body.

However, there is a complex and confused attitude towards the ‘self’ and also in relation to male, resulting from a nagging sense of insecurity and trying hard to rediscover the logic of identity in dominance. Monisha, Sita and Nanda Kaul, all are raising the question of patriarchal power structure. Maya, from her childhood, regards the world as ‘a toy, especially made for her, painted in her favourite colours and set to dance to her favourite tunes.’(P.36) Monisha, in her own estimation, is like ‘the lost princess of the fairy tales who sat somewhere in the deepest shadows of this forest, silent and unattainable.’(*Voice in the City*: 200) Sita, despite her maturity, leads "a lulled life, half-conscious, dream-like."(*Where shall we . . .* : P.26) Nanda Kaul, too, knew it well that ‘Fantasy and fairy tales had their place in her life.’(*Fire on the Mountain*: P.97)

Even in her old age she is seen ‘reconstructing block by block of the old castle of childhood.’(*Fire on the Mountain*: P.116) Now, people who break away from what is real and rational and feel alienated, shunning reality and escape into a dream world, do give way to tragic consequences. A trait in all major women characters of Anita Desai is their longing to be free of all kinds of social and familial involvement.

One recalls, Simone de Beauvoir's caution that ‘the independent woman is one who, like men, can move from immanence to transcendence in her public life activities and avoid sadomasochistic relationships in her personal life.’ (Beauvoir: “*The Second Sex*” P.670-672) The marginalization, insecurity and segregation experienced by women has been effectively depicted by women writers in the Indo-Anglian tradition. Anita Desai, in her novels, portrays the numerous facets of the woman's experience, emphasizing in particular, the trials and tribulations of being a woman in a rigid patriarchal culture.

Anita Desai has tried to present her themes organically with appropriate adjustments and adaptations in spheres of style and point of view. The result is the comparative superiority over other Indian women novelists writing in English. In her very first novel '*Cry the Peacock*' one finds the heroine Maya in several roles, discharging different familial duties. She is a pampered child who has been brought up in a fairy world, ill-equipped to cope with reality. Things become all the worse when she is married to a down-to-earth rational husband. She is a motherless child and that is why she does not grow into a balanced personality. Since she is childless herself, her predicament becomes all the more acute. One sees her in the role of a wife, daughter, sister and sister-in-law. In this novel also we find something amiss in familial relationship, especially with her in-laws. With a busy husband, uninterested in her feelings and emotions, she is totally out of tune with her surroundings. Being childless, she is in dire need of the cosy refuge of familial relationship, but, unfortunately, everyone is too preoccupied to spare time for her. Her mother-in-law, who visits her and whom she wants to stay back to alleviate her lonely existence, refuses to do so. She has her own varied excuses. She is a social worker involved in several activities of social service and therefore she says:

'How can I, child? It is impossible'. (*Cry the Peacock*: 163)

Being motherless, she wants a mother figure which is readily available in her mother-in-law. She desires for the company of her mother-in-law and sister-in-law:

"If they stayed a while, they might help me, as my own father could not, by teaching me some of that marvelous indifference to everything that was not vital, immediate and present, I did not know how they could do this but somehow it had to be done". (p. 162)

In spite of her refusal to stay back, Maya is unable to forget her mother-in-law, in whom she finds mother substitute. But this relationship becomes pathetic as it is also one-sided. Maya craves for maternal tenderness:

"And yet I yearned for her to hold me to her bosom. I could not remember my own mother at all. My throat began to swell with unbearable self pity. I would cry, I knew it, in a while, and dreaded it, in their sane presence, 'Please', I whispered". (P.163)

If Maya's marital life is unhappy, her sister-in-law's marriage is also on the rocks. She wants to seek divorce from her husband, and that is why, she has come to her brother Gautama who is a lawyer. But, subscribing to the old values, he doesn't approve of the idea of divorce and feels filing a divorce petition too for him:

... "What does she take me for - one of those two rupee lawyers that squat under the banyan tree outside the courts ... I haven't time to waste on a case like hers the mess she makes by thing too bossy and self-willed and bullying". (P.165)

Father-daughter relationship is the leitmotif of the novel. Maya suffers from father-fixation. She marries Gautama who is much older and a friend of her father. Her neurosis is further heightened by her awareness of her horoscope, and the macabre prediction of the albino astrologer, which leads to her killing Gautama and her committing suicide. In spite of her neurosis, Maya commands sympathy of the readers because she reminds one of Nora of "A Doll's House":

"... our home's been nothing but a playpen. I've been your doll wife here, just as at home, I was Papa's doll child" ... (Ibsen: "Four Major Plays" P. 110)

Anita Desai's second novel, *Voice in the City* (1965), is very much concerned with familial relationship. The novel is more about familial relationship gone sour rather than about fulfilling relationship. Although, the title may make one feel that the novel is about the city of Calcutta, and certainly the city

has great influence on different characters, but the "Voices" in the title refers to the people. The familial relationships shown in the novel are of two types:

- (i) That of one's own family and parents and the family of in-laws; and
- (ii) The second category applies to Monisha, who is married to a middle-class *bhadra* family, socially respectable, but a plebeian family. Monisha is once again an ill-matched character.

Voice in the city presents an individual's fight against the self and the consequent defeat of the individual. This is depicted by the novelist through two main characters - Nirode and Monisha. Both the characters have the similarity of being non-involved with the people and the surroundings. They suffer on account of forced detachment and non-involvement. Amla, the youngest sister, is different from them. She is full of vitality and is involved with everything around her. Nirode, around whom the novel is woven, is an angry young man. He is a rebel, always critical, leading a life of penury and misery. In contrast, Arun, the younger brother, is bright and intelligent, encouraged by parents and adored by sister. He goes abroad for higher studies.

As the novel begins, the novelist portrays the hatred and envy in Nirode for his brother. Nirode deliberately leads the life of a middle-level journalist, whose job is to cut out long strips of news-papers and paste and file them, occasionally venturing out to verify a dull fact in some airless office room. He feels that life has been unfair to him. His life is presented as a succession of failures from bringing out a magazine called Voice, to writing a play, opening a bookstall and even selling spurious antique art pieces. He had the intensity but lacked the unwavering spirit of either a pilgrim or a crusader.

He begins to doubt his efforts, which in turn, lead on to his negative thinking and attitudes. He wants to pursue failure, for he feels that happiness does not lead anywhere. He wishes to go beyond happiness and sufferings. His working in the play proves to be the most harrowing experience. He is infuriated when the play is rejected. He tells his sister:

"I have done with everything now, Even that grinning, smirking, disastrous old witch-out ... I have sealed my ears and my mouth, only my eyes are open - but just a slit. It's blessedly peaceful". (*Voice of the City: 130*)

He grows a protective shell of indifference around himself. He becomes more and wearier of contact. "The intricacies of relationship such as approach, recompense, and obligation - these aroused in him violent distaste and kept him hovering on the fringe of the world". (P. 78) He has also been compared to a broken bird in a aviary. Monisha finds him "shrunken, etiolated wasted things". (Rao "The Novels Of Mrs. Anita Desai" P. 24) Nirode is a man to whom aloneness alone matters. He tells David, the Irishman, that, "you and I will always be travellers, David, and we'll always travel alone". (*Voice of the City: P.91*) In the novel, though we feel that Nirode is close to Monisha and cares for her but he is alienated from his mother. There is suggestion that the mother, after becoming a widow, is well-off and living in Kalimpong, looking after her estate; has an affair with a retired military officer. This makes Nirode furious.

He does not even bother to open her letters. There is also a suggestion of mother-fixation. As a child he adored his mother. Now his love turns into an obsession that his mother is having an affair. He grows jealous of his rival and is completely alienated from his mother:

"To think that all through he had despised his father and adored his mother only to turn after his father's death, to have pity for him and loathing of that same, unchanged mother - this moved him now". (P. 66)

The tragedy of Nirode is that he is unable to get over this and this is the chief reason for his morbidity. He cuts himself from his family. He wants to have no relation with his mother or anything related to her.

He even rejects the monetary help offered by his mother and refuses to sign on the bank notes. It symbolises his utter disgust with his relation to his mother:

“Tell her to go, shove it up to that old major of hers, all her stinking cheques . . . I'm done with signing my name, believing my name or having a name.(P. 138)

Nirode is unable to release himself from Oedipus complex till the end when his mother comes to Calcutta, on hearing of Monisha's death. He is unable to take his eyes off her and watches her petrified; "She is still beautiful, he thought with fear . . . she is still beautiful, he repeated; and her beauty compelled him to embrace her."(*Voice of the City*: 256) He identifies her with Kali, a goddess and a demon; a symbol of destruction.

Anita Desai has portrayed the woman psyche through the character of Monisha. Monisha is similar to Maya (of *Cry, the Peacock*) in the sense that she is also childless, sensitive and a victim of ill-matched marriage. Maya feels lonely in her family because there is no one except her husband; Monisha is lonely because there are too many people in her family, it being a joint family.

She feels lonely and the atmosphere is stifling to her. She communicates herself through her diary as she is surrounded by an atmosphere of privacy. Her only other means of communication of her feelings and ideas is Nirode. There is no one, including her husband, Jiban, in her in-law's place to understand her. She longs for her mother's love and the company of her brother. She feels oppressed in the domestic environment of this house as in a typical Bengali family.

The daughter-in-law's only job is supposed to be cooking, cutting vegetables, serving food and brushing small children's hair. In a many-headed family Monisha finds it impossible to relate to her role as a daughter-in-law in this traditional joint family. The lack of refinement in the members of the family makes it difficult for her to adjust as she is sensitive and belongs to an educated family. All her ambitions, talent and potentialities are reduced to be a mere housewife and she can do nothing beyond this mundane household chores. The apt description of a 'bahu' is outlined in Monisha's diary:

“I think of generations of Bengali women, hidden behind the barred windows of half dark rooms, spending centuries in washing clothes, kneading dough and murmuring aloud verses from Bhagwad Gita and the Ramayana, in the dim lights of sooty lamps. Lives spent in waiting for nothing, waiting on men, self-centred and indifferent and hungry and demanding and critical; waiting for death and dying misunderstood, always behind bars, those terrifying black bars that shut us in, in the old city”.(*Voice of the City*: 120-121)

In this connection Shanta Acharya's view are very noteworthy:

“One of the salient features of her work is the supreme privacy of the self. What one constantly encounters is the violation of this sacred space of the self. As in self-defence, the self turns inwards, and just when it seems to have perfected the art of survival, the horror of it looms through the mask. This self-containment, so attractive a proposition, is actually untenable. Monisha reacts to this violation of her most private self”. (Acharya: 'Problem Of Self In The Novels Of Anita Desai' P.55)

Monisha has no privacy in the house. Even though she has a room of her own, yet, metaphorically she hasn't, for, the women of the family never bother that she might need some privacy. They always, without hesitation, barge into her room and discussing about her saris and her blocked fallopian tubes. She is again and again reminded of her sterility. Her problem is how to be herself in a room of her own. She records in a diary,

“Alone, I could work better and I should feel more whole”. (*Voice of the City*: P 115)

There is nothing common between her and her husband, Jiban, who leads a contented, monotonous life. Monisha is unable to lesson her suffering and the pangs of anguish, as she does not have total faith in religion, as she records in her diary:

“If I had religious faith, I could easily renounce all this. But I have no faith, no alternative to my confused despair. There is nothing I can give myself and so I must stay. The family here and their surroundings tell me such a life cannot be lived - a life dedicated to nothing, that his husk is a protection from death”. (P 125-126)

She is wounded when she is unjustly accused of theft by her mother-in-law and others, and more so, when her husband, Jiban, doesn't bother to ask her. She becomes 'an unshelled snail; totally alienated herself from everyone'. She is looked upon as an outsider by Jiban also. Her agonized self is tormented and she asks:

“Is this what life is then, my life ? Only a conundrum that I shall breed over for ever with passion and pain, never to arrive at a solution?” (P. 124-125) She burns herself to death, she wants to be totally submerged in darkness, beyond sleep:

“Leave me together the stars, frosty and distant and cool. Leave me together and then to reject them. Queenly I'll have only the darkness. Only the dark spaces between the stars, for, they are the only things on the earth that can comfort me, rub a balm into my wounds, into my throbbing head, and bring me this coolness this stillness, this interval of peace.” (P.138)

Thus one finds that Monisha is unable to relate herself meaningfully to outer reality due to her hypersensitivity. She fails bitterly to combine her personal freedom, her domestic and social duties. She remains 'an exile', an alien in her family, and she prefers non-existence to a mean-ingless existence.

In the novel, one sees that other characters are also suffering from isolation and lack of communication. The youngest sister, Amla, is also oppressed by the evil effects of the city. She is unable to understand her brother and sister, and regrets her decision of coming to Calcutta. Her initial interest in the artist Dharma also wanes away as she comes to know the truth about him and the hollowness of their relationship.

Another very important character around whom the novel revolves is the mother. She has alienated herself physically as well as mentally from her children. The mother aptly describes the complete alienation of her daughter:

“Such detailed rot about her impossible family as though she had actually immersed herself in it or as though it were a theatre to her, I cannot really tell”. (P.207)

The unreality of her situation is understood by the mother, for she too, in her turn, has perpetuated “the sin of having left home . . . for having sold it and come to live alone in this secluded paradise which seems to have no channel of communication” with her children’s “very real and rough lives in the city, away from me”.(P. 207-08)

Nirode feels overwhelmed by his mother's ever-inspiring grace and dignity as well as her supremely self-confident detachment. In the end, an attempt for their reunion also fails.

Voice of the City is about the characters of a wrecked family where all are suffering from the strains of loneliness. The novelist has used brilliant images and symbols to highlight the sense of loneliness of the characters. She has used bird images to bring into focus the entrapped conditions of these characters. The reference to bird cages, barred windows, closed rooms and closed containers describe the bleak conditions they live in.

Anita Desai's third novel, *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971) presents the story of Sarah. If Maya (of *Cry, the Peacock*) suffers because of psychological alienation, Sarah suffers because of cultural alienation. The novel portrays the problems of Indian immigrants in London. The title refers to England's bidding farewell to an Indian - a "blackbird". One is reminded of Kipling's view that the "*East is East and the West is West, and never the twain shall meet*".

What is more significant, from a feminist perspective, is that East or West, woman is the underdog and the novel underscores this aspect as well. The novel, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, deals with the theme of East-west encounter. The novel covers numerous aspects of this encounter between the British and the Asiatic immigrants in England, including the most intimate and demanding encounter - marriage. The novel centers around three characters, viz. Adit, Dev and Sarah. Among these three characters, Sarah plays a vital role in the novel. She is an English lady, married to Adit Sen, an Indian immigrant.

By marrying an Indian immigrant Sarah faces cultural crisis. Through a few flash-backs, the readers are told about the love affair of Adit Sen with Sarah. Christine Longford, a friend of Adit, introduces Sarah to Adit in a cocktail party. Even in the first meeting, Sarah's shyness attracts him and he chooses Sarah for company because:

“you are like Bengali girl Bengali women are like that, reserved, quiet. May be you were one in your previous life. But you are improving on it - you are so much prettiest”. (*Bye-Bye Blackbird*: P.73)

Except this, nothing is known about their love affair. After their marriage, they settle down in Clapham, a small city. Adit and Sarah have to adjust much, because of their different cultures. To satisfy Adit, Sarah cooks Indian food. But the typical Indian male-chauvinist in Adit finds pleasure in ill-treating Sarah:

“These English wives are quite manageable really, you know. Not as fierce as they look, very quiet and hard working as long as you treat them right, and roar at them regularly, once or twice a week.” (P. 29)

Sarah, as a typical submissive wife, on the other hand, always speaks good of her husband. She pretends that she is treated nicely by her husband. When Sarah's mother asks about her cooking, she says: “Adit still does most of it”.(P. 133)

The rituals and beliefs of the one mean nothing to the other, which makes each of them groan in pain at the lack of regard shown by the other, for what each holds dear. In the course of time, Sarah completely alienates herself from the public and private life. In the school where she works, she avoids conversation with her colleagues, who often discuss her married life. Her colleagues wonder how she is able to adjust with an Indian husband. She avoids their probing questions. She loves India. She knows something about India through the pictures of the Indian stamps. She slowly changes herself so that she can adjust with Adit in all matters.

She stops cooking English food and learns to cook Indian food. After marrying Adit Sen, Sarah feels that she is nameless:

“She had so little command over these two charades she played each day, one in the morning at the school and one in the evening at home, that she could not even tell with how much sincerity she played one role as the other. They were roles - and when she was not playing them, she was nobody. Her face was only a mask, her body only a costume . . . staring out of the window at the chimney-pots and the clouds, she wondered if Sarah has any existence at all, and then she wondered, with great sadness, if she would ever be allowed to step off the stage, leave the theatre, and enter the real world - whether English or Indian, she did not care, she wanted only its sincerity, its truth. (*Bye-Bye Blackbird*: P. 34-35)

As the 'other' Sarah sacrifices a lot, she is treated like the "other" by Adit. Seema Jena looks at this predicament of Sarah from a wider perspective:

"Anita Desai draws our attention to the annihilation of self that marriage involves, for a female". (Jena "Voice and Vision of Anita Desai" P. 47)

Adit, naturally, is a typical male-chauvinist. He never cares for his wife and her sentiments. Almost all the decisions in their family life are taken by Adit without consulting Sarah. He decides to return to India so that 'My son will be born in India.' (*Bye-Bye Blackbird*: 204) Sarah is a passive victim, 'the other' in the hands of the male-chauvinistic, Adit. Ironically, when Adit prepares himself and Sarah to leave England, Sarah gets a promotion. When Sarah informs Adit about it, Adit gets angry and accuses Sarah that she does not want to leave England; whereas she has already decided not to accept the promotion. The discussion leads to a confrontation and Sarah begins to weep.

She seems to be more an Indian wife than an English woman. Usha Bande explains the sources of Sarah's alienation:

"Sarah in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* is a case of both social and psychological alienation. The social factor stems from her marriage to an Indian settled in England; her psychological trouble emanates from her pride system". (Bande: "The Novels Of Anita Desai" P. 119)

Sarah's existentialist dilemma reaches its peak at the end of the novel. Her inner conflict is the result of three problems:

"..... one pursuing Adit on his voyage to the East; the second, holding back to cradle and comfort the uneasy, unborn child; and the third, tackling the exigencies of a career that had surprisingly revealed a future". (*Bye-Bye Blackbird*: P. 207)

After her marriage, she has sacrificed many things to buy peace in her family life. Now she has to say good bye to England itself, where she has lived for twenty-four years. The end of the novel suggests a peaceful conclusion:

"Sarah and Adit held hands, their room looks like a flooded river, drowning all that had been English in it." (P.224)

In a man-woman relationship, there would always be a need for sacrifice and surrender. But the paradox is, in reality, it is always the woman who does so. Hari Mohan Prasad compares Sarah to a volcano:

"Sarah's character has more power. In her, there is areal split, a real dilemma, a real suffering; but she triumphs over all these. She is a silent volcano, not dead, yet not bursting". (Prasad: 22)

The irony is, the volcano never bursts in the novel. If Maya suffers from psychological alienation and Sarah from cultural alienation, the sense of alienation experienced by Sita, in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is difficult to explain. Like most of Anita Desai's novel in this novel also the story moves around a family. The story is of Raman, his wife Sita, and four children. The fifth child yet to be born, yet plays an important role in the story. As a matter of fact, the whole story is occasioned by the fifth pregnancy of Sita.

Like many of her heroines, Sita's childhood plays an important role in shaping her personality. Her childhood was unusual in the sense that her mother had deserted the family and the father, a freedom-fighter and social worker, was too busy to take care of his children. She lived a life of austerity with limited material comforts, and yet she enjoyed the Arcadian life on the island of Manori in her father's house before her marriage. After the death of her father she was married to Raman, the son of her father's friend Deedar. Deedar arranged this marriage more out of pity than for love to the expectations of Sita. Initially Sita lives in Raman's joint family which is willing to 'accept even such an outrageous

outsider' like Sita. But because of Sita's haughty, supercilious, unadjusting nature, Raman decides to live separately with his family in a flat. He tries to make Sita happy but she is hard to please and she is always seething with anger, discontent and apathy. When Sita becomes pregnant for the fifth time, it is an ordeal for her, and she does not want to deliver the child. Manori island seems to her the enchanted island of miracles and she decides to go there, against the sane advice of Raman, along with her two children, Menaka and Karan, even during her advanced stage of pregnancy.

On the island she expects a miracle that never comes about because miracles hardly ever take place in real life. They only exist in the fantasy world of children. Actually, her going to the island is symbolically her retrogression to childhood. On the island she broods over her past, fantasizing over her childhood and her father who was a god to illiterate islanders. The children get annoyed and are fed up with the primitive life on the island and Menaka asks her father to take them back to Bombay. Raman comes and takes the family away though Sita goes only grudgingly.

However, by the end of the novel, revelation comes to Sita and she accepts the world of reality and becomes mentally prepared for the delivery of her child. Thus the novel ends establishing victory of reason over fantasy. In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* one can see two kinds of familial relationships regarding the heroine Sita. Sita's father may not have been a Rai Shaheb pampering the child, yet her father carried for her magical aura around her. He was a freedom fighter whose wife had deserted him, living somewhere in Benares and Sita was brought up in an atmosphere which cannot be strictly called a family. We have vague suggestions of incest between Sita's father and Rekha, her step-sister. The suggestion of incest is not very clear, still, one can read between the lines :

“But her father ... to quite clearly for it was always the big girl's heavy shoulders that he fondled, her face that he scanned as she sat singing across the room from him ‘sister should be a little alike’ ... ‘But you are not sisters,’ ... ‘She is only your step-sister’... ‘But his words had dropped on her round shoulders’... Perhaps because she never found him alone – always with Rekha, sitting at his side, or in the centre of a ring of young, fanatic, brilliant-eyed *chelas* who also wore homespun, walked barefoot, and respected, admired and adored him. She told herself she could never approach him to ask of such private and, somehow, secret matters. As an adult, later, she asked herself, had there been no opportunity ever of talking alone to him? Ah, she remembered, with an instinctive shrinking from the shock and the pain, a few strange moments, still unexplained. (*Where Shall We Go This Summer*: P.23)

The novel also has the theme of joint family system, so typical of India. Because of stubborn nature of Sita, she refuses to adjust herself to her husband's family. Her husband, who is a practical man, in order to avoid daily bickering and tension, moves into a flat. Sita's in-laws are accommodating and considerate, but she takes perverse delight in teasing them. In her in-law's family nobody smokes openly but, out of spite, she starts smoking before the family. Her smoking is symbolic of her unconscious desire to harm the foetus she is carrying. Sita is childish and petulant. She is worse than Maya. At least Maya has reasons to be dissatisfied; but here is a woman who lives in her own world of fantasy, putting all her family members to trouble. By the end of the novel she consents to rational advice and comes back to Bombay to deliver the baby.

In Sita's case too it is a case of bad familial relationship. Ramchandra Rao studies the novel as a dramatisation of ‘the conflict between two irreconcilable temperaments, of two diametrically opposed attitudes towards life’. He concludes by saying:

“The tragedy in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* arises out of the inability of the characters to connect the prose and the passion in their lives. They have lived only in fragments. The novel ends with a

defeated and despondent Sita, unable to rediscover the passion of life and deciding to accept the prose of life. But the book ends with the implicit comment that this need not have been the only ending. It could have turned out otherwise. (Rao: P. 24)

Thus Rao finds that *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is an open ended novel. This is the novelist's device of not being dogmatic or committed towards a conclusion, rather giving the reader a scope for his own reading and conclusion. M. K. Naik comments on Sita and the structure of the novel:

“*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) marks a return to the autonomous world of inner reality. Sita, the main character here, appears to be less morbid than Maya after four children. The cruelty and callousness of urban life stifles her and when she is with child again, she panics at the thought of bringing a new, fragile being into this harsh world; and runs away to a small island, which has childhood association for her; but finally allows her husband to persuade her to return. The novel is tightly structured and the island is an evocative symbol of a lost paradise, but Sita's sudden capitulation at the end comes as an anticlimax. (Naik: “A History Of Indian English Literature” P. 25)

The novel highlights the fact that Sita was always a loner. She did not enjoy the company of her father, brother, sister or her children. This pitiable predicament of Sita is the *leit motif* of the novel.

Anita Desai's another novel *Fire on the Mountain* was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for 1978; and thus, it brought recognition to the novelist. The novel which also won the Royal society Award has a very thin plot. In ancient India, polygamy was quite prevalent and was accepted by the society in a normal way. The *Shastras* too described the duties of co-wives, thereby, lending credence to the practice. In modern times, however, bigamy is a crime. But man, being polygamous by nature, at times carries on lifelong relationship with the other woman. In *Fire on the Mountain*, Prof. Kaul, the Vice-Chancellor and husband of Nanda Kaul, carries on a love affair with Miss David, the arithmetic teacher. But, as she was a Christian, he could not dare break social code and marry her.

After his death, his widow, Nand Kaul, is compelled both by choice and circumstances to live in a secluded old bungalow 'Carignano' in Kasauli, fiercely guarding her seclusion and privacy. But her insulated life is stirred by the arrival of her great grand-daughter, Raka, a girl of seven or eight years, an introvert and sensitive like Nanda herself. Raka is very much confined to her own-self, resenting any intimacy with Nanda. She busies herself with rambling through deserted hills and gorges. She is especially attracted towards a burnt house and is preoccupied with the idea of a forest fire.

A childhood friend of Nanda, Ila Das, who has fallen on bad days, is a social worker in a nearby village. She comes to tea with Nanda one afternoon. They have long chat about their early days, their experiences as a social worker, and as the Vice-Chancellor's wife respectively. Ila Das now lives in penury. On her way back it gets dark and near her village, Preet Singh, who was dissuaded by her not to marry his minor daughter with an old man, is waiting in ambush.

Angered by Ila Das's opposition to the marriage, he strangulates her and later rapes her. Nanda is informed telephonically about the outrage by the police inspector. She is still to digest this shocking news when Raka comes to say that she has set the forest on fire. And this is the end of the novel. Anita Desai excels in the poetic portrayal of the locale with charred trees, desolate landscape, dusty road, rain and the like. The novel is full of animal and nature imagery.

Like Lotte, Nanda too could not legally belong to the family and she is no better than a kept. In this case the blame goes to the cowardice of Prof. Kaul who just gave lip service to marital life. Outwardly, the Kauls were an ideal couple to university community, but from inside, it was all empty. The whole social role and socialising was a mere sham:

“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.” (*Fire on the Mountain*: P.26)

Because of her husband's cowardice and selfishness, Nanda Kaul had to suffer. She readily discharges her duty towards the family, but in doing so, loses her individuality and identity, like Sita of *Where Shall We Go This Summer ?*, although to a lesser degree. Nanda Kaul is not very happy in coping with the large family and unending stream of guests.

‘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 was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing.’ (P.145)

She is so busy raising the family and discharging the duties of a mother, a housewife and a hostess that in the evening of her life she is happy in her seclusion, even though it is partly voluntary and partly circumstantial. When the news of her grand-daughter Raka's arrival comes, she hates being disturbed by the arrival of the uninvited guest. It doesn't matter that the person coming is her own flesh and blood. When she is looking back at her life we find that through and through she is only pretending, wearing a persona, acting a role which is imposed on her.

She thought of the verandah of their house in the small university town in Punjab, the Vice-Chancellor's house, over which she had presided with such an air as to strike awe unto visitors who came to call, and had her cane chair there, too, and she had sat there, not still and empty, but mending clothes, sewing on strings and buttons and letting out hems, at her feet a small charcoal brazier on which a pot of ‘Kheer’ bubbled, snipping threads and instructing the servant girl to stir, stir, don't stop stirring or it'll burn, and then someone had to be called to hold the smallest child from falling into the bubbling pot and carry it away, screaming worse than if it were scalds.

Into this din, a Tonga had driven up and disgorged a flurry of guests in their visiting saris, all to flap their palm-leaf handfans as they sat in a ring about her - the wives and daughters of the lectures and professors over whom her husband ruled. She thought of that hubbub and of how she had managed and how everyone had said, pretending to think she could not hear but really wanting her to, ‘Isn't she splendid? 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.

Looking down at her knuckles, two rows of yellow bones on the railing, she thought of her sons and daughters, of her confine-ments, some in great iscomfort at home and others at the small filthy missionary-run hospital in the bazaar, and the different nurses and doctors who had wanted to help her, but never could and the slovenly, neurotic *ayahs* she had to have because there was such a deal of washing and ironing to do; and Mr. Kaul had wanted her always in silk, at the head of the long rosewood table in the dining-room, entertaining his guests.

Mentally, she stalked through the rooms of that house - his house, never hers, to keep out the flies, looking sharply to see if the dark furniture, all rosewood, had been polished and the doors of the gigantic cupboards properly shut. She sniffed to make sure the cook was not smoking *biris* in the kitchen and to verify that all the metal-ware smelt freshly of Brasso. She seemed to hear poignant shrieks from the canna beds in the garden - a child had tumbled off the swing, another had been stung by a wasp, a third

slapped by the fourth, and gone out on the veranda to see them come wailing up the steps with cut lips, bruised knees, broken teeth and tears, and bent over them with that still, ironic bow to duty that no one had noticed or defined.

Thus, in Nanda Kaul's case, familial relationship is not genuine, although it may appear to be so. *In Clear Light of Day*, Anita Desai has dealt with the relationship between four brothers and sisters - Raja, Bim, Tara and Baba. All the characters in this novel are unable to perceive the connection with each other and suffer from differences and a gnawing sense of disintegration. They, particularly Bim, look back in anger and frustration at the closeness and sense of fullness that has been lost with the passage of time. Bim is alienated from her brother, Raja, because she, being sensitive, wants to live in a romantic world of past; whereas, Raja becomes practical and pragmatic.

This novel is about the changes that come in Das family and it covers a long span of time – of both British India and Post-independence India. After the death of father; though his death hardly mattered to the children as he didn't give them time, Bim, being eldest, assumes the role of a father. She takes care of the brothers and younger sister. She is so pre-occupied with family responsibilities that she hardly gets time to think for herself. Bim is a middle aged woman, teaching history in a college. From early childhood Bim and Raja find a greater mental and temperamental affinity with each other. To break away from the dullness and gloominess of the old house, they take refuge in literature of different languages - English, Hindi and Urdu.

Raja is enchanted by the aristocratic Hyder Ali, their neighbour and landlord. Bim's identification with Raja is very deep and tries to be emotionally and intellectually his equal. Her ideal figures are 'Joan of Arc' and 'Florence Nightingale' - single, selfless woman. She is shocked and dismayed when she finds Raja to be an ordinary man, with ordinary interests. Raja deserts Delhi, Bim and Baba in search of a new world, marries Hyder Ali's daughter and adopts their life-style. This creates a chasm between Raja and Bim. He shouted,

“I have to go. Now I can go. I have to begin my life sometime, don't I?

You don't want me to spend my 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 ?” (*Clear Light of Day: P. 100-101*)

Bim is left alone in the company of her younger, mentally retarded brother. The high aspirations of a young girl are thwarted by sudden change in circumstances in her family. Tara, the younger sister, marries a foreign diplomat, Bakul, largely to 'escape', as she admits later. Bim is left alone to attend the aged, alcoholic and invalid Mira Masi and retarded Baba. Dr. Biswas understands later on that she had sacrificed her life for her brother and aunt.

Bim resents Raja's moving into the world of action. They have seen "gap between them, a trough or a channel that the books they shared did not bridge." (P.121) she feels rejected, deserted and needs a renewed sense of self-justification.

The neglected and decaying house symbolizes the frustrated and wasted life of Bim. There is a feeling of incompleteness and a sense of disintegration in her. "All these years she had felt herself to be the centre . . . Bim, who had stayed and became the part of the pattern, inseparable", now feels unwanted and alienated. This isolation has drained her enthusiasm for the past. She tells Tara, “But you wouldn't want to return to life as it used to be, would you? All that dullness, boredom, waiting. Would you care to live that over again? Of course not. Do you know anyone who would, secretly, sincerely, in his innermost self, really prefer to return to childhood ?” (P.4)

She has difficulty in relating to her own past, the dead past. On utter disgust she thinks that all her relations - Tara, Bakul, Raja and Benazir – had come in her life like mosquitoes, only to torment her, and sip her blood. In her anger, which vents on Baba, she asks bitterly, "Are you willing to go and live with Raja in Hyderabad." (P.163)

However, the novel ends on a positive note. Bim tries to discover her greater-self in relation to others. She finds the inspiration for selflessness, of the isolation which is inherent in the nature of human life and mortality. She feels:

“There could be no love more deep and full and wide than this one No other love had started so far back in time They were really all parts of her, inseparable, so many aspects of her as she was of them.”(P. 165) This feeling gives her a sense of fulfilment and result in optimism, very different from Desai's earlier novels. Baumgartner's *Bombay* (1988) is the second successive novel where the spotlight is no more on the solitude and interior landscape of the sensitive women. Yasmeen Lukmani comments on the novel,

“Baumgartner's *Bombay* is a story of pain, of rootlessness, of lack of communication and also of moments of love dredged out of the dirt and treasured.” (Lukmani: “Poiseel Control” P. 28)

The novel focuses on the past and present of two isolated Germans without family and country. Hugo is the main protagonist and Lotte, the female cabaret dancer, is of secondary importance. The two characters try to establish their identity in an alien land, but it ends in failure, frustration, and disgust.

These people are trapped by circumstances. They are victim of forces beyond their control - social, political and psychological. Hugo Baumgartner is a victim of holocaust, which uproots him from his native country, Germany, due to the violence by Nazis. Hugo, being a Jew, had to flee to India. His father was a respectable and wealthy furniture-dealer. After the death of his father, the shop was sold to his father's friend. Hugo was sent to India to do business and start a new life. In this new place, Bombay, he got nothing but loneliness and isolation. The security of the home is lost, disowned by his own people and rejected by his motherland, are Baumgartner's tragedies. With the death of his mother his only link with his country breaks and he is left with no desire to return to Germany after war. His sense of rootlessness is expressed when he says, “Go back, where?” (*Baumgartner's Bombay*: P.211)

Baumgartner's tragedy is that he really never belonged to any- where or to anyone except his parents. Even when he was a child, he felt alienated in school, being a Jew. He remains a misfit in India too, even after living here for so many years. He moves on to Calcutta, but peace alludes him there also.

Unfortunately, the war broke out and Hugo is taken to the detention camp for six years. This further throws him in an isolated condition. The weariness of time hung upon him and he waited for his release. Even when he comes out of prison, Hugo always faced the gap between himself and the Indians:

“He felt his life blur, turn grey, like a curtain wrapping him in his dusty felt. If he became aware, from time totime, that the world beyond the curtain was Growing steadily more crowded, more clamorous and the lives of other more hectic, more chaotic, then he felt only relief that he had never been a part of the mainstream. Always, somehow, he had escaped the mainstream. (P.211)

Baumgartner learns to withdraw, to keep things to himself, to be aloof and not to share. This habit exacerbates his loneliness. He seems to himself like a turtle, always feeling secure in his shell:

“This habit of an only child, of an isolated youth is an increasingly unsafe and threatening land and then of solitary foreigner in India had made Baumgartner hold to himself the fears he had about his mother, about what was happening in Germany, allowing it to become a dark, monstrous block.” (P.109)

His isolation had been broken only for a short time in the company of Lotte in Calcutta with whom he had developed a kind of friendship. Her friendship was like an oasis in desert. He had other friends too - Chimanlal, Hobibullah, Julius etc. They fill up his emptiness considerably but the distance is never paved. He is an empty wanderer with a loss of identity, the feeling of estrangement and isolation and persisting sense of alienation. He finds himself a stranger, an outsider:

“He had lived in this land for fifty years . . . yet the eyes of the people who passed by glanced at him who was still strange and unfamiliar to them and all said, "*Firangi*, foreigner". (P.19)

The most important thing which we find in the isolation of Baumgartner is that he always fought with the despair and isolation in his life bravely and did not commit suicide. The end to it comes in his death, but it was a murder by a young German whom he had tried to befriend in order to get over his loneliness. The problem of isolation and alienation pesters other too. Lotte marries Kantilal in order to acquire an Indian identity, in order not to go to internment camp. This marriage reduces her to a mistress, living in comfort, but always alone. "Mostly I am alone. All, all, alone," she tells Hugo. (P.203) She has none, except Hugo, in her isolation, as Hugo has none except her. After Kanti's death, she is penniless and in a condition of a destitute, she confesses to Hugo that she should have gone back to Germany.

But there is no return possible, as is clear in the novel. Their isolation is the result of their up rootedness from their past, culture, tradition, society and milieu. There is no release from this isolation. Baumgartner gets released from his existence when he is murdered and meets death, but Lotte is left alone, all alone and isolated, a tragic figure.

Lotte's case and her relationship with the Kantilal family is ironic. Here is a case of unfulfilled familial relationship. These two examples acquaint us with Anita Desai's fine portrayal of familial relationship.

In Desai's next novel, *Journey to Ithaca* (1996), India, more specifically, spiritual India, becomes a kind of Ithaca. The main characters are Sophie and Matteo, a European couple, who come to India as hippies in the early 1970s in search of spiritual enlightenment. In this novel, there is a fundamental, almost irreconcilable difference between Matteo and Sophie. The difference between Matteo and Sophie is seen from the very beginning of the book and is highlighted even in simple things like Matteo's long hair versus Sophie's short, "manly" cut. Matteo is drawn to this India of yogies, sages, and mystics, partly through a reading of the book which was at the heart of the hippie cult, Herman Hesse's *The Discovery of the East*. While Matteo is a dreamy, 'feminine' Italian with an unhappy childhood, his wife Sophie is a hard-headed German who is practical and quite materialistic in her approach.

The novel begins with Matteo lying sick in a hospital in India. Sophie has come to fetch him. Matteo's sickness is partly a result of the death of the Mother, the spiritual leader in whose *ashram* Matteo has finally found his destination after much wandering and sorrow. Sophie goes in search of investigating the Mother's past and uncovers that the Mother was actually Laila, born in Egypt, the daughter of Alma and Hamid. She went to Paris to study where she was entranced not only by Eastern occult and spirituality but by an Indian dancer named Krishna also. Joining Krishna's troupe, Laila tours Europe and North America before coming with him to India. Once here, she suddenly disappears to the *ashram* of a *guru* and remains there after his death.

All these events are contained in a diary which belonged to the Mother and is given to Sophie by the ageing Krishna. Matteo's is a simple one-dimensional story. He has his goal fixed for him early in life; he follows it single-mindedly; after some initial trouble he attains it. He is, indeed, so obsessed with his pursuit that he simply does not care for or even remembers his responsibility towards parents, wife or

children, not to speak of love. He seems to have been devoid of that kind of personal feelings although that does not deter him from begetting children in quick succession with Sophie.

Sophie had come to India with no intention to find Truth or God or *guru*. She came out like just another adventurer bent on enjoying the exotic beauties and delights of India. She had never shared Matteo's dreams about India.

Exasperated by Matteo's obsession with Truth and spiritual India Sophie leaves him within months of their arrival in desperate rage to join the drug-tribe on the beach of Goa. She goes into a sort of hippie hell, lying drunk and utterly destitute in her own vomit. She, probably, wants neither the senseless hedonism of the hippies nor Matteo's spiritual delusions. She is turned into something of an investigative journalism, uncovering the Mother's past with single-minded determination. Incidentally, motivation of visiting India is to write about it. She constantly criticises both Matteo and things Indian. Because Sophie is at the centre of the narrative, it is her viewpoint which predominates.

In chapter second of *Journey to Ithaca*, Anita Desai upholds sanctity of relations between husband and wife. Till this portion of the novel, Sophie is pregnant and she wishes to leave this place for another one on a mountain of the Himalayan regions for her safe delivery. On the advice of the doctor, both Sophie and Matteo come to an *ashram* at Himalayan region. This *ashram* is run by a beautiful young woman who is known as the Mother. But Sophie suspects the spiritual authority of the Mother:

“It sounds as if she gets up on a stage and hypnotises you all like a magician” (*Journey to Ithaca*: P. 102)

Sophie, with her womanly emotions, becomes jealous of the Mother and regards her ‘a monster spider who had spun this web to catch these silly flies’. (P. 127)

Like Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer ?*, Sophie becomes rebellious against the forced decision of her husband. With her future anxieties of a mother, she leaves the company of her husband and comes back to Italy to her parents. In Italy, she tries to fill the absence of Matteo in the company of another gentleman, Paolo, whom she meets in a party. Paolo also finds this mature woman quite fascinating. But Sophie still experiences the overpowering effect of the Matteo-consciousness on her:

“Her life with Matteo had spoilt her life with a man like Paolo; it was no longer possible.” (P.155)

In Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), the story revolves around an upper middle-class lawyer's family. The lawyer is not named but he is painted so vividly that he becomes a symbol of millions of faceless Indians who live similar lives, dominate their families and deny them their freedom. The family also has a wife who is a docile creature and agrees to everything Papa says. She enjoys her secret pleasures when she goes to play rummy at the neighbours.

The husband and wife, MamaPapa, PapaMama, as they are called, become like siamese twins, inseparable, after he retires. They keep swinging on the swing on the verandah, and repeat, or mutely agree to whatever one says. The daughter Uma feels that it was hard to believe they had ever had separate identities, that they have been separate entities and not MamaPapa in one breath. The retired life led by this couple mirrors that of many Indians.

Mama and Papa have two daughters - Uma and Aruna, and one son, who was born quite late and named Arun. Uma, the plain older daughter, who does not succeed in outgrowing her parental home, is the main character of the story. She fails to get married. Her first engagement is unceremoniously broken off after a large dowry is taken. The second time round with another dowry she is married off, only to become aware, after a few months, of the terrible fact that her husband was already married and had his family in Meerut. He had agreed to this marriage out of the greed for dowry. The marriage was never

consummated. These two fiascos unveil the fabric of this society. The tragic episode of Uma's cousin, Anamika's, death shows the falasity rampant in this society.

Aruna, the second daughter, is pretty and intelligent. She is married off after her elder sister Uma's marriage encounters fail twice. Her marriage swishes her off to a Bombay flat, a haven-heaven, where she bosses about, dictates and lives in a flutter of anxiety for perfection in her husband, her kids.

Aruna's state is a sad comment on the women of today who keep bustling and blundering about anxiously in search of perfection, a utopia, while real life, with its simple joys and pleasures, just passes them by. Arun, being the only male child, is heaped with so much attention and affection that he feels suppressed and the minute he gets time, he escapes into his comic book world. He is forced to eat food he does not like. His education, his tutors and the academic burden on his frail shoulders leave him exhausted.

He does not learn how to communicate with people, or how to express his feelings. When he goes to America for higher studies, he does not mix with anyone. During summer break, he goes to stay with the family of Mrs. Patton. The concern that Mrs. Patton shows for him scares him. Part two of the novel sees a shift of scene from India to Massachusetts, America. Anita Desai paints the family and life style of Mrs. Paton's household. The four members of the family - all go their own way, each cooks up something for himself/herself when hungry. There is independence and selfreliance, but no warmth and interaction between the members of the family.

Each character has his/her own separate dreams and nightmares. Rod is busy in his body-building programme, dreaming to get into the football world and ultimately winning a football scholarship. Melanie has her own devils torturing her from within, which makes her behaviour furtive, frantic and unbalanced. She gets alternately hysterical or depressed. She gorges food down her throat, ultimately throwing it out, rejected by her body. The family does not know about her illness. It is Arun who notices her illness. Melanie's behaviour seems to be the result of lack of warmth, personal care and emotional support. There seems to be no familial bond amongst the members of the Patton family. Mrs. Patton is the mother/wife of the house. She is insecure and emotionally starved as the family around her goes its own way, lives its own life. When Arun comes to stay, she showers him with attention. The plight of Arun and the differences between the lives of East and West are used together in a masterly manner by Anita Desai to reveal a deep insight.

The Zigzag Way, Anita Desai's latest novel, opens in a ghost town in the Sierra Madre, whose silver mines were abandoned during the Mexican revolution of 1910-20. The American Eric, a bespectacled, scholarly misfit has arrived in Mexico from Harvard at the instigation of his more purposeful girlfriend, Em. But finding her preoccupied with her medical research, he begins to follow his own trail, tracking down the ageing "queen of the sierra" and ostensible champion of Huichol Indians, Doña Vera, who holds clues to his English father's birthplace in the Mexican mountains. Eric learns of his grandfather's arrival with other Cornish miners after the collapse of Cornwall's tin mining industry and of his grandmother's death in childbirth during therevolution.

Davey, Paul and Eric are three generations, sharing same lineage and constituting similar pedigree. Davey began his life where his work was his fulfilment and his wife, Betty's, smiles were his trophy. The tempo and the tenor of life went unperturbed and so the life around the mines. Suddenly life as well as dreams took a setback when General Madero announced a change in political setup. The Cornish miners became substance of the guerrilla war, some joining the 'rebels' and others, the 'federals'. With fright, rumours and loot around, Betty and Davey looked at the grimness around:

“The pace of life, once a steady jog through the familiar routines underwent as change, now seeming to race as if to a finish. Only no one thought about the finish because it was unthinkable. Something had been exposed –the stupidity of their presence here and it was like a new rift open and raw, that had been suddenly revealed at their feet. The men, pulling on their boots, ran up the hill too, cursing at the shortage of firearms among them. Women were ordered to remain indoors and open the doors to no one before daylight”. (P.138)

Betty and Davey, with their small possession, bundled hurriedly and left for a safe place along with other refugees. The pandemonium took a heavy toll on Betty’s pregnancy whereby she is reduced to a miserable state, lying lifeless, with no symptom of delivering the child. The forced process killed her but saved the infant who was sent along with the refugees heading for a further camp. Davey stayed back to prepare a coffin for his beloved and for the proper grave where she would rest eternally.

Betty’s death and Paul’s birth shifts the narrative voice from one generation to the other. Here Paul and Madeline make next generation pair. Paul unlike his father is quiet, reticent and aloof to the world around. In terms of psychic interpretation he can be labelled as a sensitive personality. He has no innate drive to reach any ideals and his affirmation of life lies in accepting the anatomical and physiological aspect of life. He is beyond the cognitive setting of the life and is a stranger to the community he belongs:

“Paul found his married existence a complete escape from the loneliness he had known till then but was also often overcome by the sheer numbers and noise and apt to fall silent and feel lost among them. At such moments, Madeleine would emerge from the crowd and find a reason for him to return to the small room where he kept the books and where he could disappear for a little respite. She would pat his shoulder in sympathy and he would clasp her hand gratefully, but without a word”. (P.158-59)

When Eric was born to Madeleine, she proved as protective of him as of the stranger she had married. They both personified for her the outside world that she herself had never stepped into - except on the one visit back to Cornwall that she and Paul undertook when they left Eric with his grandfather in the pebble dashed cottage by the sea where he played with a toy train filled with sparkling flakes of ore till his step grandmother, entering the room with a teapot under a cosy said, 'Now don't go filling his head with all that nonsense'. (P.159)

Thus we see that in all her novels Anita Desai creates characters who feel terrible isolation in the suffocation darkness of life in which no deep communication is possible. Indira Bhatt brings out the similarity with Kafka's characters –

“Like the Kafkaesque characters, Desai's characters suffer from the oppressive walls of sounds and smells from which there is no release.” (Bhatt: “Indian Women Novelists” P. 141)

To conclude, from the above thematic survey of some of Anita Desai's novels we find that family and familial relationship play important parts in her fictional world. But what is remarkable is that more often than not the familial relationships are not harmonious. We cannot find a single family in any of her novels which can be called good, if not perfect. This implies that she writes realistic novels and though in the world the institution of family continues to exist yet we seldom find a harmonious family. One may do well with friends or non-familial relationships.

But we are at daggers drawn with our own flesh and blood relationships. We cannot choose our relatives but we can certainly choose our friends. But this is the way of the world and none can help it. We have to accept familial relationships - whether good or bad.

Chapter - IV

Feminine psyche in the novels of Anita Desai

Feminine psyche constitutes a major part of Anita Desai's fictional material. Women writers of all ages have a natural preference for writing about women characters. Anita Desai is no exception in so far as she has written, by and large, about women characters; and no wonder, most of her novels move around women characters. By 'Psyche' Jung means:

"Not only what we generally call 'soul' but the totality of all psychic processes, conscious as well as unconscious, hence something broader and more comprehensive than the soul". (Jung "The Nature and Structure of the Psyche" P. 5)

To understand 'Feminine', just as we cannot confuse female and feminist, we also cannot presume that anything and everything written by women, will be 'feminine'. To quote Toril Moi:

"It has long been an established practice among most feminists to use 'Feminine' (and Masculine) to represent social constructs . . . and to reserve 'Female' and 'Male' for the purely biological aspects of sexual difference. Thus, 'feminine' represents nurture, and 'female' - nature in this usage . . . Seen in this perspective, patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for 'femininity' are natural. Thus a woman who refuses to conform can be labelled both unfeminine and unnatural . . . Patriarchy, in other words, wants us to believe that there is such a thing as an essence of femaleness, called femininity. Feminists must therefore always insist that though women undoubtedly are female, this in no way guarantees that they will be feminine". (Mori: "Sexual and Textual Politics" P.65)

The word 'Feminine', as used in the title of this chapter, is not meant to denote 'an essence of femaleness' but rather a mode of characterising females in fiction. The novels of Anita Desai revolve around the women protagonists, who mirror the persisting grip of the culturally imposed 'Feminine', upon their female conscious and unconscious. Thus, it is implied that the author's understanding of what constitutes 'Femininity' in behaviour and thought, is intermingled with the creation of female characters who define themselves according to the socially prescribed norms for a woman. It is also informed by a feminist's awareness about the kind of limitations inevitably faced by the 'feminine' self that is at the centre of their novels and is explored through the female protagonists.

The present study is aimed at examining the commonly recurring image of the lonely woman protagonists in the novels of Anita Desai, chiefly to explore the female psyche in the different stages of a woman's life, particularly the influences that shaped the female psyche that makes it conform to rigid patriarchal structures; and to analyse the different thought patterns that emerge from the different experiences portrayed in the novels with reference of the main characters.

These thought patterns emerge from the battle-ground of life itself with relation to the main characters in the novels. Even though a lot has been written about women by both men and women in the past, yet scientific studies on women have shown an increase only in the recent decades. In our country, most of the studies on women have been undertaken by sociologists, economists, historians, political scientists and educationists, besides medical practitioners.

Psyche has always been woven into political and realistic writings. Psyche describes the realms of the unconscious and the world of imagination. Among Indian writers in English, too, this theme has been dealt with extensively. Mulk Raj Anand, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai are to name a few writers who have dealt with this theme in their novels in one or the other

form. As Eric Rabkin in *The Fantastic In Literature*, expresses the view that the fantastic is nearly allied to "disexpected" than unexpected.

The important thing is that it takes the readers by surprise. He also points out that fantastic is comprehensible only in relation to reality. It gives a greater degree of experimentation on any level - the level of event or plot, of characters, language and thought. It has also taken various forms. Fantasy takes the form of 'utopia' or 'dystopia' as in Sunita Namjoshi's *Mothers of Maya Diip*. In R. K. Narayan's *The Painter of Signs* and *The Vender of Sweets*, it incorporates with a fable. It also incorporates itself with myth and religion, as in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*. In the novels of Anita Desai there is a willing suspension of disbelief.

Anita Desai, in her novels, mainly explores the emotional world of women, revealing a rare imaginative awareness of various deeper forces at work and a profound understanding of feminine sensibility as well as psychology. She sets herself to voice the mute miseries and helplessness of millions of married women tormented by existentialist problems and predicaments. She is concerned with the problems faced by her protagonists. Her serious concern is the "journey within", her central characters mostly being women. The recurring theme in her novels is the trauma of existence in a hostile, male-dominated society that is conservative and taboo-ridden. She portrays the inner conflicts of her characters and also underlines their individuality and quest for freedom.

Nature is not merely a matter of heredity. It is also a matter of inclination and tendency of the different combinations of instinct, feeling and thought, of the surfacing or otherwise of the unconscious and the subconscious. The unconscious itself is determined by various factors, dominant among them being a character's relationship with others, which itself is governed by the unconscious. But the self, in order to grow towards harmony, to move towards wholeness, needs to attain some measure of distance from the central being, to reach a position of being self-critical, in order to be able to analyse the ramifications. In psychological terms, it is convenient to talk of the conscious and the sub-conscious layers, of the extrovert and the introvert types; but in ordinary terms, it would be the equivalent of stepping out of oneself. One of the ways to do this is by questioning one's motive and situations, another by going through the process of recollecting the past. These are not foolproof methods, for, whether they lead to sanity or insanity, distancing or self-glory and self-pity depends on the initial point - why the person is motivated to go through the past ! But no matter in which direction it leads, the process is excruciatingly painful and violent. This mechanism then acts more and more actively to face the anxious situation that tends to build up tensions in human minds. Coleman has commented in *Abnormal Psychology and Modern life*, "Strong emotions make maximum energy resources available to the organism for meeting such emergencies". (Coleman: P.75) It has been proved that philosophers and writers were the first to discover the 'unconscious'. As Usha Bande expresses it:

"Freud, during his studies, often maintained that the credit of discovering the unconscious goes to the poets and philosophers before him, and that, he simply discovered the scientific method by which the unconscious could be studied". (Bande: P. 24)

The normal or abnormal behaviour of a person expresses or reflects conflicts and complexes of a person. These constitute the inner-nature and if it is "suppressed, one gets sick; if it is encouraged it leads to healthy personality"(Bande: 25) When inner nature is suppressed it gives rise to frustrations. This fact has been illuminated by Coleman also:

“Frustration results when our motives are thwarted either by some obstacle that blocks or impedes our progress towards a desirable goal, or by the absence of an appropriate goal. Frustration may be minor or they may be serious threats to our welfare, they may arise from outer or inner sources”. (Coleman: P. 82) In the characters of Desai's novels many internal frustrations arise out of psychological barriers. When these barriers, in the form of reality and ethical restraints, break down her characters get involved in self-recrimination and a feeling of guilt. Her characters suffer from loneliness which gives rise to insecurity. There is tension in their mind which results in their strained relationships. They react vehemently and emotionally to these situations. Because of feelings of insecurity, her characters do suffer and also cause suffering for others. In this connection Coleman has observed :

“Feelings of insecurity may have widely differing effects on behaviour, but typically they lead to a restriction in activities, to fearfulness and apprehension and a failure to participate fully in one's world.” (Coleman: P.70-72)

Such psychological problems leave a restraining effect on their mutual relationship. Anita Desai, almost all in her novels, portrays female protagonists who are hyper-sensitive, solitary and retrospective. Maya, Monisha, Sita are obsessed with the idea of death. They are aware that they are living on the edge and show a marked tendency towards neurotic behaviour. Desai is interested in peculiar and eccentric characters. In an interview to Yashodhara Dalmia she told:

“I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against general current. It is easy to flow with the current : it makes no demands, it casts no effort. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out ‘the great no’, who fight the current and struggle against it, they know what the demands are and what it costs to meet them”. (Dalmia: TOI)

The emotional needs of these women remain unsatisfied, with the result, they are withdrawn into a life of seclusion and loneliness. These women seem to live in closed, sequestered limbo of private suffering which is real, though different from the material suffering of rural female characters in the earlier novels of Markandaya, or the suffering of females due to marital disharmony in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal. According to Yashodhara Dalmia, "Only the individual, the solitary being, is of true interest." (Dalmia: TOI)

The novels of Anita Desai present characters undergoing psycho-logical turbulence arising out of a conflict between reality and illusion that the characters build up for themselves. In psychological terms, this types of psychic nature in called ‘semiotics’ and ‘regression’. We find both kinds of psychic nature in her novels, but mainly ‘semiotics’ - Maya in *Cry The Peacock*, Nirode and Monisha in *Voices In The City*, Nanda Kaul in *Fire On The Mountain*, Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Sarah in *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* and Sarla and Deven in *In Custody*. We find all characters clinging to imagination or belief as they are unable to relate to reality. It is a kind of temporary compromise with the immediate environment. The resulting complicity increases as it persists in a given frame-work in which the characters operate, as has been rightly pointed out by Jasbir Jain in Desai's novels :

“Fantasy is never a total structure as in the world of fairy tale and it does not necessitate a complete shifting of perspective but is always a part of the total structure and is constantly juxtaposed with other worlds and does, at some point, merge with the normative, commonly accepted world view”. (Jain: P.69)

In the novels of Anita Desai, we also find characters suffering from loneliness, unfulfilling relationship and psychic disorders. This void in their lives is, at times, filled by illusions. Being hypersensitive to

these inadequacies in their lives, they turn to romanticise these with their imagination, by weaving a happy world for themselves. As N. R. Gopal has pointed out :

“Characters in the novels of Mrs. Anita Desai are generally neurotic females, highly sensitive but sequestered in a surrounding as a consequence of their failure or unwillingness to adjust with the reality. They often differ in their opinion from others and embark on a long voyage of contemplation in order to find the meaning of their existence”. (Gopal: P.7)

This search for identity by these characters often leads to escapism. Imagination may be a desire to escape for adventure or for freedom from the bondages of life. Julia Segal, in *Phantasy In Every Day Life*, develops the aspects of liberating experience:

“In some ways the word fantasy seems to give me a similar freedom as a child gains when he learns the concept of 'Pretend'. What is 'Pretend' can be subjected to different laws from what is real. As a result, the child is free to play and to experiment in a way that it could not do if it did not make the distinction.” (Segal: “ Phantasy in Everyday Life” P.20)

But there is no permanent relief for them in illusion. The objective world, consisting of other human beings, acts upon them and shatters them. It becomes difficult for them to grapple with reality without these beliefs which had sustained them so far. This anxiety leads to a conflict between their belief and objective reality. As a result, they contemplate their own identity. They realise that their failure stems from their inability to come in terms with objective reality and inability to move beyond their self-created belief:

“The true identity of characters lies in their attempt to reconcile their subjective vision with the objective world and its demands, thus achieving an openness, enabling them to look at things as they really are”. (Panigrahi & Kirpal: “ The individual and The search for self identity in CRY” P.71)

These beliefs objectify themselves in many ways, as hallucinations and nightmares, as wishful thinking and personal aspirations or as obsession or a psychological fear. Anita Desai has used imagination as a narrative technique in *Cry The Peacock* to explore the interior world of Maya's fears. She uses it as a means of reinterpreting reality in *Where Shall We Go This Summer? And Clear Light of Day*. In *Fire on the Mountain* she projects belief as a part of the total structure to enable the characters to relate to each other. Imagination creates an alternate reality.

In *Cry, The Peacock*, imagination and fantasy are used to expose Maya's inability to grow out of the confines of her world in order to merge with the larger world. She clings to fantasy as she is unable to relate to reality. Anita Desai has probed into the consciousness of the central character, Maya, to bring out this conflict between reality and illusion. Maya and Gautama represent the conflict between objective reality and self-nurtured belief. One is that of intellectual detachment, personified in the mythic figure of Gautama and the other is the world of belief personified in Maya. Their very names suggest their nature: ‘Maya’ means belief and ‘Gautama’ evokes the figure of Gautama, the Buddha, who perceived the world of belief and by renunciation brought an end to sorrow.

Maya's relationship with reality passes through three phases. The first is that of her childhood when she is brought up within a limited world. The second is her life with Gautama when she makes abortive attempts to recede into her past and equally abortive ones to reach out to others. The third and final phase is, her total surrender to the world of her fears and to insanity.

In the very beginning of the novel we find this conflict in the mind of Maya. She is unable to accept the death of her pet dog, Toto. When Maya looked upon Toto's dead body she, "screamed and rushed to the garden top to wash the vision from her eyes, continued to cry and ran, defeated, into the house". (*Cry the*

Peacock P. 5) The sorrow of the death and detached behavior of Gautama towards this incident make her lonely and pushes her back into her childhood memories, as they are like a gentle, poignant lullaby. Memories of her childhood are pleasant and happy. That world was “like a toy, especially made for me, painted into my favourite colours, set moving to my favourite tunes.” (P.36) Maya longs for the leisurely breakfast in the garden with her father.

“She enjoyed the sumptuous fare of the fantasies of the Arabian Nights, the glories and bravado of Indian mythology, long and astounding tales of princes and regal queens, jackal and tigers, and, being my father's daughter, of the lovely English and Irish fairy tales as well” . . .(P. 43)

Maya lived in this fantastic world of beauty and luxury. The toys and their world was more real to her than the real world. She herself realises later on that her childhood was one in which much was excluded, ‘Which grew steadily more restricted, unnatural even.’(Cry the Peacock: 89) But her encounter with reality is horrifying which disturbs her. She has been brought up by her father like a princess, preventing her from seeing the ugliness and sorrow of the world. She becomes so sensitive that she identifies herself with natural objects and animals but not with human beings. The incident of bear and bear-trainer makes it clear.

She gets ‘lavish pleasure’ watching the bear dance, but is also anxious that trainer probably does not give much food to the bear, and this haunts her so much that on that night she dreams of hungry bears ‘grabbing and gesticulating,’ and falls ill. This shows that Maya had a partial vision of the world, a world devoid of human beings and perceived only through senses. Meena Belliappa observes that the ‘world of childhood . . . to Maya stood for a state of grace’.(Belliappa: 8) Her childhood has been carefree, perhaps more so in memory than in reality. She had been free to romp with pets or smell flowers. She is almost as free, now years later, except for two constraints - Gautama and the astrologer's prediction. She cannot deal with them rationally. Maya descends into her childhood days. She feels comfortable for a little while, but when reality looms large over her inner fears, she is nagged by feelings of unease:

“Its presence was very real and truly physical – shadows cast by trees, split across the leaves and grasses towards me, with horrifying swiftness . . . I leapt from my chair in terror, overcome by a sensation of snakes coiling and unlocking their moist lengths about me, of evil descending from an overhanging branch, of an insane death, unprepared for, heralded by deafening drum beats.” (P.12-13)

Maya loves nature and finds peace and contentment in the beauty of nature. It is as if she is running away from the horror of death, unable to face the facts of life to the lap of mother nature. She has a beautiful garden, with many flowers. She recognises each and every flower with their perfume. The end of the flowering season means:

“a sense of all good things coming to an end and only the long, weary summer to look forward to . . . a Sunday evening sense that precedes each tedious Monday”. (P.19)

Maya wants the same understanding about nature from her husband, but he does not notice anything. Maya is looking for a total understanding and love from her husband, which, when she lacks, plunges her into the abyss of depression and melancholy. She is soothed by contact, relationship, communion as they soothe her till the disturbed murmurs of agitation get clamour.

The growing distance between Maya and her husband, Gautama, hurls her into the abyss of nightmares, which is greatly enhanced by the constant reminder of the prophecy of albino priest. At times, Maya tries to get out of her ghastly nightmares by going out and meeting her friends. It was as if she was getting "more aware of a world that lay beyond the enclosed one which Gautama and I, and recently, the smart shadow of the pale albino, inhabited." (P.56)

But her meetings with her friends, Pom and Leila, are unsatisfactory for her. She is disturbed by their problems, and it affects her greatly, as she gets emotionally involved with them. She is in great need of support and understanding of Gautama which she is denied, with the result that she closes herself in a private world. But this, too, is incapable of transforming into an anchor she perceives the transience of her dreams and changing into nightmares. She is so obsessed with the predicted disaster that every trivial thing becomes an intimidation of the forthcoming disaster, and she is frightened by the prospects of death. She is in love with life, with the idea of death looming large on her mind. Maya lives in this 'mortal agony' in the duality of life and death, illusion and reality, and she fails to reconcile them. This duality of Maya's existence continues till the end of the novel. Her contact establishes a contrast between her world of belief and the human world of action and business. But Maya is not ready to compromise. She refuses to participate in the world of others. Due to the constant conflict between reality and belief, Maya loses her sanity completely and she kills Gautama by pushing him off the roof, and she herself descends irrevocably into the world of past.

There is also a clash between the two philosophical levels represented by Maya and Gautama. Gautama explains the teachings of The Bhagvat Gita. He points out the deficiency in her outlook towards life as she lacks detachment:

“Life is a fairy tale to you still. What have you learnt of realities ? The realities of common human existence, not love and romance, but living and dying and working, all that constitutes life for the ordinary man”. (P. 15)

But Maya is fully satisfied with her world, which is complete for her. She tells Gautama:

“I don't care to detach myself into any other world than this. It isn't boring for me . . . the world is full-full, Gautama. Do you know what that means? I am not bored with it that I should need to hunt another one!” (P.117-118)

Yet, this detachment from the external world and her absorption into the inner world does not offer any freedom but merely enslaves her. The novel, thus, questions the nature of reality. In this connection, Jasbir Jain has posed the query

“who is involved and who is detached in the true sense? Gautama who needs to keep himself busy and engaged in actively, or, Maya, whose inner being creates a full life? Who is more wise of the two - Gautama who dreads passion; or Maya who is lost in emotion?” (Jain: P.73)

This mental retrogression suggests that Maya has not been able to adjust herself in the world of reality, and after killing her husband, she mentally goes back to her protected and pampered childhood, the best part of her life. Thus, in the character of Maya, Anita Desai has presented the feminine psyche of both, a girl and a woman.

Anita Desai's second novel, *Voice In The City*, has received adequate critical response. The title of the novel has made critics to debate on the point whether Nirode or the city of Calcutta may be called the hero of the novel. Desai's skillful handling invests the city with a character. Nirode's sketch on the other hand is rather insipid.

It is true that the city of Calcutta is the locale for most of the actions of the novel, and serves as a background, and it influences and affects all the major characters in the novel. But the novel itself is primarily a family drama around which the story revolves. Even the blurb of the novel says that the novel describes the corrosive effects of the city life upon the Indian family. The whole novel is divided into four sections - 'Nirode', 'Monisha', 'Amla' and 'Mother'. This chapter-division tells us that in spite of

the city of Calcutta, the novel is more concerned with the characters than with the background. Although this section-division refers to four characters only, yet, primarily, it is the story of Nirode.

In the novel again we find the conflict between belief and reality in the two characters - Monisha and Amla. As in the earlier novel, this conflict leads to suicide and disillusionment. Monisha lives in terrible isolation in the utter darkness of her life without any communication. She, too, suffers from lacks of understanding and love from her husband, Jiban. This results in her living in illusion, enclosed in locked container. Monisha is unable to face the realities of life that she has to change herself according to the new atmosphere of her husband's home. She withdraws herself and is afraid of involvement.

Monisha lives her life without a touch of love or hate or warmth. She is frightened to find that she is unable to be affected by the music of the street singers, whereas, others are moved by it. She feels that even a terrible cyclone would not touch her. She is greatly disturbed with the charge of the theft made on her. It makes her realise her position in the family whence she has to pick herself up unsupported by her husband. This reality is too demanding on her and she commits suicide by burning herself.

Amla, the young vivacious sister of Monisha who comes to Calcutta, also faces the same conflict. Amla plunges into parties, on reaching Calcutta, trying to escape the suffocating realities of life. She is disillusioned by the superficialities of society and feels suffocated. She meets Dharma, a middle aged, married painter, and thinks she is in love with him. It is almost a case of love at first sight. It brings a conspicuous change in both of them. Dharma changes into "chivalrous, tender, subtle and prophetic", (Voice In The City: P.188) and asks Amla to be his model for paintings. Amla too feels a change in herself. "She felt herself being torn, torn with excruciating slowness and without anaesthesia, from the Amla of a day, an afternoon ago." (P.186) This relationship is not accepted by Monisha, Nirode and Aunt Lila. Amla is advised against such involvement by Monisha but she is unable to resist Dharma's charm and is drawn to him again and again.

In the novel one sees that Dharma is inspired by Amla and that she had enabled him to see "What the subconscious does to an impressionable creature, how much more power it has on them than sun and circumstances put together." (P.223)

Dharma's development as an artist and a rediscovery of himself due to the inspiration provided by Amla is evident in the novel. A similar kind of change is seen in Amla. Earlier she had a frivolous approach to life and glorifies it in her peak. 'Season' of love and enjoyment. She matures with Dharma's 'measured talk and serene appearance.'

In spite of all this inspiration and understanding, a strain is there in their relationship, which is not well-defined to either of them. She wishes to connive at Dharma's allegiance to his wife and the social propriety and impropriety of maintaining his relationship with her. Such relationships are still unacceptable in the society; but Amla can not dissociate herself from these facts. It is the balanced reality and hallucination. Both of them face a conflict in their minds. Dharma expresses it in his paintings; whereas, in Amla it is symbolised in her dreams. There seems no way out of this situation. As soon as Amla learns about Dharma's daughter, she reacts instantly and decides to break free of him. As Usha Bande has concluded,

"love, which could be an active force in their minds, has a different effect, as it is not love. What their conscious minds construe as love is an illusion, created unconsciously, though, to relieve them of their isolation". (Bande: 109)

Thus, an attempt to escape from the realities of life is misconstrued as lure and leads to disillusionment in the case of Amla.

Their brother Nirode, is also running away from reality. He is obsessed with the thought of her mother's affair with Major Chadha in Kalimpong. He wants to forget himself in the hustle-bustle of the Calcutta. He does not want to have any relation with his mother. Even a letter from her is like

“It was sinking his teeth through a sweet mulberry to bite into a caterpillar's entrails.” (P.37)

Nirode calls her an old she-cannibal. His running away his past, trying to forget by getting over-busy with the publication of his magazine, Voice. His mother's offer of her sending money to him fills him with anger.

‘Raising himself on an elbow which shakes and trembles with the pressure of his shrunken body, he speaks with ferocity.’(P. 134)

Nirode has only hatred for his mother and he spits the venom of his thoughts to Amla, about his mother. He questions Amla.

“Ask her about the love that made her swallow father whole, like a cobra swallows a fat, petrified rat, then spews him out in one flabby yellow mess”.(P. 190)

Amla sees him as insane, pale, bony, monster who seemed to live on his venom alone. She is repulsed with these thoughts of Nirode and inquires, "What do you know of mother? or her relationship with father? What do you know of Major Chadha?(P. 191) She accuses Nirode of living in his foul hole, away from the world, imagining it to be so depraved. "It is you, it is you who are depraved, who makes love into something ugly and degenerate."(P. 191)

In the end, after the death of Monisha, the detachment of the mother disturbs Nirode and Amla He says, she is not merely good, she is not merely evil, she is good and she is evil. She is our knowledge and our ignorance. She is everything to which we are attached; she is everything from which we will always be detached. She is reality and illusion, she is the world and she is Maya. (P.256)

This vision of his mother is analogous to the representation of Shakti or Kali. Nirode, too, swings between reality and illusion and it results in the sense of escapism which is predominant in the novel.

In this novel also Anita Desai has portrayed feminine psyche mainly through the character of Monisha, although there are other women characters in the novel. Monisha is similar to Maya of *Cry, the Peacock*, in that she is also childless, sensitive and a victim of ill-matched marriage. If Maya is lonely in her family because it is a nuclear family with no one except her husband, Monisha's family has too many people, since it is a joint family. Through Monisha, Anita Desai has portrayed the psyche of a sensitive intellectual woman who is suffocated in uncongenial atmosphere of her in-laws house.

In the next novel, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, the characters, Adit and Sarah, travel through the world of fantasy to come to terms with the reality of their situation. They make adjustments with the external reality by shedding their beliefs and myths. Adit, an Indian immigrants in England, lives in the illusion of belonging to the foreign land. He scoffs at Dev for his idea of not being accepted by the Englishmen and their country, and is ready to undergo any amount of humiliation flung at him. He is ready to ignore them. England is the land of opportunities for him; and he hardly notices any drawback there. India symbolises poverty, dirt and boredom for him. It seems that Adit is trying to escape them and live in the illusion of an Elysian world in England. Adit seems perfectly happy with his life in England. He enjoys the prosperity of the land. Even Dev's derogatory comments on the immigrants cannot move him. He

says, "I see gold, everywhere gold, like Sarah's golden hair. Its my favourite colour." (*Bye-Bye Blackbird*: P.19)

"Pack up all my cares and woe Here I go, Singing low, Bye-Bye, Blackbird.

Where somebody cares for me, sugar is sweet and so is she, Bye-Bye, Blackbird". (P.19)

This is the favourite song of Adit. He is nicely adjusted in England with its life. He cannot tolerate the laziness of Indians, the unpunctuality, dirt and heat, a common feature in India. He longs to go back to England, to the nice put and 'Pick up a glass of Gin and eye the girls and be happy again". (P.49) His philosophy is 'live for the moment, don't think and don't worry'. But Adit feels an unknown anxiety and abstract pain on return to London from a weekend at his in-laws place. He grows nostalgic about India. The lush green countryside of Hampshire do not please him, instead, they remind him of the landscape of India, "the vast moonscape of dust, rock and baren earth" having mud houses and dead trees. The river Thames reminds him of shameful little Jamuna, the slush and mud of Ganges'. Adit longs to see an Indian sunset with its wild conflagration, rose and orange flamingo pink and lemon:

"It was as though some black magician had placed an evil pair of spectacles on his eyes which led him to see, not what was before him, but what the black magician wished him to see, distorted and terrifying." (P.177)

Adit behaves strangely with his wife, at his work. He makes everything very difficult for Sarah to understand. It was as if

"the lot of yearning shut up and enclosed inside him for so long, releasing it now like a dam that releases its water when it is full to bursting." (P.184)

The placidity and munificence and ease of England prove too much for him, and he undergoes a conflict between illusion and reality. Anita Desai has projected the conflict in his mind between illusion and reality. Adit is haunted by nostalgia after his stay in his in-laws house. He begins to see the reality from which he was running away. Now Adit wants to escape from this world of illusion into the world where he would "pack up all my cares and woe." He is reminded of the 'wild, wild grandeur, its supreme grandeur, its loneliness and black, glittering enhancement,' (P.205) of India when he sees the Hampshire landscape:

"The truth was that his disenchantment with England had begun sometime before he read the news in the papers, but this he stowed away in his subconscious and it was the myth he lived by and acted on". (P.229)

He cannot bear the show of fakery and falsehood of being happy in England by the Indians. They display an unnatural strain. He makes it evident to everyone that is stifling, always to be aware of who you are and where you are. Adit is a changed person and realises that his country, India, guarantees him love, respect, care, security which he will not get in England. He resolves his conflict and decides to return to his country. Adit realises that his life in England was unreal. It was little India in England. "It has no reality at all, we just pretend all the time . . . Now it has to be the real thing. I must go." (P.204)

Sarah, the English wife of Adit, also faces the dilemma of this conflict. She has lost her identity by marrying an Indian. She fluctuates between reality and unreality. There is split within herself as she cannot understand where she truly belongs to. She is constantly under tension which makes her life unreal; and that is why she is affected by anxiety and insecurity. The future is unknown and dark and the harmony of her life is broken by her contact with Adit. "To her closed eyes the darkness moved in a tumult of black shapes that would not settle. Her dreams too were in pieces." (P. 58)

She faces the dilemma of up rootedness, and so, it is deeper and darker. To escape it, Sarah creates a world of illusions of her own. Her love for India and its customs is shown when she is with Miss Moffit, admiring everything Indian. She longs to go to India and is fascinated by the number of relatives there. When asked by Adit whether she could leave her country for India, she replies willingly and promptly, 'I could, when I think of all the Millers of England, I could leave at once.' (P.83) Sarah has come to realise that she will have to face the reality of leaving her country. When she decides to accompany Adit for India, she knows she is bidding farewell to her English self:

"It was her English-self that was receding and fading and dying. She knew it was her English-self to which she must say goodbye. That was what hurt" . . . (P.255)

She, however, musters courage to live only in her Indian-self by settling in India. Though the question of her acceptance in India still looms large on her mind, Sarah tries to overcome the conflict in her mind with a positive attitude towards life and her future.

The novels of Anita Desai are eloquent commentary on the predicament of man trapped in the human condition he cannot remedy. In her next novel *Where Shall We Go In This Summer?* We find that the protagonist, Sita, is bored and frustrated by the aimless and meaningless life. She is unable to accept that:

"This was all there is to life, that life would continue thus, inside this small enclosed area, with these few characters, churning around and then past her, leaving her always in this grey, dull-lit, empty shell". (P.36)

Sita develops certain complexes which turn her into an alienated and morose character, unable to adjust with the people around her. She cannot face the realities of her life boldly. As this ordinary life and the everyday world grows insufferable to her, she desires to escape and take refuge in the magic island of Manori, where her father is believed to have performed many miracles:

"If reality were not to be born, then illusion was the only alternative. She saw that island illusion as a refuge, a protection. It would hold her body safely unborn, by magic". (P.101)

Sita's irony lies in the fact that she constantly dangles between selfrealisation and self-delusion, consciousness and anguish. She falls prey to anguish and struggles to fill it by imagining herself object-like and helpless when she is ready to fathom the mystery of life. Sita is the daughter of a political celebrity, a freedom fighter. After independence, her father comes to settle in the lonely island of Manori. He presided over Manori like a saint or more exactly like a magician. She cannot decide whether he was a charlatan or a genuine mystic. Sita is obsessed with the memory of her childhood days on the island. She retreats there as into a womb, with an obsessive desire to recapture once again the childhood innocence and purity. Her own frustration with her life in Bombay drives her to the island. Also, there is her desire to provide her unborn infant with a world that is uncorrupt. This illusion of Sita does not last for long. She soon realises that her retreat to the island is madness. The island, after an interval of twenty years, is half-paradise and halfurban reality. She tempers her memories of childhood by reconciling to the realities of present actualities of the half dilapidated buildings and the run-down life that she finds there.

By believing into magic, instead of delving deep into her own self, to find an existential fissure in her being, she deceives herself. She refuses to accept her responsibilities because it is difficult for her to govern herself. She is looking for love, which would 'stay whole'. She cannot find this in reality and so she seeks it somewhere else. By escaping from her familial duties and responsibilities, she wonders whether it is courage or cowardice:

“She had escaped from duties and responsibilities, from order and routine, from life and city, to the unlovable island. She had refused to give birth to a child in a world not fit to receive the child. She had the imagination to offer it an alternative, a life unlived, a life bewitched. She had cried out her great ‘No’ but now the time had come for her epitaph to be written - *Che free per viltate it gran rifiute.*” (P.139)

Raman tries to disillusion her about the ‘contraries’ in life by saying ‘other people put up with it - it's not so-so insufferable.’ (P.143)

Anita Desai has portrayed, through the character of Sita, that life, in spite of its contraries, has to be lived. Sita realises the truth that Raman too has suffered from anxiety for her and the unborn child. In travelling to herself, she has revealed the agonies of the journey as transparently as the jelly fish does its self. Her desire to run away, all are captured in the hope of “the slumberous egg as it labours under the shell. Patiently to divide and subdivide, asks to be hidden and wishes nothing to tell.” (P.150)

While walking on the beach, she begins to trail behind Raman, ‘follow the footsteps he had laid out for her.’ (P.150) She realises, instead of living of life of primitive reality on the island, she was ‘to return to a life of retirement, off stage.’ (P.153) Sita realises the difference between the necessity and the wish between what a man wants and what he is compelled to do.

In Anita Desai’s next novel, *Fire On the Mountain*, fantasy plays a major role in the life of the protagonist, Nanda Kaul. It is a novel about the loneliness of this old woman and the way fantasy becomes her life. The conflict arises when fantasy overtakes reality to such an extent that ultimately reality has to assert its position and Nanda Kaul is made to acknowledge reality. In this novel, fantasy is a means to escape loneliness. Nanda Kaul lives a lonely life in the mountain retreat, Caregnano. Her retreat to the mountain is by no means ‘withdrawal’ but is a ‘forced’ seclusion. She has been ‘reduced’ to live for the rest of her life alone in Kasauli. She had a very busy past life, full of responsibilities. Being the wife of a Vice-Chancellor, she had to fulfil various social duties as well as domestic duties; with a house full of children. But in spite of all this, we find Nanda lonely within herself. She could not get mentally involved with all these activities but merely did them as part of her routine. She does not have a natural motherly attachment with her children, a weakness we find in the mothers of Anita Desai's novels. So it is quite natural that in her old age she is not looked after well by her children, ‘Discharge me,’ she groaned,

“I have discharged all my duties Discharge.” (*Fire on the Mountain*: P.30)

Nand Kaul resents Raka's intrusion because it awakens in her the past memories of her children. She can neither love nor understand them. Her relationship with her husband was nothing beyond the duties and obligations they had for each other. Her husband's affair with another woman is a scar on her heart which she is trying to forget with her withdrawal into the world of fantasy. Her rejection of the outside world can be seen as a retaliation of her own rejection:

“To sustain this meagre present, she resorts to fantasy which eventually replaces reality. Withdrawal becomes a necessity to nourish all illusions. Being alone is ‘a moment of private triumph, cold and proud’ for her. It proves an armour against hurts and betrayals. It is an escape route from responsibilities, demands and obligations that she detests. The emotional frigidity that she wears at times is a mask, at times very much a part of her because of regular wear.” (P.19)

In the beginning, Nanda Kaul hates the intrusion in her peaceful and lonely life in the form of Raka, her great grand daughter. She hates to prepare menu for her and does not even go to the taxi stand to receive her. Raka is a highly perceptive child. For her, withdrawal is her nature. She keeps away from Nanda and wanders the whole day in the desolate and wild surroundings.

Slowly one sees a gradual change in the attitude of Nanda. Raka wears loneliness with ease, as it is her choice, but it bothers Nanda, as it is thrust upon her. She needs the company and attention of Raka as if she is a 'good, a challenge to her - the illusive fish, the golden catch.' (P.99) She resorts to tales of fantasy to win over Raka. It is a desperate attempt to come to terms with the reality of the present by modifying the past. Nanda Kaul creates a world of illusion which centres around herself. She weaves stories about her childhood with thing of varied interest, as, apple orchards, bears, leopard, cats, peacocks, tortises and pangolins, things which are bound to interest the fantasy of a child. But Raka is a not normal child. She remains indifferent to all this:

"She would have to break out into freedom again. She could not bear to be confined to the old lady's fantasy world when the reality outside appealed so strongly And here she was hedged, smothered, stifled inside the old lady's words, dreams and more words". (P.100)

Even Ila Das creates a world of make-believe about Nanda Kaul's youth "always in pearls and emeralds" for Raka, but of no use. At this moment Nanda realises that her world of lies was like the 'tranquillisers' necessary for her to continue the act of living in her abandoned state. Thus, Raka becomes a agent to help an adult review her life and confront reality. Nanda Kaul has to face the reality of her being different from Raka and of her unhappy past life. Raka, however, shares a world with Ram Lal, the servant. As Jabir Jain points out,

"Ram Lal and Raka meet as equals, not as an adult and child, and share the wonder and the awe that the existence of such beings is likely to arouse. Ram Lal's belief in the supernatural is neither an escape nor an emotional prop. It is integral part of his world and of his background. Raka accepts it unquestioningly because it has a certain authenticity and cohesion". (Jain: P.20)

Raka has a world of fantasy of her own, different for Nanda Kaul's and Ram Lal's. She roams in the desolate surroundings. Her fantasy finds expression in thinking the Pasteur Institute as a 'Square dragon" and Ram Lal's kitchen as "a blackened, fire-blasted cave in which one fiery inflamed eye glowed and smouldered by itself." Raka is also running away from the gruesome reality of human relationships. She has been a spectator of her father beating her mother, which has a negative effect on her psyche. It is this fear which makes her put that forest on fire. It is perhaps an irrepressible urge to destroy all falsities.

When Nanda is face to face with reality, she has to admit all the falsities to herself. But she is not able to bear it and dies. Jasbir Jain sums up the entire philosophy of the novel as, "withdrawal, which does not come naturally to her, takes her nowhere and involvement is equally meaningless." Death is the ultimate reality of life whereas life is a painful process:

"Thus, we see, fantasy is an escape from reality, a way of life, a survival strategy to deal with the present. It is fantasy with a purpose - first to make her solitary life bearable and then to win Raka over. Both invariably lead to self-deception. When the past and the present are, thus, built on and of lies, one has to pay the price, and the price, in Nanda's case, is confrontation with reality". (Panigrahi "The writer's Obligation" in Custody P.75)

In Anita Desai's next novel *Clear Light of Day*, there is a conflict between the four brothers and sisters who have gone their own way as they have grown old. In this process of pursuit of their destinies, they find a loss of a wider base - there is a sense of uprootedness in them. They look back in anger and guilt, wanting a recovery of a sense of fullness and closeness that they have lost.

The two sisters, Tara and Bim, face the conflict between reality and illusion, though in different manners. Both have to overcome the illusions to come to terms with reality and life. Tara the younger sister is an incurable romantic who wishes for a bright and happy carefree world. She reads Lorna Doone

and *Gone with The Wind*, as she grows old and lives in a world of imagination and fantasy. She enjoys the fairy tales narrated by Aunt Mira. She picks up the snails in the hope of finding a pearl even when she is grown up; which shows her fanciful ideas and beliefs. As Tara grows up, she goes out in the company of Misra sisters. She prefers the Misra home to her home as they don't keep up appearances and are sure of their middle class status. The Dases, on the other hand, played bridge and neglected their children. Tara tries to escape the dreariness and oppressive atmosphere of the house by going to the Misra house and finally by marrying Bakul, a Foreign Service diplomat. Still, Tara likes to come home, as she is afraid to lose contact with India. She recalls her childhood days and becomes a child again as she roams in the garden, trying to steal a guava when her husband is not watching. She enjoys being home after such a long time, yet at times, questions its stagnant atmosphere. She asks, "Why had nothing changed? She had changed - why it did not keep up with her?" (*Clear Light of Day*: P.12)

Tara faces the conflict of accepting the reality of her past and present. She is guilty of abandoning her sister Bim. She undergoes the agonies when recollecting her childhood troubles. Though her marriage seems an escape, it liberates her only superficially. When she returns, she is more confident and socially poised, yet she slips into her old groves of meanness. She doesn't wish to go out of the house with her husband. This inertia shows that Tara had become aware sharply of what she had left Bim to cope with. But Tara is worried about Bim and realises that she is not different from Bim. "We're not really. We may seem to be, but we have everything in common. That makes us one." (P.162)

Unlike Tara and Raja, Bim has a realistic and practical temperament. She also escapes from the dreary and desolate atmosphere of the home by reading history. Her preference for cold, hard facts pervades her whole life. She gets more and more involved in the life that she had inherited after the escape of Tara and Raja. Bim is left with Baba, who is mentally retarded, and is totally dependent on her. Though Bim seems to be a realist, yet we see that she has deliberately constructed a barrier around herself. Bim nurses a grudge against Raja for abandoning her:

"Her love for Raja has too much of a battering, she had felt herself so humiliated by his going away and leaving her, by his reversal of role from brother to landlord, that it had never recovered and become the tall shining thing it had been once". (P.62)

Bim does not escape like Raja and Tara, which appears more to be a matter of compulsion rather than of choice. Having staged, she sees her action as a sacrifice. Naturally, she too feels hemmed in and she is full of anger, 'her anger was as raw as a rash of prickly heat that she compulsively scratched and made worse.' (*Clear Light of Day*: 162) This conflict in her mind makes her give vent to her 'swelling, bulging and glinting anger on Baba. But Bim soon realises her mistake and sees the reality that:

"They were really all parts of her - inseparable, so many aspects of her as she was of them, so that the anger or the disappointment she felt at herself. Whatever hurt they felt. She felt . . . Bim could see well as by the clear light of the day that these gashes and wounds in her side that bled, then it was only because her love was imperfect and did not encompass them thoroughly enough and because it had flaws and inadequacies and did not extend to all equally". (P. 165)

Bim's anger paves the way for a compromise with reality. Thus, when the cloud of illusion clears her mind she sees the reality in a new perspective and realises that only she can bind the family into one.

In the next novel *In custody*, we find Deven and Nur, the great Urdu poet, caught up in the world of illusions. Anita Desai explores how their life has no meaning and it is absurd at its core. Deven, a lecturer in a private college in Mirpore, is an ardent fan of the great Urdu poet, Nur, and is also striving to be a poet and a critic. Deven fails as an artist because he is alienated from the realities of life. He

considers art to be separate from life. He believes that life with its indignities and impediments cannot meet his artistic sensibility.

“He had not found a way to reconcile the meanness of his physical existence with the purity and immensity of his literary yearning”. (*In Custody*:P. 26)

Deven places poetry on a remote plane above life, 'above any reality':

“That, he saw, was the glory of the poets - that they could distance events and emotions, place them where perspective made it possible to view things clearly and calmly. He realised that he loved poetry not because it made things immediate but it removed them to a position where they become bearable”. (P.54)

Deven had a flair for poetry and it is evident when Murad asks him about sending something for his special number on Urdu poetry, he feels, “a glow creep through him at the thought of writing.” (P.16) Murad's suggestion of interviewing Nur creates a romantic illusion. Deven feels that Nur exists in a higher sphere; where ‘his god dwelt, the domain of poetry, beauty and illumination.’ He climbed the stairs of his house ‘as if sloughing off and casting away the meanness and dross of his past existence and steadily approaching a new and wonderously illuminated era.’ (P.40)

But these illusions are shattered on his encounter with the old poet. Deven finds Nur's life messy, distorted and disintegrated and he wonders "how, out of all this hubbub, the poet drew the threads and wove his poetry of philosophy"(P. 52) Deven is repulsed on seeing the private and public life of the poet; his loutish company, the unemployed parasites who lived on the fantasy of being poets and surrounded him. Nur seems to enjoy their company and blatant talk. He broke into curse and abuses on account of the piles that he is suffering from. Deven is scandalised at his excessive drinking and eating large amount of biryani, kababs and pulav in an unsightly manner. He had:

“Pictured him living either surrounded by elderly, sage and dignified literates or else entirely alone in divine isolation. What else are these clowns and jokers and jugglers doing around him or he with them?” (P.51)

While interviewing Nur and after meeting him several times Deven realises the full significance of the poet's relationship with life. Nur identifies with life completely by willing acceptance of the realities. Deven also realizes the inadequacy of his own romantic conception of art. But still he is tormented with the conflict between reality and illusion as he is unable to relate it to his life. The realisation that his pursuit of art had not only disillusioned him of all his lofty idealism but driven him to the depth of disaster and disturbs him so much that he cannot sleep the whole night. He realises that it is not he alone who was living in a trap, but Nur himself was living in a kind of cage, like some trapped animal:

“The unexpected friendship had given him the illusion that the doors of the trap had opened and he could escape, after all, into a wider world that lay outside but a closer familiarity with the poet had shown him that what he thought of as the ‘wider world’ was an illusion too – it was only a kind of zoo in which he would not hope to find freedom. He would only blunder into another cage, inhabited by some other trapped animal”. (P. 131)

Deven does get an answer to reality provided by art through self examination. He realises the inevitability of mundane realities and their role in fulfilling his aspiration as an artist. With this acceptance, Deven moves on to greater realisation of the truth that ‘There is no release or escape’. (*In Custody*: 203) His final run, after stopping for a while, affirms the ultimate convergence into his self, embling him to go for a prospective search.

The novel Baumgartner's Bombay is about the isolated life of an uprooted Jew. It is a novel about his alienation. Hugo Baumgartner is forced to leave his motherland, Germany due to anti-semitic activities. He takes refuge in British India before Second World War for a better future, but, is not accepted by the Indian society for being fair-skinned. This tragedy is his homelessness and rootlessness. As Usha Bande rightly points out, the characters of Baumgartner's Bombay are "lost personages, pathetic in their loneliness, unable to find their cosmos." (Bande: P.122)

Hugo Baumgartner is trapped in situations beyond his control. He knows that he would be unable to rectify them, so he accepts them as they are. This makes him a pathetic figure and the readers pity him for his sorry state. Hugo is unable to belong to anyone except his mother. In his school, he was always aware of his being a Jew. This feeling isolated him from the rest of the children. It fills him with shame that "he did not belong to the picture-book world of Fir trees, the gift and celebration" of Christmas.

He could not belong to the Jewish children too. He keeps himself alienated from them, happy in his home, his dream-land. But his happy state does not last for long and he has to leave for the East. We see for a moment that Hugo could relate to the surroundings of Venice, where East and West meet. He is nostalgic about his brief sojourn in Venice and hopes to go back there. But Hugo is misfit in India. He cannot relate to this new land and its people. He always remains a '*firangi*', a '*malechha*'. This makes him withdraw into himself and keep himself aloof from the outside hustle-bustle.

Baumgartner is not friendless in India. He has some Indian and German friends. But the distance is never paved. He maintains a distance with everyone. He is unable to share his troubles, his fears about his mother with anyone. There is always a shell within which he finds himself secure, like a turtle. His desire to withdraw and remain uninvolved is echoed in his thoughts when he feels relieved that he is not a part of the chaos he sees around him:

"He felts his life turn grey, like a curtain wrapping him in his dusty felt. If he became aware, from time to time, that the world beyond the curtain was growing steadily more crowded, more clamorous and lives of others more hectic, more chaotic, then he felt only relief that he had never been a part of the mainstream. Always, somehow, he had escaped the mainstream". (*Baumgartner's Bombay*: P.211)

These are the thoughts of a man satisfied with a life, devoid of any entanglements. But this is an isolated world of make believes. Hugo cannot face the reality of loneliness, so he keeps himself surrounded with cats. He fills his home and life with stray cats. He goes out of his room only to collect leftover food for the cats from the nearby cafe. Baumgartner eased the pain of loneliness by keeping himself in the illusion of his past days in Germany. The memories of his mother and his days in Germany give him sustenance to bear his lonely life in India:

"It was as if his mind were trying to construct a wall against history, a wall behind which he could crouch and hide, holding him to a desperate wish that Germany were still what he had known as a child and that in that dream country his mother continued to live the life they had lived there together." (P.118)

Lotte, a friend of Hugo, also suffers from isolation. She, too, cannot accept India. These outsiders sustain themselves by illusion and make believe situations. Lotte and Lily forget themselves in the world of dance, drinks and other frivolities. Lotte tries to escape her loneliness by marrying a *Marwari* businessman, Kantilal Sethia. Her loneliness increases after the death of Kantilal; and when she is turned out of his house, Baumgartner and Lotte cling to each other, as they are victims of the same situations. In the uttermost sense of loneliness they talk of going back. When asked by Julius, "Oh, Hugo. Why did we

not go back?" His answer reflects his disillusionment, 'Go back? Where?' (P. 112) Talking of going back to their country and returning to their past explains their realisation of reality and their disillusionment.

As a novelist Desai succeeds in revealing the subtle and intense expositions of human psyche, first in *Clear Light of Day*, then in *In Custody*, and in Baumgartner's *Bombay*. The last novel prepares the foreground for *Journey to Ithaca* by revealing a super-sensitive mental state of the protagonist. The central issue in *Journey to Ithaca* is not the search for identity of existence, but a "search for truth, ultimate reality, beauty, joy, ecstasy or whatever form truth has" (*Journey to Ithaca*: P.18)

Laila - the 'Mother'; and Sophie - the wife of Matteo; the two female characters in *Journey to Ithaca*, are in India as the seekers after truth. Laila, as is revealed by Sophie's ceaseless efforts for discovering her past, in fact a Muslim by birth, rebels against the traditional code of Muslim religion and leaves her home in search of her spiritual existence. As a rebellious daughter of Alma and Hameed, Laila exhibits 'an amber of curiosity'. Since her early childhood, her curious nature makes her to give up "all orthodox religions". She is sent away from home to further her academics. At Cairo, superficially she pursues her studies with all diligence. From "her appearance and studious demeanor they never suspected that Laila might have secret life, a night life". (P.127)

In fact, Laila is in search of freedom. Her friend, Fatima, is not aware of the upheaval going on in Laila's mind. Her escapes into the maze of lanes in the Khan-el-Khalili sound strange even to her parents. In her search for freedom, she is unable to control her mind and her senses are like unmanageable horses. At the Al Azhar University, her yearning for freedom is perceptible when she addresses her fellow students: "better to go to prison than live as slaves". (P. 131) Laila as a revolutionary student becomes a source of affliction to her parents. Even at her seventeen, she determines to break off the traditional custom which snares her like the coil of a serpent. Her parents now decide to send Laila to Paris for further studies. She is not at all pleased with the idea of going to Paris because by now her inner self is able to give directions to her religious quest.

At Aunt Françoise's place, Laila behaves in a very uncivilized manner. She finds her Aunt's household disgusting as the glass windows are always screened with lace curtains which are never drawn aside. She has the temperament of a free wanderer and the rich surroundings of her aunt's house eclipse her vision of spirituality. She wants to keep herself away from the materialistic pursuits of life and to achieve this she is quite capable of unpredictable behaviour. Her stay at Paris upsets her aunt Françoise and uncle Bertrand by the rebellious thoughts. When her uncle asks her to eat the meat, she refuses it and confesses: "I am a vegetarian. No one will make me eat the flesh of slaughtered animals". (P.185)

In Paris, instead of purchasing Islamic books, she purchases the books of the Oriental philosophy. Above all, as luck would have it, she meets a troupe of Krishna Lila and joins this troupe for learning the Oriental art of dance. She learns the classical art of dance from Krishnaji, but the art of dance does not bind her for a long time and she gives it up for realizing the higher vision of God. As a dancer, she fails, but as a seeker after truth, she succeeds in fulfilling the final goal of her life. As 'Mother', Laila refuses to accept any kind of formalism for the realization of ultimate truth. She, as a Muslim girl, does not hold back to be initiated by a Hindu saint. She remarks about the futility of all religions thus:

"This is no church, my friends, this is no temple or mosque or Vihara. We have no religion. Religion? Like the black crows up in the tree caw-caw-caw, scolding, scolding! But, do they crow at us now? No, they are silent! We have silenced them . . . Religion makes one ashamed, makes one guilty, makes one fearful. The Master has told you not to feel guilty not to feel ashamed, not to be afraid". (P.98)

The image of “the black crow” in the above passage brings forth the hollowness and emptiness of all religions. The sound of the crow - “caw-caw caw” is linked with the meaningless sound of different religions which have nothing to do with the absolute reality.

The Mother thus exemplifies an ideal life of high attributes while teaching her disciples :

“You must know I mean honey made from spiritual nectar, to nourish your souls. All organizations are useless, Matteo, useless and dry and empty, if they do not contain the nectra of the spirit. I want it to be rich, rich, rich with this nectar”. (P.118)

The “nectar” here symbolizes the essence of life.

Sophie, as a young wife with the western-oriented approach to life, desires to fulfill the dream of her woman-hood but this is not possible in an unruly and stuffily arranged life of the ashram. She feels neglected among the other pilgrims in the ashram:

“She scrambled to her feet and returned to eat some bread from the night before and drink a tumbler of tea given to her, and even smoked a cigarette furtively behind a hut . . . feeling both guilty and grateful to be excluded”.(P.53-54)

The smoking of cigarette “furtively” becomes symbolic of two things:

First, she breaks the code of the ashram; and secondly, she relieves herself momentarily from her tense nervous system due to an inferiority complex as an ashramite. Again, the smoking of Sophie brings forth the apparent contradictions of her mind : the guilt and gratefulness. She feels guilty, for she smokes furtively as an ashramite and feels grateful as she does not like to develop any association and reconciliation with any of the pilgrims in the ashram. As an expatriate, she experiences the dilemma of her identity. The sense of belongingness so vexes and overpowers her that she questions her husband : “Couldn’t we stay in our own country? To die there?” (P.57) Disenchanted as an ashramite, even the very mention of the word ‘ashram’ baffles her so much that she longs for her home. Weeping like a child she cries, “I want to go home”. (P.89)

Earlier, when Sophie and Matteo come to this *ashram* at Himalayan region which is run by a beautiful young woman who is known as the Mother, Sophie suspects the spiritual authority of the Mother : “It sounds as if she gets up on a stage and hypnotises you all like a magician”.(P.102) Sophie with her womanly emotions becomes jealous of the Mother and regards her “a monster spider who had spun this web to catch these silly flies.”(P.127) The jealousy of a woman makes her enquire all about the past of the Mother. Her inquisitiveness leads her to discover her arrival in India as a dancer, “looking for a rich somebody to pick her up”. (P.131)

Like Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, Sophie becomes rebellious against the forced decision of her husband. With her future anxieties of a mother, she leaves the company of her husband and comes back to Italy to her parents. In Italy, she tries to fill the absence of Matteo in the company of another gentleman, Paolo whom she meets in a party. He also finds this mature woman quite fascinating. But Sophie still experiences the over-powering effect of the Matteo-consciousness on her: “Her life with Matteo had spoiled her life with a man like Paolo; it was no longer possible”. (P. 155) Anita Desai thus upholds sanctity of the relations between husband and wife.

The second character who becomes rebellious like other heroines of Anita Desai for her spiritual quest is Laila, who later becomes the “Mother”, in the novel. Spending her childhood in Alexandria, she is educated in Paris and Venice and finally comes to India for her spiritual emancipation. Laila, as a Muslim girl, revolts against her parental religion, and endures the panics of life in her search for godhead, first in Paris and then in India.

These are two women, Sophie and Laila, revolt in this novel against their surroundings. Sophie longs for worldly freedom while Laila aspires for spiritual freedom.

As the novelist analyses the psychic depth of the characters, her language tends to be situational and contextual. Sophie expresses her contempt towards other people in the ashram through non-verbal language. She does not like to give up her European identity among the ashramites in India. So, she does not try to understand the mystical yet the false language of the people at the ashram.

She excludes herself from the environment of the ashram due to the lack of the language. She rather tries to understand the language of birds and animals through their gestures and motions, but ignores willingly to understand the language of people at the ashram.

Although Anita Desai is known for her delineation of women characters who are the victims of society, the depressed lot, who either react to their situations or fall as victims, but in her *Fasting, Feasting*, she does not present such characters. The protagonist, Uma does not appear a depressed girl. Uma is made to appear a victim of her circumstances, a victim of her fate and as such she accepts her destiny quietly, ungrudgingly and tries to live like the dumb driven cattle. But that does not mean that she is completely insensible and unthinkable.

On the contrary, Uma is full of tender feelings; she has her wishes and desires, imagination and expectation, which she is unable to express. There is a sense of agony, a sense of irreparable loss and permanent shock in her which she deliberately hides in order to remain true to her nature. It is significant to note that Uma has been delineated in altogether a different way from all the other heroines of Desai. She is neither a psychic case nor a violent rebellion in the society; neither assertive nor demanding and yet she is a thinking, feeling human being. Unlike her sister, Aruna, she cannot express nor can she register her thoughts and yet she appears to suffer under the circumstances against which she can make no resistance. Here she becomes the traditional archetypal woman who is born to live and suffer.

In *Fasting, Feasting*, it may be observed that, unlike her other novels, Anita Desai has made an attempt to present Uma as a girl who has to live in the society accepting all the humiliations, injustices, sufferings and miseries without raising any voice or making resistance. Like the traditional Indian woman, Uma suffers quietly only to prove her great sense of endurance and stoic acceptance. After her tragic withdrawal from her husband Harish, Aruna, the younger sister, whispers to her in the dark and silences, "Uma, Uma Didi - did he touch you?" Uma burries her head in her pillow and howls - "No, No." (*Fasting, Feasting*: P.171) There could not be a more tragic situation than the one that Uma faces! Who could explain the cause or the justification of such a situation?

Anita Desai's latest novel, *The Zigzag way*, is a word map of her long established creative acumen. With this new arrival, she has added a cultural bridge in order to relocate Mexican cultural in its own recognizable way. Here she is a new voice in providing space for the marginalised in an alien culture, her new home. *The Zigzag Way* is an impressive tag of a cultural creative hybrid. With her long established confident voice she makes an analytic and interpretative exploration into the life and views of a distinct civilization with its recognizable historicity striking a neat balance between skillfully worked art and rhythmic life.

The Zigzag way, is the story of twentieth century Mexico, through the turbulence of the revolution and personal calamity; of the exploitation of the Mexican Indians, and their dubious saviours, such as the formidable Dona Vera. Known as the "Queen of the Sierra," Dona Vera is the widow of a mining baron who has dedicated her fortune to preserving the Huichol culture. But her formidable presence belies a dubious past. Dona Vera, whose quetzal-coloured kimono conceals "layers of worn and lumpish grey

flannel”, is unveiled as one of Desai’s unctuous charlatans, like the decadent Urdu poet of *In Custody*, having fled not the Nazis, but her family’s Nazi past, sloughing it off to emerge “like some sly and secretive snake in its new skin”. Though she houses local Indians, Eric notes that she “never speaks to them, only of them”. Yet her private mourning for a Huichol boy whom she adopted may hint at a deeper grief and guilt. Drones of US university researchers charting the pre-Columbian past and peyote-fuelled visions are meanwhile likened to missionaries harvesting souls.

Thus it may be concluded that in her different novels Anita Desai has portrayed different facets of human feminine psyche. Her range is quite wide. Her characters cover women of almost all age groups. In *Fire on The Mountain*, in *Raka* we have a child going to girlhood; in *Cry, The Peacock*, Maya a married woman; in Baumgartner's *Bombay*, Lotte is a middle-aged woman and Nanda Kaul, and Ila Das old women. Not only there are women of different age groups but they are also of different types and characters. In *Voices In the City*, if Monisha is an intellectual type, Maya is hypersensitive, we have Sarla in *In Custody* who cannot look beyond the four walls of her house. Even though the wife of a Hindi lecturer she has absolutely no interest in literature, or her husband's profession. She is so ignorant that she concludes her husband’s frequent visits to Delhi to interview the poet as a ruse for meeting his girlfriend.

In *Voice in the City*, one also finds subtle suggestions of adultery between the widow mother of Monisha and the retired Major Chaddha. Thus these novels embody explorations of the human & feminine psyche by the Anita Desai, who has presented a variety of characters facing identity crisis in different situations and attempting a reconciliation between illusion and reality, sometimes successfully; but often succumbing to the strain and yielding to suicide and death.

Chapter - V

A Study of Comparison of Traditional and Modern Oeuvre

The term “Feminism” has different uses and its meaning is often contested. Some writers use this term to refer to a historically specific political movement in the US and Europe; whereas, others use it to refer to the belief that there are injustices against women, though there is no consensus on the exact list of these injustices. Although the term “feminism” has a history in English, linked with women’s activism, from the late 19th century to the present, it is useful to distinguish feminist ideas or beliefs from feminist political movements, for, even in periods where there has been no significant political activism around women’s subordination, individuals have been concerned with and theorized about justice for women.

To speak of “Feminism” as a theory is already a reduction. However, in terms of its theory, ‘Feminism’ may be categorized into three general groups: theories having an essentialist focus, including psychoanalytic and French feminism; theories aimed at defining or establishing a feminist literary canon or theories seeking to re-interpret and re-vision literature and culture and history and so forth from a less patriarchal slant including gynocriticism, liberal feminism; and theories focusing on sexual difference and sexual politics including gender studies, lesbian studies, cultural feminism, radical feminism, and socialist/ materialist feminism.

Further, women and men needed to consider what it meant to be a woman, to consider how much of what society has often inherently female traits deemed are culturally and socially constructed. Simon de Beauvoir’s study, *The Second Sex*, served as a ground-breaking book of feminism that questioned the ‘othering’ of women by Western philosophy. Early projects in feminist theory included resurrecting women’s literature that, in many cases, had never been considered seriously or had been erased over

time, e.g. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was quite prominent in the early 20th century but was virtually unknown until her work was 're-discovered' later in the century. Since the 1960s the writings of many women have been rediscovered, reconsidered, and collected in large anthologies such as The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women.

However, merely unearthing women's literature did not ensure its prominence. In order to assess women's writings the number of preconceptions inherent in a literary canon dominated by male beliefs and male writers needed to be re-evaluated. Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* (1963), Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), Teresa de Lauretis's *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (1984), Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (1975), Judith Fetterly's *The Resisting Reader* (1978), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), or Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gulbar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) are just handful of the many critiques that questioned cultural, sexual, intellectual, and psychological stereotypes about women. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Right of Women* (1792) which discusses male writers like Milton, Pope, and Rousseau; Olive Schreiner's *Women and Labour* (1911); Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), which vividly portrays the unequal treatment given to women seeking education and alternatives to marriage and mother-hood; and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) which has an important section on the portrayal of women in the novels of D.H. Lawrence:

"The Radical Feminists allege that marriage is at the very root of women's subjection to the man because, through it, man controls both her reproduction and her person". (Banks: "Face of Feminism" P. 230)

Indian English literature originated as a necessary outcome of the introduction of English education in India under the colonial rule. The new literature, however, is characterized by Indian themes, Indian reality, and above all, by a new language, that is, a new English, adequately suitable for the communication of Indian experience.

Indian English literature is today a fast growing discipline at the levels of creativity and criticism. The earlier shackles, skepticism and cynicism, with which the new literature was born, have vanished with the passage of time. Today this literature, which was born on Indian soil in the hands of Indians, is widely acclaimed even outside the land of its birth. Speaking about Indian English fiction, Braj B. Kachru remarks:

"Indian English fiction is now being studied and discussed in the entire English speaking world by those interested in the Indian subcontinent or in non-native English, and by linguists for its thematic and stylistic Indianness. At least half a dozen Indian English novelists have created a small but slowly increasing international reading public for themselves e.g., Mulk Raj Anand, Anita Desai, Manohar Malgonkar, Kamala Markandaya, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Khushwant Singh and Nayantara Sahgal." (Kachru: "The Indianization of English" P. 87)

Obviously, international attention to these Indian writers is due to their Indianness, conveyed through their work in more ways than one, including themes, images, myths, symbols and linguistic nuances. Typical Indian themes are said to be the caste system, social attitudes, social and religious taboos, superstitions, notions of superiority and inferiority. Even more important issues pertain to socio-cultural ethos and philosophical heritage. Moreover, as K.S. Srinivasan aptly points out, myths are also repositories of Indian identity:

"The characteristic Indianness is traceable to the totality of the myth of India, embodied in themes, such as Siva- Parvati, Radha-Krishna, Ram-Sita and so on, they being part of our collective national psyche . . .

. Tales from Panchatantra, Kathasaritsagara and the extinct Brihatkatha are as much part of the national psyche". (Srinivasan: " The Ethos of Indian Literature" p.2)

The emergence of women novelists in Indian English literature took place as early as the last quarter of the nineteenth century. But, it was only after independence that they could make solid contribution to Indian English fiction. The post-independence period has brought to the forefront a number of noted women novelists who have enriched Indian English fiction by a creative release of feminine sensibility. The 'woman' has been the focus of many literary works in this period. Writers like Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Kiran Desai etc. have achieved recognition in recent times.

Problems of women, which were till now in the periphery, have now shifted to the centre. Through the eyes of these women writers one gets a glimpse of a different world, till now not represented in literature. Women, who were till then treated as second class citizens, were assigned their due place in these novels. These novels present a picture of the impact of education on women, her new status in the society and her assertion of individuality. The works of Indian women novelist like Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande can be compared with those of the Canadian novelists, like Margaret Atwood, Margaret Lawrence and Aritha Van Herk. All these writers write of life as seen by women and life as affecting women. The Feminist movement in the West has inspired a new approach to reality in relation to woman and her portrayal in literature:

"Coined by the feminist scholar, Elaine Showalter, the term 'gynocriticism' has now become synonymous with the study of women as writers, and provides critics with four models concerning the nature of women's writing that help answer some of the chief concerns of feminist criticism. Each of Showalter's models in sequential subsuming and developing the preceding model, as follows : (1) the biological model, with its emphasis on how the female body makes itself upon the text by providing a host of literary images and a personal, intimate tone; (2) the linguistic model, concerning itself with the differences between women's and men's use of language and with the question of whether women can\and do create a language peculiar to their gender and utilize such a language in their writings; (3) the psycho-analytic model, based on an analysis of the female psyche and how such analysis affects the writing process and (4) the cultural model, investigating how the society in which female authors work and function shapes women's goals, responses and points of view". (Bressler: "Literary Criticism" P. 105-06)

A literary manifestation of the specialization process creates a different linguistic experience and environment for male and female experiences, especially in novels, we can move much closer to the female experience. Novels, therefore, are seen as structured and extended statements about reality.

Of the varied hues and shades of the women novelists, Anita Desai happens to be one of the major voices of the modern Indian English fiction. She represents the welcome "Creative release of the feminine sensibility" which began to emerge after World War II. She is a recorder of the dilemma faced by an individual in the Indian urban set up. She ushered a new era of psychological realism in this genre with her novel *Cry, The Peacock* (1963).

Anita Desai, like Kamala Markandaya, has made human relationship central to her fictional concern. Her serious concern is with the journey within her characters. Therefore, the recurring theme that we come across in her novels is the agony of existence in a hostile and male dominated society that is not only conservative but also taboo-ridden. The metaphysical world attracts her too; and so does the mental apprehensions and the sense of insecurity in the life of her protagonists who are undergoing traumatic

psychic experiences due to the collapse of value-system and lack of satisfactory alternatives. Despondency, frustrations and failures do not give rise to complete chaos and anarchy in human relationship. We see the struggle of the protagonists as heroic attempts that finally bring glory to the individual and add dignity to the spirit of freedom.

As K.R.S. Iyengar has aptly put it, her forte becomes:

“. . . the exploration of sensibility - the particular kind of Indian sensibility that is ill at ease among barbarians and the philistines, the anarchists and the amoralists”. (Iyengar: P. 82)

The women characters of Kamala Markandaya are generally conformists and traditionalists. In her novels, *Possession* and *Two Virgins*, the central consciousness is that of a woman. Her women characters possess an admirable strength to face the calamities of life and are adept at the wisdom of compromise and adjustment. Her novels *Nectar In A Sieve* and *A Handful Of Rice* portray the harsh economic reality in rural areas. Kamala Markandaya draws her canvas on the changing socio-economic scenes making her novels a wonderful kaleidoscope. She shows dexterity in her selection of characters and situations. Her characters represent a wide spectrum: peasants, queens and concubines, rural and city breeds, English officials in India and Indian émigrés in England. An adept teller of tales,

“She claims to be on the side of the human and life, against machinery, against exploitation of the weak, against war and violence” (William, “Galaxy Of Indian Writings in English” P. 26)

Woman’s struggle is one ranging from survival at the sheer physical level to the quest for identity. Most women have to grapple with conflicting situations at home and also outside. In Markandaya’s wide repertoire of women characters, ranging from the harassed, victimized peasant women to the princess of *havelis*, we discern the plight of the Indian woman crippled by her sex, society and economic condition. Traditional patriarchal Indian society confines woman to the taboo-ridden path. Rukmani of *Nectar in a Sieve*, Markandaya’s debut novel, exemplifies the large mass of underprivileged rural women whose backs are bent with ill-rewarded labour. The ravages of nature and hunger for millions have been treated sensitively in her novels. As H.M. Williams has rightly observed :

“Yet Markandaya’s picture is not despairing. Human dignity survives, especially in the passionate and loyal Rukmani, a brilliantly conceived character who changes from dignified stoicism to acts of near-lunatic madness when goaded beyond patience, are made vividly credible. The dignified religious sense of fate in the Indian peasant is portrayed with sympathy”. (Williams, “Indo-Anglian Literature” P. 84)

Kamala Markandaya’s *A Silence of Desire* (1960) and Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of Day* (1980) clearly connect the desire for freedom of the spirit with the freedom of body and mind, centering on the older women protagonists’ quest for spiritual fulfillment only through the worldly context. Markandaya and Desai question the codes of Brahminical orthodoxy that define women within the confines of their domestic existence, particularly in terms of their conjugal and maternal responsibilities. *A Silence of Desire* and *Clear Light of Day* dramatize the difficult struggle by which women seek detachment from the ties on the material plane in order to enter a space, traditionally reserved for men, of spiritual discovery.

Nayantara Sahgal wrote novels mostly related with the political affairs of India. Her novels take a stand against the vital relationship, like, marriage going sterile. Her female characters opt out of it and find fulfillment in extramarital relationships. They want to establish a new order with changed standards where women can be their true selves and there is no need for hypocrisy. But, Sahgal seems to have avoided going into the depths of woman’s mind. Seema Jena remarks:

“The tension and anxiety of being modern in traditional society have been overlooked by most of these writers who have devoted their attention to broad social features that emerge in course of the gradual metamorphosis of the old order. So intense was their devotion to the physical aspect of this change that they failed to properly take note of and project the psychological reality.”(Jena: 8)

Nayantara Sahgal’s *The Day in Shadow* (1971) has attracted little favourable critical attention from the feminists. While the realism of its portrayal of the protagonist’s suffering has generally been acknowledged, the novel, on the whole, has been attacked as a bad feminist book . . . anti-feminist, pro-male. Her novel is, moreover, characteristically a feminine novel, not because the author is so thoroughly indoctrinated in patriarchal ideas that she speaks and thinks like men want (women) to, but, because the people, the situations and the narrative structure that she employs are based on recognizable feminine archetypes in which protest and hard-thinking analysis subvert the surface acceptance. As Annis Pratt notes,

“. . . to use our drive for authenticity in order to shape feminine archetypes into fiction, to bring elements of our inner world into consciousness and give them shape in the social form of the novel, is an act of defiance with perilous consequences.”(Pratt: “Archetypal Patterns in Women’s Fictions” P. 11)

Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai have both produced new and very mature works. Sahgal has grown tremendously, both in commands over event and character, and in ironic detachment. Desai has progressed beyond the intense involvement with personal psychology and stream of consciousness narration to a deep understanding of wider social problems of class and culture.

Another remarkable woman writer is Shashi Deshpande. She not only forthrightly articulates a thematic and technical maturity but also effectively communicates an intensely apprehended feminine sensibility. She has apparently injected a new consciousness, offering varied interpretation of imperishable Indian values as well as highlighting our cultural heritage. She added a new depth, a new dimension, to Indian English fiction. The novel, *That Long Silence*, which won Shashi Deshpande the Sahitya Akademi Award for 1990, tells the story of an Indian housewife, who maintains silence throughout her life. The novel ends with her resolve to speak, to break her long silence.

The women protagonists in these novels achieve “Personhood” yet do not negate the family or the society. They go beyond, what Elaine Showalter calls, the “Female Phase” (Showalter: 13) which is a phase of self discovery, a turning inward, freed from the dependence of opposition, a search for identity. They no doubt discover themselves but the quest does not end there. It could be observed that they are not feminists in the first stage but in the second.

“The second stage cannot be viewed in terms of women alone, but also in terms of the separate personhood or equality with men. The second stage involves coming to new terms with the family, new terms with love and work”. (Showalter: “A Literature of their Own” P. 10)

Shashi Deshpande’s *That Long Silence* could be read as crystallization of memory and catharsis. It is an autobiographical narrative of Jaya. Her husband could not understand her feelings, as a result of which, she was torn from within. This estrangement between Jaya and her husband reminds one of Anita Desai’s *Cry, The Peacock* where an ever-widening gap in communication between Maya and her husband is felt throughout the novel.

Like Virginia Woolf or Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande is a prose rhapsodist of feelings, sentiments and emotions passing through human consciousness. Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande specialize in depicting the undulations of the female ego or self under the pressure of critical human situations and emotional relationships. Their attention is also focused on feminine suffering in the complex cultural

stresses and strains in Indian society, having strong past moorings. Both, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande, explore human relationships in modern Indian society, particularly the husband-wife relationship. Shashi Deshpande's women, like those of her predecessor, are tolerant, obedient and submissive. But a feminist awakening and upsurge is all along notable in their feelings and conduct.

Another most popular woman novelist is Kiran Desai, daughter of the author Anita Desai. She is a born story teller. Her first novel, *Hullabaloo in The Guava Orchard* (1998), and the next novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), which won Kiran Desai the Booker prize for 2006, tell the story which revolves around the inhabitants of a town in the north-eastern Himalayas.

Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is a pacy, fresh look at life in the sleepy provincial town of Shahkot in India. The central character of the novel, Sampath Chawla, failed postal clerk and pathological dreamer, escapes from his work and his oppressive family to live in a guava tree. Here, he spends his life snoozing, musing and eating the ever-more exotic meals, cooked for him by his sociopathic mother. He begins to amaze his fellow townspeople by revealing intimate details about them, gleaned from a bit of lazy letter opening whilst still working at the post office, and by spouting a series of truisms worthy of a Shakespearian fool.

Before long, he becomes known as a local *guru*, and attract such a strong flow of visitors that opening hours have to be established in the orchard to allow him to rest. Soon, commercialism, a recurrent theme in Desai's work, takes over -Sampath's fast thinking, entrepreneurial father Mr. Chawla, who, at first, despaired at his son's inanity, now sees his chance to make the family's fortune. He sets up his picturesque family in a compound around the guava tree that is soon lined with colorful advertisements for tailors, fizzy drinks, talcum powder and insect repellent.

Visitors bring gifts that Mr. Chawla can sell, the family bank account begins to grow and he looks at investment plans. All goes well until the arrival in the orchard of a group of languor monkeys who have developed a taste for alcohol and begin to terrorize the town. The tale continues, with a growing sense of impending doom, as the family and the various officials of the town try to resolve the monkey problem.

Like many important works of literature, the book can be read on several levels - as an inventive, fast moving, delicious tale, full of rich descriptions and marvelous comic cartoon like personalities, but also as a deeper study of the pathos of familial misunderstanding the ridiculousness of hero-worship, the unpredictability of commercialism and the ineptness of officialdom.

Many of these themes are explored further in Kiran Desai's next novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). The story revolves around the inhabitants of a town in the north-eastern Himalayas, an embittered old judge, his granddaughter, Sai, his cook and their rich array of relatives, friends and acquaintances and the effects on the lives of these people brought about by a Nepalese uprising. Running parallel with the story set in India, we also follow the vicissitudes of the cook's son, Biju, as he struggles to realize the American dream as an immigrant in New York.

Like its predecessor, this book abounds in rich, sensual descriptions. These can be sublimely beautiful, such as in the image of the flourishing of nature at the local convent in spring : 'Huge, spread-open Easter lilies were sticky with spilling antlers; insects chased each other madly through the sky, Zip Zip; and amorous butterflies, cucumber green, tumbled past the jeep windows into the deep marine valleys'. They can also be horrific, such as, in descriptions of the protest march: 'One jawan was knifed to death, the arms of another were chopped off, a third was stabbed, and the heads of policemen came up on stakes before the station across from the bench under the plum tree, where the towns people had rested

themselves in more peaceful times and the cook sometimes read his letters. A beheaded body ran briefly down the street, blood fountaining from the neck.....’

The Inheritance of Loss is much more ambitious than Hullabaloo in its spatial breadth and emotional depth. It takes on huge subjects such as morality and justice, globalization, racial, social and economic inequality, fundamentalism and alienation. It takes its reader on a seesaw of negative emotions. There is pathos-which often goes hand in hand with revulsion, for example, in the description of the judge’s adoration of his dog, Mutt, the disappearance of which rocks his whole existence, set against his cruelty to his young wife. There is frequent outrage at the deprivation and poverty in which many of the characters live, including the cook’s son in America; and there is humiliation, for example, in the treatment of Sai by her lover-turned-rebel, or Lola, who tries to stand up to the Nepalese bullies.

Against these strong emotions, however, Desai expertly injects doses of comedy and buffoon like figures. One of these is Biju’s winsome friend, Saeed, an African (Biju hated all black people but liked Saeed), with a slyer and much more happy go lucky attitude to life. Whereas, Biju finds it difficult to have a conversation even with the Indian girls to whom he delivers a take away meal, Saeed had many girls. “Oh myee God!! he said. Oh myee Gaaaawd! She keeps calling me, he clutched at head, “aaaiii.....I don’t know what to do!!It’s those dreadlocks, cut them off and the girls will go.” “But I don’t want them to go!” Much of the comedy also arises from the Indian mis- or over-use of the English language. “Result unequivocal” the young Judge wrote home to India on completing his university examinations in Britain. “What” asked everyone “does that mean?” It sounded as if there was a problem because “un” words were negative words, those basically competent in the English agreed. But then, his father consulted the assistant magistrate and they exploded with joy “Boss, the judge’s friend from his university days is a wonderfully optimistic but pompous individual, made all the more ridiculous by his over use of British idioms “Cheeri-o, light-o, tickety boo, simply smashing, chin-chin, no siree, how’s that, bottom’s up, I say!”

An original and modern aspect of Desai’s style is the almost poet like use she makes of different print forms on the page: She uses italics for foreign words as if to emphasize their exoticness and untranslatability; and capitals for emphasis when someone is angry, expressing surprise or disbelief, a natural development of the etiquette that to write in capitals is like shouting. She also exploits our modern mania for lists. In an age where our media is filled with top tens and top one hundreds-most voted - for politician, best dressed woman, richest man etc., Desai produces her own array of matter of fact but quite unnerving lists - the parts of their bodies which touch when Gyan and Sai Kiss; the free gifts that you get from a charity if you make a donation to a cow shelter; the wide variety of puddings that the cook is able to make, the list rattled off with no spaces as if expressing both the urgency of the speaker to impress and his perplexity at the foreignness of English pudding names.

Anita Desai confesses that while she ‘feels about India as an Indian’, She thinks about it ‘as an outsider’. Desai probably derived this point of view from her German mother, whom she aptly describes as carrying ‘a European core in her which protested against certain Indian things, which always maintained its independence and its separateness’. Her oeuvre has explored the lives of outsiders within Indian society and, more recently, also within the West. Her fiction has covered themes, such as, women’s oppression and quest for a fulfilling identity, family relationships and contrasts, the crumbling of traditions, and anti-Semitism. The Euro-centric and social biases that are sometimes detected in her fiction, therefore, may be more productively read as the result of the author’s focus on uprooted and marginalized identities. Tellingly, the literary example which Desai set off to emulate was that of

another migrant to India of German origins: Ruth Praver Jhabvala, though, some critics detect a Western disdain for Indian social customs in her fiction.

Ultimately Desai's literary world is not sharply divided along Western and Eastern lines. On the contrary, ever since her novel Baumgartner's Bombay (1987), east and West have been treated as mirror of each other. Desai's novels and short-stories evoke characters, events and moods with recourse to a rich use of visual imagery and details, which has led to comparisons with the modernist sensibilities of T.S. Eliot, William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf. The origin of her stories is itself rooted in images that remain in the mind but they often are also forgotten, and they pass through one's life and then they vanish. However, there are certain images, certain characters, certain words that you can't forget, you remember, they stay with you and eventually these come together, you being to see what the connection is between them.

A close study of Anita Desai's work reveals her struggle for female autonomy played out against the backdrop of the patriarchal cultural pattern. At the outset, it seems, she is asking a new and different question. Her writing can be viewed as a self-conscious reaction to overwhelming masculinity of privileged dominant gender. We can identify in her character a defiant tone of voice in asserting the personal and the subjective. Her emphasis is psychological rather than sociological; her profound intellectual maturity provides a frame-work based on gender (female) as the ideological scheme for the analysis of society in general.

Like all feminist literary artists, a sustained analysis of allusive and elusive expression of individual is imperative for her. Her purely subjective novels depend upon a private vision. This private vision poses extreme situations arising out of conflicts between the will and the reality revolving around the "self". Carl Rogers rightly defines human interactions as a way of self-disclosure arguing.

"Man lives essentially in his objective functioning, is the result of subjective purpose, and subjective choice". (Rogers "Self concept" in *Self in Social Interaction* P. 3)

Now the centrality of self in Anita Desai is concentrated in terrifying isolation, finding it hard to reconcile with the world around "self". Her protagonists, therefore, are constantly confronted with the stupendous task of defining their relation to themselves and to their immediate human context. Acceptable behavioural pattern is alien to them. The root is not far to find. Her central characters, by and large, have strange childhood from which they develop a negative self image and aversion. The immediate result is their fragmented psych to view this world as a hostile place. For them, domestic life is not their world, rather, it is a trap where their individual problems interact; and dissonance in their relationship brings solitary confinements and shows their reluctance to face reality. Though there is a different set of character also who compromise with life - Sita, Bim, Sarah and Amla,

"Bim discovers through the serious consideration of her whole life the urgent need to correlate her knowledge with her imagination." (Desai, *Clear Light of Day*: 26)

However, there is a complex and confused attitude towards the 'self' and also in relation to male, resulting from a nagging sense of insecurity and trying hard to rediscover the logic of identity in dominance. Monisha, Sita and Nanda Kaul, all are raising the question of patriarchal power structure.

In a subtle but decisive manner the self image of Anita Desai's protagonists, structures the way in which all violence and disturbing things are due to man and patriarchal power. Her women know how they have been trapped and how they can begin to live afresh, but the obstacle is man. Man enters in her world as a disturbing factor. But in the process, she reduces the patriarchal discourse to a set of clichés and soon her women are caught by fantasy:

“Maya, from her childhood, regards the world as “a toy especially made for her, painted in her favorite colours and set to dance to her favourite tunes”. (Desai, *Cry, The Peacock*: P.36)

Monisha, in her own estimation, is like “the lost princess of the fairy tale who sat somewhere in the deepest shadows of this forest, silent and unattainable”. (Desai, *Voices in the City*: P.200) Sita, despite her maturity, leads “a lulled life, half-conscious, dream-like” (Desai, *Where Shall we . . .*: P.126) Nanda Kaul, too, knew it well that “Fantasy and fairy tales had their place in her life”. (Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*: 89) Even in her old age she is seen “reconstructing; block by block, of the old castle of childhood”. (Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*: P.116) Now, people who break away from what is real and rational and feel alienated, shunning reality and escape into a dream world, do give way to tragic consequences.

A common trait in all major women characters of Anita Desai is their longing to be free of all kinds of social and familial involvement. One recalls, Simone de Beauvoir’s caution that:

“. . . the independent woman is one who, like men, can move from immanence to transcendence in her public life activities and avoid sadomasochistic relationships in her personal life”. (Beauvoir: 670-72)

In the midst of social contempt they face a particular dilemma nurtured by marital disharmony. Perhaps, Bim is the only exception, as she is deeply committed to certain responsibilities even while struggling against the consequent psychological strain. Feminist reaction in this sense goes beyond being a mere revision and becomes revenge. In her Endeavour to humanize woman, it seems, Anita Desai dehumanizes the male and thereby duplicates rather than transcends the ideology she reacts against. In an attempt to root out the essentials of the woman condition, she perpetuates gender bias. Such an anti-male attitude does not help to release the male-female relationship in any form a determinate position.

In her fiction, Anita Desai has continued to seize upon the shapelessness and meaninglessness of life and impose a design on them. She believes that literature ought not to be confined to the portrayal of outer or inner reality. It should deal with life and with death. Anita Desai finds that novels, when one reads them, have the power to convey truth far more vividly, forcefully and memorably than any other literary form. It is because the artist knows how to select from the vast amount of material and present it significance of things. She must seize upon that incomplete and chameleonic mass of reality around her and,

“try to discover its significance by plunging below the surface and plumbing the depths, then illuminating those depths till they become a more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of visible world”. (Desai, *Kakatiya Journal*: 2)

Anita Desai, in her novels, mainly explores the emotional world of women, revealing a rare imaginative awareness of various deeper forces at work and a profound understanding of feminine sensibility as well as psychology. She sets herself to voice the mute miseries and helplessness of millions of married women, tormented by existentialist problems and predicaments. She is concerned with the psychology angle of the problem faced by her protagonists. Her serious concern is the ‘journey within’, her characters, the central characters, mostly being women. The recurring theme in her novels is the trauma of existence in a hostile, male-dominated society that is conservative and taboo-ridden. She portrays the inner conflicts of her characters and also underlines their individuality and quest for freedom.

Anita Desai’s first novel, *Cry, The Peacock*, broke new ground in Indian English fiction and is said to be a trend-setter. It has been termed as ‘a poetic novel’ by the critics. Maya, the protagonist of the novel, is highly sensitive woman who suffers from neurotic fears caused by the predictions of an albino priest about her untimely and possible death four years after her marriage. She is married to a practical,

unsympathetic, rational, down to earth man. She suffers from incompatibility in her married life and tries to escape into a world of imagination and fantasy. Maya also suffers from father-fixation. She looks for her father in twice-her-age husband. Having virtually nothing in common, they are bound by matrimonial bonds. For Maya, freedom is impossible unless she removes Gautama, her husband. She pushes him from the parapet in a fit of fury and to transfer the albino prediction about death to Gautama. Anita Desai has successfully shown the transformation of a sensitive woman into a neurotic person.

In her second novel, *Voices in City* (1965), Anita Desai is not concerned with the physical aspect of the city Calcutta but on its influence on the three characters of a family. The novel is divided into four sections, namely, 'Nirode', 'Monisha', 'Amla', and 'Mother'. All these sections are devoted to the characters as named by the title. The first section 'Nirode' is about the alienation and conflict in the mind of Nirode. He is an artist who is struggling with art form and his life. He brings out a magazine 'Voice', but is not happy with its success and prosperity. Nirode also suffers from Oedipus complex, like Maya. And like her, he too wants to destroy the figure of his obsession, his mother. He believes that his mother has an affair with Major Chadha, her neighbour. Nirode wants to forget this episode and so alienates himself from his mother. Anita Desai has probed into the psychic working of the disturbed artist, who has lost his faith in life. Madhusudan Prasad feels that,

"Desai delves deep into human psyche and tries to explore very adroitly the dim domains of the conscious of the major characters in the novel". (Prasad: P.22)

Monisha, like other heroines of Anita Desai, is sensitive and suffers from an ill-matched marriage. She lacks understanding and love from her husband, and finds it difficult to adjust into the joint family. She takes to diary writing and alienates herself from everyone. She is an example of maladjusted woman who is an introvert. Monisha is unable to bear the charge of theft by the family members and even her husband. She commits suicide by self immolation. Amla, her youngest sister, a commercial artist, too, suffers from conflict in her life. She rises above the complexities of relationships to realize the destroyer. She is described as an onlooker, not getting involved with the affairs of her children.

The third novel *Bye, Bye, Blackbird* (1971), depicts the plight of Indian immigrants in London. The novel has the theme of East-West encounter. It has three parts - 'Arrival', 'Discovery' and 'Recognition and Departure'. Dev arrives in England for higher studies and stays with his friend Adit and his English wife Sarah. He is perturbed by the insults and humiliations Indian have to face in public and private places. Adit is happy with his peaceful life in England.

But in the second part of the novel a gradual change comes over. Adit feels nostalgia for his country and realizes the superficiality of his life in England. He returns home in the end, whereas, Dev is stuck by the charm of this land and stays on. Anita Desai has also described the difficulties faced by Sarah, an English wife with an Indian husband. The title of the novel refers to England's bidding, farewell to an Indian - a 'Black bird'. Anita Desai has created a lively picture of immigrant Indians. She has also portrayed the conflict of the immigrants who cannot sever their roots and yet make an effort to strike new roots in an alien country and eventually become alienated.

Her fourth novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) depicts the tensions between a sensitive wife, Sita, and the rational and worldly husband, Raman. The story is about Sita who has four children and is reluctant to abort or give birth to the fifth child. She is a sensitive person, sensitive towards violence and death prevalent in the world and thinks that by giving birth, she would be doing an act of destruction. Sita is not happy and satisfied with her married life also. Her husband is busy with his own work and has no time for his wife. Sita feels betrayed and lonely, and goes to the island of Manori, her

childhood home. She is looking for peace on the island.

Instead, she feels alienated. As she has adjusted herself on the island, her husband comes to take the children. Sita is angry and disturbed at first but realizes the futility of escaping from her duties. She reconciles the realities of the life and returns with her husband. Madhusudan Prasad considers the novel “a wonderful poetic *tour de force*, singularized by her intense lyrical fervor and wild poetic imagination which do not run riot, but instead, remain under a certain curious discipline. (Prasad: P. 32)

Anita Desai’s fifth novel *Fire On The Mountain* was published in 1977. It won the Royal Society of Literature’s Winfred Holtby Memorial Prize and the 1978 National Academy of Letters Award. The novel is almost of Nanda Kaul, wife of the onetime Vice-Chancellor of Punjab University, who withdraws herself to a lonely, secluded house Carignano, in Kasauli. Nanda lives her life all by herself in her old age and she does not want to be disturbed by anyone or anything. Even the postman is an intruder. Nanda is upset and disturbed by the arrival of her great grand daughter, Raka. The novel is divided into three parts - ‘Nanda Kaul at Carignano’, ‘Raka comes to Carignano’ and ‘Ila Das leaves carignano’. In the first part, the author describes the arrival of Raka and the disturbance it causes in the life of Nanda. In the second part, Raka, a sensitive and an introvert girl, loves the life at Carignano. She is a lover of nature and spends her time roaming in the surrounding places. Ila Das, a childhood friend of Nanda, who is a welfare officer in the nearby village, comes for a visit. Anita Desai has described her barren life and her tragic death in the end of novel. She also makes Nanda realize the truth of her life, from which she is trying to escape. The end of the novel is sudden and unexpected. The title of the novel refers to Raka setting the forest on fire. R.S. Sharma says that it is “expressive of Raka’s resolve to destroy a world where a woman cannot hope to be happy without being unnatural.” (Sharma: P. 127)

Anita Desai has depicted the theme of alienation and relationships in this novel.

Anita Desai’s next novel *Clear Light Of Day*, was published in 1980. She has described the book as a ‘four dimensional piece’. Time plays an important role in the novel as she herself says about time ‘as a destroyer, as a preserver and about what time does to people’. She makes it clear in the novel that time passes, but things remain the same except that the pattern changes.

Clear Light Of Day is a family drama about the Das family - mainly the four children - Bim, Tara, Raja and Baba. The story is narrated from the point of view of Bim, the protagonist of the novel. Bim and Tara are sisters and their mother suffers from diabetes and dies. The parents had no time for their children, and had a led a busy life playing cards. Bim has to shoulder the responsibilities of her brothers and sister. She sacrifices her life for her siblings, educating them and marrying them. She also takes the responsibility of her mentally-retarded brother, Baba; senile aunt, Mira Masi, and the decaying house. Tara marries Bakul, a foreigner diplomat and goes abroad. Raja, too, leaves Bim and his house and goes to Hyderabad to Hyder Ali. He marries Hyder Ali’s daughter and settles there. Bim is hurt and feels neglected by everyone. She is unable to accept Raja and Tara. Bim refuses to go to Hyderabad on the occasion of the marriage of Raja’s daughter. In anger, she thinks of sending Baba to the marriage but realizes her mistake. In the end she is aware of her weakness and repents of the wrong done towards Raja, Baba and Tara. *In Clear Light of Day*, she sees the truth and matures to forgive everyone.

Her next novel, *In Custody* was published on 1984. This novel is about the plight of Urdu poet. Deven is a lecturer in a private college in Mirpore. He aspires to be a writer and has great interest in Urdu poetry. He belongs to middle class, striving hard to make ends meet. He is in a pitiable state, unable to stand against injustices. He is married to Sarla, an uneducated girl, who is miles away from literature. Here

again we see maladjustment in marriage. Deven gets an opportunity to interview Nur Shahjehanabadi, a renowned poet of old days. Deven comes to see the disparity between Nur's poetry and life.

He sees the decadent life of the old poet. Somehow he records a part of interview, which is almost useless. He has to play it in the college as he has received a grant from the college for the purpose. Deven is also pestered by the old poet and his wives for money. However, Deven gets the courage to face everything in the end, and the novel ends at a positive note. The title suggests that Nur's poetry would be in safe custody of Deven but the irony is that he is in custody of Nur's personality. The poet himself is a prisoner of his circumstances 'changed times are not favorable to Urdu poetry and poets and flatterers and self seekers take the place of connoisseurs of poetry and appreciative audience.

Anita Desai's next novel, *Baumgartner's Bombay*, published in 1988, is about the plight of a displaced person. Hugo Baumgartner, a Jew, has to leave his country, Germany, at the rise of Nazism and comes to the British India before the Second World War to begin a new life. The story revolves round the life of Hugo in Germany and in many cities in India. It is a story of family less, rootless and homeless man, always trying to belong, wanting to be accepted, but never being accepted anywhere. The pathos of the novel lies in the fact that after living for fifty years in India Hugo is not accepted by the Indian Society. He is a 'firangi'. He picks up stray cats from the street to give them shelter.

In Desai's *Journey to Ithaca* the protagonists seek a solution to their problems. They feel that the solution lies in discovering some lost essence which they have already experienced, usually as children. They undertake a journey to recover that lost essence; but after what is difficult voyage, they end up disappointed, disillusioned. Such a pattern is seen in Desai's other novels also, viz. *Cry, the Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer*. Almost the same pattern is repeated again in Desai's supposedly strongest novel, *In Custody*.

Fasting, Feasting is compartmentalized into two distinct sections – Part One dealing with family intrigues through socio-cultural and spiritual experiences in India and Part Two describing (though not so extensively) familial existentialism in a small town in America, weaving the main fabric of the plot around female characters. The reader is introduced to a couple known as MamaPapa throughout the novel - a unique manner of expressing their oneness, having three children - Uma, Aruna and Arun. Apparently the family is closeknit:

"It was hard to believe they had ever had separate existences, that they had been separate entities and not Mama Papa in one breath". (*Fasting, Feasting*: P.5)

But in reality the atmosphere at home is highly charged with surreptitious intrigues. When the father goes to work the mother indulges in all those clandestine activities which he volubly opposed and disapproved of, such as, play cards with the neighbours and chewing betel leaves. Uma and Arun were quite like their mother. Uma, the docile daughter, would stifle her emotions merely to please MamaPapa while Aruna made no efforts whatsoever to conceal her rebelliousness.

The novel *Fasting, Feasting* deals with the story of two very different worlds - an extremely orthodox and domineering Indian family and an unusually idiosyncratic family in Massachusetts. Uma, the protagonist of the first part of the book represents the attitude of the author. Through this woman character, Anita Desai wants to expose the hypocrisy, and male chauvinism in a particular conservative family. She shows how Uma bears the brunt of many insults and abuses flung by her own parents. Though she is the most neglected child of the family, yet she is needed at every time. In the very opening of the book, the author connotatively presents the luxurious life of the parents through the image of the 'swinging sofa' (*Fasting, Feasting*: P.1). The opening passage is so rich in both matter and

manner that it is enough to suggest the ensuing events and the discriminating attitude of the parents to their daughters.

“On the veranda overlooking the garden, the drive and the gate, they sit together on the creaking sofa-swing, suspended from its iron frame, dangling their legs so that the slippers on their feet hang loose. Before them, a low round table is covered with a faded cloth, embroidered in the centre with flowers. Behind them, a pedestal fan blows warm air at the backs of their heads and necks.” (P.17)

The family in which Uma is brought up is highly conservative traditional and bragging. Everything is in the direct control of the Mama Papa. Mama keeps ordering the cook through Uma from her swing throne. The parents don't do anything in the house except visiting the coffee house and attending the clubs. Both their daughters are very submissive and so they seldom rebel against the step-motherly conduct of the family.

The women depicted in Part One of *Fasting, Feasting* - Uma, Aruna, their mother and Anamika, are in one way or the other victims of the age old traditions and customs of India's social set up. In Part Two of the novel two other female characters - Mrs. Pattons and her daughter Melanie have been portrayed by the author. Both feel suffocated in the modernized but highly impersonal Western lifestyle. Mrs. Pattons, obsessed with the idea of food, makes frantic trips to the market only to ensure that her kitchen cabinets are well stocked with edible goods. Mrs. Patton's bulimic daughter, Melanie, shuns company. She is averse to converse with anyone including people of her own age group. Both Mrs. Pattons and Melanie find the Western environment to be stifling and phlegmatic. The excessive freedom in the West had induced the over dosage, and then the ultimate repulsion led to another kind of suffocating environment. Though the novel is distinctly divided into two parts, yet the narrative does not project any indication of being disjointed. Episodes are dexterously correlated, characters are realistically delineated and reminiscences are meticulously interwoven into a single fabric of a fine narrative.

Desai's new novel, *The Zigzag Way*, tells of an American, adrift in a foreign culture that remains frustratingly inscrutable. Eric is a New England-born graduate student in history at Harvard who follows his scientist girlfriend, Em, on a research trip to Mexico. Once she sets off with her colleagues to conduct field observations, he is left alone and overwhelmed by his own lack of purpose. Remembering that his Cornish grandfather, about whom he knows next to nothing, had worked as a miner in the Sierra Madre in the early part of the 20th century, he determines he will use the trip to find out more about his family's past. Along the way he meets an eccentric, powerful European woman, Doña Vera, who has become a champion of indigenous culture but whose own past is mysterious. The stories of Eric, his grandparents and Doña Vera are interwoven into a short, contemplative narrative. Eric is a passive narrator, clambering his way through the beautiful but beguiling scenery, which is described in florid, dense prose reflecting his sensory overload. Desai has uncovered a compelling chapter in Mexican history.

Anita Desai has tried to present her themes organically with appropriate adjustments and adaptations in spheres of style and point of view. The result is her comparative superiority over other Indian women novelists writing in English. While going through the major novels of Anita Desai, one can realize that she belongs to the 'female' phase, during which the focus is on uncovering misogyny in male, and text is being replaced by a turn inward for identity.

This inward search for identity is a common factor among the central women of Desai, whether it is the immature and psychologically alienated Maya, or the stoic Nanda Kaul, all of them suffer owing to male domination. Anita Desai wants to stress in her novels the various qualities of an Indian woman – her

emotions, her sensitiveness, her tenderness, her sexuality. She arouses physical attraction in the heart of the male sex. This is her most overwhelming facet. Without the presence of woman, home is not home but a dreary desert. Her attitude is very close to Anees Jung:

“In this complex pantheon of diversities, the Indian woman remains the point of unity, unveiling through each single experience a collective consciousness prized by a society that is locked in mortal combat with the power and weakness of age and time. She remains the still centre, like the centre in a potter’s wheel, circling to create new forms, unfolding the continuity of a racial life, which in turn has encircled and helped her acquire a quality of concentration”. (Jung: P.26)

Anita Desai may not be a ‘radical feminist’, in the real sense of the term, but then, given the context, this woman novelist presents the woman’s problems with such an understanding that she is ‘feministic’, to say the least. In her novels taken for discussion, Sarah is the only girl with an employment and that too, that of a teacher. The other women are housewives. By presenting the stereotype woman and her problems in an understanding and sympathetic way, she makes everybody realize the predicament of the women in a male chauvinistic society. The protest element is implicit.

To say that Anita Desai is a Feminist writer is not to deny her artistic achievement. She is not just a propagandist. Socio-, psycho-, philosophic dimensions in her novels are quite impressive. That woman is the centre of her novels, is not only natural but quite convincing. As Mrinalini Solanki explains:

“As a consummate creative artist, Anita Desai shows tremendous potential and vitality. In her writings she not only offers an expose of human life in its shocking shallowness or outward show, but also provides, down deep, a philosophical probe or basis to sustain our life. She emerges neither as a downright pessimist nor an incorrigible optimist. All along, her earnest endeavour is to hold a mirror to life, and in the process, to unravel the mystery of human existence”. (Solanki: “Fiction: Patterns of Survival Strategies” P.86)

In the process she does present the plight of the women, the underdog and that makes her a Feminist. The idea of empowerment is an elusive dream to Desai’s protagonists as they yearn to express themselves in difficult situations. Though Desai does not offer alternative and radical models of female behaviour, she depicts the irreconcilable contradictions, the discontinuous identities and the fragmented nature of the life of her protagonists. They live and die as dreamers, but are never denied, a rare wisdom about their status and position in the social fabric to which they belong. Failure in one aspect of the women’s lives does not render them dysfunctional in society. It is their ability to live life as women according to their own terms that mark them as strong survivors in a hostile patriarchal world in Desai’s fiction.

Wavering Between Traditional and Western Models:

With the new strains and challenges that have emerged from the Indian family, the life of married woman has been going through an evolution. It has been wavering between traditional and western models. The fast-changing social and family environment has thrown up new challenges for married couples. The educated women of today living in urban areas are liable to develop a marked tendency to become extraordinarily conscious of their individuality and individual status and are prone to have marital discord is a lack of adjustment and synchronization in the marriage.

It symbolizes a breakdown in the commitment and co-operation of the married couples. Usually, marital discord originates when enmity develops among the partners through internal and external manifestations like constant finger-pointing, physical aggression, antagonism, and so on. It is a process that begins before physical separation and continues even after the marriage is legally ended. Marital

discord is a very effective stressor that can prompt individuals to enter mentally disturbed stages or engage in behavior that will lead them to have psychotic or hysteric manifestations. It is a significant predictor of subsequent delinquency and depressive symptoms for married couples. It is evident that marital problems are more likely to cause depression than depression causing marital problems.

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

Discord and Suspension of Marital Rights:

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

Marital discord in marriage is not new to India as well, and it has existed at all eras of well-known history. But separation was resorted to only in severe cases where there was intolerable malice, abandonment, mental illness, sterility, and disloyalty. In the wake of the industrial mutiny, marital discord has come to presume greater importance. Men and women who come together in marriage lacked knowledge of various psychological and social aspects of life, the proper understanding of which would make sure of attitudes of affability, flexibility and self-control. In the commercial age, the increasing liberty of married woman has pulled her further apart from compromise and has changed the concept of marriage.

In the words of Virendra Kumar “from stability, permanence and indissolubility to discord, separation and divorce” (Kumar.1978:25). Frequent marital discord can lead to growing dissatisfaction for the partners involved, which force people to consider an alternative remaining married. For example, a person who is forced to deal with marital dispute on a regular basis might grow dissatisfied and try to live life independently.

Disparity and Dissatisfaction:

Anita Desai has highlighted marital discord as a serious concern in her works. She humbly admits that she is allergic to writing social novels. However, she is involved in the problems of marital discord and the insincerity, the faithlessness and the soul-destroying, grinding process of compromise which accompany it. Anita Desai while choosing marital discord as a theme, highlights how the lack of ability to put one’s soul and convey freely one’s fear and agony result in the snapping of communication between husband and wife. Unusual attitudes, individual complexes and fears add to this distancing between husband and wife resulting in conjugal disharmony. In each of her novels, one encounters traumatic experiences of married lives. Each novel, maintaining the basic features of marital discord, presents different features of the problem to which Mrs. Desai gives new aspect and visualization. She bravely puts forth the fact that in society, marriages usually pursue the jungle law of the survival of the fittest and being physically stronger, man survives. In her novels, marital discord is reflective of the social parlance. Excessive bondage and high level of restrictions imposed on a girl who recently parted from her parents, hit her psychology leading to excessive frustration. This frustration emerges out in

different forms like suicidal tendencies, non-adjustments, marital discords, psychological irritation and many more. Hence society and its restricted canvas play a great role in dealing with the girl's psychology.

Protagonists Trapped in Marital Relations :

In the novels of Anita Desai, most of the protagonists find themselves trapped in marriage. Desai comments: "There are those who can handle situations and those who can't and my stories are generally about those who can't. They find themselves trapped in a situation over which they have no control. Desai, Anita Cry, the Peacock(London: Peter Owen, 1963p.10.) All her characters fight the current and struggle against it. They know what the demands are and what it costs to meet them.

There is an effort, in the novels of Desai, to represent and understand the feelings, thoughts and doubts, which remain, locked up within the inner recesses of the isolated female heart. Anita Desai's novels represent intense study of personal life, the conflicts and anxiety which the females face. The characters of Anita Desai are trapped in the web of unreceptive circumstances.

Anita's Unconventional and Painful Realistic thesis:

Anita Desai's robustly outspoken manner of propagating the typically unconventional but painfully realistic thesis that the institution of marriage is increasingly taking the shape of the dead albatross around the necks of the modern, emancipated self-respecting women. Desai focuses on the personal struggle of middle-class women in existing India as they endeavor to prevail over the societal limitations forced by a tradition-bound patriarchal society.

She has specifically mentioned middle-class women, with which she clearly points to such women who are traditionally bound with certain restrictions of family and society. Her central theme in many of her novels has been the portrayal of women's viewpoint, alienation of middle class women and tension that crops up in middle class families. Her novels, with a touch of feminist concern, portray the failed marriage relationship which often leads to disaffection and loneliness of the characters. She writes for the woman who is always dominated initially by father and then by the husband.

Focus on Emotional Reactions of Women:

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

Social Realities :

Anita Desai's works are directly related to social realities. Social realities are related to new family norms in which it is difficult for a girl to adjust or deal with the situations and circumstances. But Anita Desai does not reside like others on social concerns. She explores deeper into the forces that condition the growth of a female in this patriarchal male subjugated society. She examines social realities from the

psychological viewpoint without posing herself as a social reformer. Her novels are studies of the inner life of characters and her talent lies in the description of minute things that are usually ignored.

In Search of Significance:

Anita's women are in everlasting pursuit for a consequential life. Anita Desai states that all her writing is "an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things." Jasbir, ('Anita Desai' essay published in *Indian English Novelists: An Anthology of Critical Essays*, Ed. By Madhusudan Prasad. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1982, 2-50.)

This explains her involvement with her characters. Her protagonists suffer strongly because of their fruitless attempts to find poignant contact, response and understanding. Anita Desai's novels are in tune with her idea that "a woman writer is more concerned with thought, emotion and sensation." (Jain, Naresh K., *Women In Indo-Anglian Fiction (Tradition and Modernity)*, Manohar Publishers, Replica Press, 1998)

Depression and Other:

In her writings she has touched upon depression, time apart, sex, household responsibilities, irritating habits, large family circle, expectations, and family decision-making, as the reasons which lead to marital discord.

Depression:

It is a condition of mental disturbance, severe dejection, accompanied by feelings of hopelessness and inadequacy which create difficulty in maintaining interest in life. Same is the condition of Anita Desai's women characters who deal with frustrations, depression, and rejection in their life. They like solitude and privacy. Anita Desai is concerned with the depression and oppression of these intensely introverts female characters that are unable to vent their emotions. As in *Cry, the Peacock*, moving from one pit of despair and depression to another, Sita's feeling of hopelessness and dejection is depicted by: "All order is gone out of my life. There is no plan, no peace, nothing to keep me within the pattern of familiar everyday life." (P.79).

Time Apart

Time apart and a lack of worthwhile time with each other serves to get people out of sync. This makes life unbalanced and creates issues which result in marital discord. In the novels of Anita Desai, one major reason of marital discord is lack of time given by the male characters to their wives. As in *Gautama's*, in *Cry, the Peacock*, busy profession spares him no time for his family. With no vocation to occupy herself with, Maya broods over the coldness of her husband: "Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me" (P.19). In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Sita, in spite of living under the same roof for twenty years and parenting four children the couple hardly spend time with each other and they always remain like "an ill-assorted couple lacking altogether in harmony in their lives." (Madhusudan Prasad, "Anita Desai, The Novelist" P. 65)

Regularity, quantity, quality and infidelity are all frequent causes of hassle and dissonance in marriage. In reference to Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*, the root of Maya's distress is her marriage, is his disconnected and aloof behavior to the amount of not fulfilling her physical and emotional desires. "A

continuous frustration of the body's sexual needs can be disastrous to somebody like Maya, given her fierce instinctuality." (M. Rajeshwar, 1998:P.23)

Irritating Habits:

Irritating habits of partner incite impatience or anger. At times, people find some of their partner's habits undesirable and thus causing friction in relationship. In *Cry, the Peacock*, Maya, the central character of the novel, who has failed to grow out of her childhood, lives in a world of fantasy and fairytale that is far removed from reality. This irritated Gautama who was rather a mature man.

Large Family Circle:

Large family or in other words 'joint family' comprises of married couple and husband's other relatives. Life for a newly married woman becomes difficult if the in-laws don't give her necessary support and space. It gets difficult for her to adapt in a new environment as she comes out of the protective shell of the parental family. In case of Monisha in *Voices in the City*, her life is in a state of deprivation due to the domination of her in-laws. Repeated comments by her in-laws on her inability to conceive makes her go through psychological misery.

Expectations:

It is a strong belief about what might happen in the future. Especially in marriage, spouses have certain hopes and expectations from their partners. The difficulty with expectations is that they are often poorly defined and sometimes completely unknown. And unknown things generate curiosity. Most of the people idealize marriage and become disheartened once those prospects aren't met.

Family Decision Making:

It relates to important decisions related to family; for e.g. decision involving child planning. For Example: - In *Where Shall We Go This summer?* When Sita came to know that she is fifth time pregnant, the intensity of the feeling of obsession is apparent in her constant fear of child-birth. She feels a strong revulsion as her husband was confused and puzzled. She herself takes a quick decision that she doesn't want to have the baby. This decision brings discord into their married life.

Conflict :

It is a serious disagreement or argument or eternal conflict between the sexes. After marriage when men do not behave according to the expectations of women and vice-a-versa, conflict is obvious. In *Where Shall We Go this Summer?* , Sita's husband gets irritated when Sita decides to go to the island in her pregnant condition. He says "Not much longer to go now, Sita, it'll soon be over. You are doing a blunder".(Anita Desai: 1975; P.21) But she wasn't ready to listen and in frustration she says "I am trying to escape from the madness here, escape to a place where it might be possible to be sane again." (Anita Desai: 1975:P.23)

Isolation:

Isolation in Anita Desai's novels was a significant cause of Marital Discord. In the novels, isolation operates at two levels - physical and mental. Physical Isolation may be within the wall of the house in which a woman is alone and nobody is there to care for her and mental isolation occurs when a woman feels that her husband does not care about her. *Custody*, the problem between Deven and Sarla is the

lack of togetherness. She expects her husband to take care of her with continued responsibility. Because of opposite temperaments, they hardly spend time with each other. Thus, this isolation makes Sarla go through mental trauma and live an isolated life.

Lack of Communication :

Husband - wife alienation ensuing from lack of communication and unpredictable inappropriateness form a very important issue of Anita Desai's novels. Anita Desai's women long for love and unity of the strength which they recognize as the panacea of the troubles of the world. Their refusal to surrender and the incapability to accept their partner's perspective, unavoidably results in separation and isolation. As in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Sita finds herself alienated from her husband due to lack of communication. She remains an ignored personality. She creates a world of her own which she fills with extraordinarily sensitive beings. Lack of understanding on the part of her husband, and incapacity in them both to strike a sympathetic chord between each other leads to discord.

Domestic Violence:

As one would mostly assume, domestic violence is not limited to physical violence only. Emotional abuse and economic deprivation can also be categorized under domestic violence. This has also become a significant concern leading to marital discord.

Novels Dealing with Complexity of Human Issues :

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

Cry, the Peacock

Cry, the Peacock portrays the psychic uproar of a young and sensitive girl Maya who is disturbed by a childhood prediction of a fatal disaster. The novel is about Maya's cry for love and relationship in her loveless wedding. The peacock's cry is an implication of Maya's distressed cry for love and life of involvement. It "explores the turbulent emotional world of the neurotic protagonist Maya who smarts under an acute alienation stemming from marital discord and verges on a curious insanity." (Madhusudan Prasad, 1981:P. 3).

In this novel, Maya, who's obsessed condition is brought about by multiple factors, include marital discord and drabness as well as a psychic disorder. Desai looks in to the cause for marital discord and mentions how such discord influences the family. Most of the times, the inability of an individual to be responsive to the behavior patterns of her partner leads to tension and stress in the relationship, while sometimes it is on adaptation of various levels of affection that strained relationships occur.

This novel explains both husband and wife relations in depth. It has been mentioned that both have strained relations because of their incompatible attitudes. Maya is pensive, receptive and sensitive, while Gautama is pragmatic, insensible and lucid. Maya is prosaic and high-strung Gautama isolated, thoughtful and inaccessible. Maya has gentleness, quietness and affection, while Gautama is rigid and bitter.

The marital bond that binds the two is very brittle and shaky; the growing tension between them reaches its climax when Maya kills Gautama and then commits suicide. Maya is a convict of the past, lives

almost eternally in the shade of a world of memories, which overwhelm her. Gautama, on the other hand, lives in the present and accepts reality and facts even though they are not very beautiful. On the contrary, Maya never tries to admit the truth, but she wants to live in her unreal fairy world. She keeps on recalling her childhood days and the love her father poured out on her. Maya herself is in two minds about her bond and love with Gautama as she always seeks the other father in her husband.

On other occasions she looks at her marriage as a fiasco as she says “broken repeatedly and repeatedly the pieces were picked up and put together.”(Jha, Uma Shankar & Pujari, Premlata, *Indian Women Today* (Tradition, Modernity and Challenge) Volume 1, New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 1996.) The incompatibility between them emerges from their attitudes and approaches to life. With his pragmatic and practical attitude, Gautama fails to respond to Maya’s emotional needs. She is conscious of the insurmountable impasse between them.

Sensitive Maya is awfully distressed and loses her mental calm at the death of her dog and Gautama neglects the emotional yearning of Maya and says that he would bring another dog for her. This emotionless behavior makes Maya brood over Gautama’s insensitivity – “Showing how little he knows of my misery or how to comfort me”. (*Cry, the Peacock*, P.14). Gautama is so near to her, yet so far. This gap in communication coupled with her obsession with the albino astrologer’s prophecy makes her an emotional wreck.

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

Both marriages point out that qualities and shortcomings, capability and weaknesses of husband-wife and projects how they have not cautiously and deliberately been balanced to make a relationship successful. Similarities between the attitudes of both husband and wife to life and things in general play an important role in making their conjugal life successful. General situations in society are such that no proper time or thought is given to these affairs. It results in conflicts, desperation, separation and loneliness.

Women who are treated casually become sufferers in these conflicts. Their supposed reliability and traditional approach toward them cause alienation in their lives. They struggle against strong, negative, soul-killing circumstances but in vain. They become hopeless, desperate and nervous. Committing suicide, running away or living separately are the only solutions visible to them. The fact that finally Maya turns insane and kills her husband may contain an indirect comment on their different values of life. The novel becomes a fascinating psychological study of neurotic fears and anxieties caused by marital incompatibility and disharmony.

Madhusudan Prasad briefly alludes to Maya as a neurotic figure: “In *Cry, the Peacock*, Desai explores the turbulent emotional world of the neurotic protagonist, Maya, who smarts under an acute alienation, stemming from marital discord, and verges on a curious insanity.” (Justman, Stewart. *The Apple of Discord*, Published by Viva Books, Raj Press, New Delhi, 200)

He partially agrees with the discovery of Maya’s neurosis in the novel based on ‘marital discord’ arising out of her ‘morbid preoccupation with death’ and it shatters the very identity of ‘women in our contemporary society dominated by man in which woman longing for love is driven mad or compelled to commit suicide.’

Maya’s psychosis does not completely occur out of ‘marital discord’ in which Gautama is utterly to be held responsible. On the contrary, he dreadfully tries to understand her problem. Furthermore, in her

hours of anxiety Gautama is very much worried about her troubled mind and acts as a nurse. Therefore, she admits that he is “her guardian and protector.” (Kohli, Devindra & Just, Melanie Maria., Anita Desai (Critical Perspectives), Published by Pencraft International, D.K. Fine Art Press, New Delhi, 2008)

The marital discord arises out of her neurotic traits which she is helplessly struggling to disentangle herself from. The novel sensationalizes the fight for life and death of Maya who is already oppressed by her irrational personality. Similarly Srinivasa Iyengar says *Cry, the Peacock* is really “Maya’s effort to tell her story to herself, to discover some meaning in her life, and even to justify herself to herself.” (Kohli, Suresh “The World of Anita Desai” The Tribune (Saturday Plus) 11 July, 1992, p.4)

Voices in the City

In *Voices in the City*, Anita Desai’s main concern is chiefly with human beings and their necessity for bonding and how in the absence of meaningful relationships a person suffers. She probes the psychic coercion that may affect an individual in forging long term relations and how an individual is exasperated if he is not capable to form such relationships. The theme of parting is treated in terms of mother-child relations which itself is an effect of discord in husband-wife relationship. Monisha lives a fragmented and famished life. She is estranged from her mother as well as her husband.

Her association with her husband is marked by loneliness and lack of communication. Jiban (her husband) thinks that a woman’s most important role is to take care of children and household jobs under the supervision of her mother-in-law. He has no time for her and no desire to share his sentiments as he is quite busy in his professional life. Monisha’s mis-matched marriage, her loneliness, unfruitfulness and pressure of living in a joint family with an insensible husband pushes her to breaking point. The element of love is missing in her life and at last she commits suicide.

If Maya’s misfortune in *Cry, the Peacock* emanated from her fascination with a father figure, Nirode’s (Monisha’s brother) calamity lies in his love-hate bond with the mother. The marital discord transforms Nirode’s parents into emotional monsters. The father turns into a drunkard, debased and dishonorable creature absolutely different from an easy-going, sports –loving and fond father. The mother is transformed from a sweet, sensitive, accomplished beauty into a cold, practical and possessive woman having no human warmth and tenderness even for her own children. Anita Desai presents through these images that a marriage without mutual respect and love, is at best a farce, at worst it is a kind of disease that destroys body, mind and soul completely.

Where Shall We Go This Summer?

Anita Desai’s other novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) is similar to her first novel *Cry, the Peacock*, and focuses on marital dissonance which accentuated the perceptively highly strong nature of the protagonist. The mismatched couple, Raman and Sita are confronted with the same problem of discord. Sita’s marriage to Raman was not based on proper understanding and love between them. Desai gives the explanation as “and finally- out of pity, out of lust, out of a sudden will for adventure and because it was inevitable, he married her.” (P.99) Sita represents a world of sentiment and feminine sensibility, while Raman is a man with an active view of life and the sense of the practical.

Sita is a restless, responsive middle-aged woman with unstable and emotional reactions to many things that happen to her, she always wants to escape reality and does not want to grow up and face the responsibilities of adult life. Raman represents shrewdness and an acceptance of the norms and values of society. He is brisk and precise in dealing with the business of life. He is unable to understand the hostility and passion with which Sita reacts against every unpleasant incident. His response to his wife’s

recurrent outbursts is a mixture of bewilderment, tiredness, fear and finally a resigned acceptance of her abnormality. He cannot comprehend her boredom, her frustration with him.

The theme of estrangement and lack of communication in marital life is discussed by the writer in this novel. Since childhood, Sita remains a disregarded character. She is the result of a broken family. She yearns to have the attention and love of others, but her father remains busy with his chelas and patients. Even after marriage, she remains lonely as her husband Raman fails to fulfill her expectations. He fails to understand her violence and passion just like Gautama in *Cry, the Peacock*. Raman is wise, lucid and passive whereas Sita is unreasonable. Through Sita, Anita Desai voices the awe of facing all alone “the ferocious assaults of existence” (TOI: P.13). The conflict between two polarized temperaments and two discordant viewpoints represented by Sita and Raman, sets up marital discord and conjugal misunderstanding as the *leit-motif* of Desai’s novels. They are temperamentally poles apart which accounts for their being unable to forge a harmonious marital relationship.

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

In Custody

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

The problem of marital discord in the novels lies in the fact that Gautama in *Cry, The Peacock*, Jiban in *Voices In The City*, Raman in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* and Deven in *In Custody* are practical and matter-of-fact men while Maya, Monisha, Sita and Sarla in these four novels respectively are idealistic. Maya, Monisha, Sita and Sarla each crave for love and understanding but their tragedy is that they are married to wooden, hard-hearted and insensitive men. All the marriages in her novels are more or less business dealings, the under-counter profits rationally handed over to the male partners.

But not infrequently this order is violently convulsed, the caged bird batters its head against the iron bars and manages to leave a few bloodstains. Similarly a wife revolts, runs away, commits suicide, becomes a homicidal maniac, and finds tremendous freedom in blessed widowhood. The great ‘No’ is said at least to ensure freedom of both body and mind. By implication Mrs. Desai makes it clear that either one should remain unmarried, unfettered and unaccepted by the society as such, or marry and be damned to an everlasting private hell. In consequence, therefore, she is taken with definite discomfort by the complacent reading public. Her novels are indeed chilling encounters of the traumatic experiences of married lives with developed egos. The attitudes of spouses towards each other’s role and status might be of considerable importance for marital harmony or disharmony. The decline in harmony can be associated with emphasis to individualistic, materialistic and self-oriented goals over that of

family well-being. And this later takes the shape of marital discord. Thus *A Study Of Comparision Of Traditional And Modern Oeuvre* deals with the different characters of Anitha Desai who is considered to be one of the most important women writers of the modern times. She speaks volumes of the dipressed women in this world where male domination is at a high rate. Her readers will be a lot emotional while reading her each and every novel. The message she expresses in her novels is really worthy to the present world. Its inspiration lasts long in the minds of the readers.

Chapter - VI

Conclusion

After an emotional and intensive study of various novels, a picture of the subject matter of Anita Desai's novels has emerged. Anita Desai brings forth some marked deviations from the style of her predecessors. She tries to grasp her characters psychologically; she is a great analyst of human mind and human relationships, a creator of brilliant characters and astute interpreter of life and its various problems.

After all the world of Anita Desai is an ambivalent one 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 to the core. Most of her characters are pre-occupied with themselves, and are lonesome. Yet they are tried to rebel against the established norms and struggle to protect their privacy at any cost.

The "Introductory" chapter specifies and introduces in detail the overall picture of Anita Desai as one of the major contemporary novelists among Indian women writers in English. Much has been said by different critics about her grasping of human psyche, especially of her female characters. The purpose of this study has been to establish Anita Desai as a feminist writer although she has no literary and theoretical commitment to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism. None of her novels can be considered as a political discourse and a feminist critical theory for all practical purposes.

In fact, her feminist critical perspective and theory are concerned only with the analysis of the personal power relation between both sexes. Her purpose is to see women characters as humans with their weaknesses and potentialities, who are caught in the web of their own compulsions, but cannot be regarded as haunted protagonists who do not come to terms with life, so Anita Desai's novels have been examined as the manifesto of female predicament and creative release of the feminine sensibility. Her feminism is not anti-male and her women need man's loving company and aspire for the happiness of life which they are not able to achieve. It is, however, clear that she raises the woman's question in all its aspects that is, all the issues pertaining to the growth and needs of women. Her characters are neurosis, have psychological phenomena; and they are interested to living individuals with its hopes, dejections and chaotic flow.

The foregoing study of the theme and technique in the novels of Anita Desai leads to draw certain inferences. In order to convey her theme, Anita Desai as a novelist, judiciously uses characters, situations, dialogues, and other elements in relation to the plot. The theme serves as the skeleton, incorporating the whole life-perspective of the novelist, through situations and scenes that are peculiar to her alone. Anita Desai's incorporating of psychological aspect to theme has added a new meaning. The various themes recur and overlap each other in her novels.

The unique feature of Anita Desai's fictional artistry is her use of imagery to carry theme, to unite structure to create the filling of wholeness. She sees a novel as a pattern or a design:

“I like to have this pattern and then fit in the characters, the scenes - each piece in keeping with the other so as to form a balanced whole.”

One finds through a close study of images and symbols in her novels that these elements contribute to the structural pattern of the novels. These image patterns, in turn, record the different states in the novelist’s development as an artist. The evolving stages of her philosophy of life are also manifest in almost all her novels.

The first chapter “Women novelists in Indian writing in English from post-Independence era till today” discusses some important aspects of fictional technique, quoting extensively from different critics on the subjects. The post-Independence period in the recent Indian history corresponds suitably with her concept of the “nodal period” when a number of Indian writers of fiction in English try to explore and manifest Indian reality. In these writers one hardly finds the commitment of the earlier period or even the amused narration of the trials of the middle class, trying to unite the past traditional outlook with the fast emerging realities of the modern living conditions. In this effort the writers of the post-Independence phase move inward. They get more and more psychologically intended and try to assess the sociological effects on the psyche of their characters.

Fortunately this movement, from the outward gross realities to inward complexities, found, as its mouth-piece, a number of women novelists who, by the peculiar situation of their existence, have been able to see the Indian complexities from close quarters where constraints of varied hues and shades work upon the sensitive individuals. Among the women novelists, Anita Desai happens to be the leading voice. One may miss in her fiction the customary strains of rural poverty, caste and class conflict, but she has fascinating stories to tell about individuals who have to traverse a ground too tricky and treacherous to handle smoothly. She becomes, therefore, a recorder of the dilemma faced by an individual in the Indian urban set-up. She gets interested in analysis and portrayal of human relationship, mostly baffling in nature in the sense that man’s actions and volitions often take to uncertain ways under different situations.

The second chapter deals with the theme of “Man and Woman relationship in the novels of Anita Desai”. It is central to most of Anita Desai’s early novels. Man and woman relationship seems to be of particular interest to her. Anita Desai has concentrated on the predicament of modern women in the male dominated society. According to her, most marriages are unions of incompatibility. Men and women have different ways of looking at things and their reactions are different. The fact that men are more rational makes all the difference. Only the women are expected to change, to adjust herself in the different environment after marriage; instead of mutual adjustment. This results in gradual erosion of marital relationship. It brings a nullification of the values she has cherished. This affects her psyche and behaviour. Anita Desai has depicted this aspect of the man and woman relationship in her novels.

In Anita Desai’s novels, one can see a definite sequence and pattern emerging. We can see growth and development of her attitude towards this theme. In her first novel, *Cry, The Peacock*, the relation between Maya and Gautama is of indifference. Maya’s quest for love and understanding is futile as Gautama is indifferent to her demands. Maya is obsessed with the fear of the predictions of the albino priest, but she gets no support and love from Gautama.

This results in a void in her life which she is unable to bear and she kills Gautama, the source of her unhappiness. One sees the predicament of Monisha in *Voice In The City* is similar to that of Maya. Monisha is obsessed by a sense of suffocation. She builds a wall around herself, alienating herself from

others, even from her husband. Unable to bear the pain of being alone, she sets herself on fire and dies. In many ways, the married lives of Maya and Monisha are similar.

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Sita is a victim of loveless marriage. The central theme of the novel is Sita's attempt to say "No" to spend her life with her husband Raman, and the demands it makes on her. Here we see a change in the theme as Sita compromises with Raman and returns home with him. Though the novel ends at a depressing note as Sita's attempt to escape did not help her solve the situation. In the same way, Nanda Kaul, in *Fire on The Mountain*, in spite of her pretension to be happy in her loneliness did not help her solve her problems.

In her next novel, *Clear Light of Day*, Anita Desai has treated the tensions between brothers and sisters, but there is an optimistic end. She has reached the conclusion that there is no need for despair. She sees the ultimate wisdom of life in under-standing. In *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*, she has projected a similar solution of understanding and adjustment in married life. Sarla and Deven in *In Custody*, keep up their marriage in spite of their differences and discrepancies. The man and woman relationship serves as the back-drop. Though one sees similar maladjustments in relationships, one may observe that there is a marked growth in Anita Desai's treatment of man and woman relationship.

The third chapter "Familial Relationships in the Contemporary Indian Society," deals with the novels which focus on family. Different varieties of familial relationships have been discussed here. Relationships are not necessarily pleasant and the tension in familial relationship is obvious. The unhappy married life of the characters of Anita Desai's novels aggravates the sense of loneliness and alienation in the characters. These themes are interrelated in her novels.

The moving description of loneliness leaves a lasting impression on the reader's mind. Maya, Nirode, Monisha, Amla, Sarah, Sita, Nanda - all suffer from a sense of isolation which is not merely physical but also psychic. This estrangement from which they suffer is the consequence of the absence of desired relationships. The snapping of communications, dissimilarity of attitudes, incompatibility of temperament, leads to the feeling of loneliness. The characters of the novels *Cry*, *The Peacock*, *Voices In The City*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* - Maya, Nirode, Monisha and Sita are isolated, firstly, by their own inability to see things as a whole, and secondly, by other characters withdrawing from them, as if they were different from others. These characters are pathetically alone. Maya, Monisha and Sita suffer from alienation as it stems from incompatibility in their relationship with their husbands and family.

These women are hypersensitive and are obsessed with one or the other thing. Maya is obsessed by the predictions of the albino priest about her death; Monisha is obsessed with suffocation, and Sita, with violence and death. Their obsessions become hurdle in their relation-ships. They are unable to share their feelings and thoughts with others, and thus, isolate themselves. This loneliness has a harrowing effect on their psyche. Maya and Monisha are unable to face the reality of their circumstances. In the novel *Fire on the Mountain*, Nanda Kaul pretends to be happy in her isolated abode, but in reality this loneliness is imposed on her. She is unwanted by her children and has to retreat to Kasauli. Another character of the novel, Raka, however, enjoys loneliness which is not an imposition but an inborn habit. One also sees the loneliness of Nur Shajahanabadi, in 'In Custody', who is surrounded by many psychological problems. He is a victim of changing times and old age. One also sees the alienation of Sara, Adit and Dev in *Bye, Bye Blackbird* and Hugo Baumgartner in *Baumgartner's Bombay*, due to cultural and social dislocation.

The next chapter, “Feminine Psyche in the novels of Anita Desai”, deals with different aspects of feminine psyche which constitute a major part of her fictional material. The novels have been selected from the point of view of female characters, such characters that represent different aspects of feminine psyche. These characters cover a wide range of age-groups, and have different personalities and characteristics, some of which are neurotic and sub-normal.

If, at one extreme, there are sensitive women characters, on the other extreme, one also finds thick-skinned women with blunt sensibility. In her very first novel *Cry, The Peacock*, one finds examples of the two extremes. It is a novel mainly concerned with the theme of dis-harmony between husband and wife relation-ship. Here, Anita Desai has dealt with a sterile woman, highly sensitive and emotional, who is married to Gautama, a promising, prosperous and over busy practitioner of law. Gautama’s sensibilities are too rough and practical to suit Maya’s. Though Gautama is a faithful husband who takes care of Maya and loves her in his own way, but Maya is never satisfied and happy.

She feels that Gautama never cares for her and does not have any feelings for her. The novel gives us an impression of the marital incompatibility and unhappy conjugal life. The novel begins with the death of Maya’s pet dog, Toto. This makes matters worse. This event upsets Maya so terribly that she is off her mental balance. This example certainly gives us an idea of Anita Desai’s art of reading woman’s psychic-self, which reveals Mays’s inner thoughts. Maya is a hypersensitive woman, an introvert. This mental retrogression suggests that Maya has not been able to adjust herself in the world of reality, and after killing her husband, she mentally goes back to her protected and pampered childhood, the best part of her life. Thus, in the character of Maya, Anita Desai has presented the feminine psyche of both - of a girl and a woman.

In *Voices in the City* also Anita Desai has portrayed feminine psyche, mainly through the character of Monisha, although there are other women characters in the novel. Monisha is similar to Maya this that she is also childless, sensitive and a victim of ill-matched marriage. If Maya is lonely in her family because it is a nuclear family with no one except her husband, Monisha’s family has too many people, since it is a joint family.

The over-crowded house makes her uneasy and even though she has a room of her own, literally yet metaphorically, she hasn’t, for, the women of the family just never bother that the daughter-in-law may sometime need privacy. Her sisters-in-law, always without any hesitation, barge into her room, making themselves comfortable on the big bed, discussing Monisha’s sarees and her blocked fallopian tubes. Her plight increases because sterility is a stigma for a married woman. Through Monisha, Anita Desai has portrayed the psyche of sensitive, intellectual woman who is suffocated in uncongenial atmosphere of her in-lows house. She is happy neither with her husband nor with his family members.

In the novel ‘*Where Shall We Go This Summer?*’ is a strange case of neuroticism where the woman doesn’t want to give birth to a child. However, finally she consents to the same advice of her husband and comes back to Bombay to deliver. Sita also, in this novel, suffers from ill-matched marriage, but the fault lies more with her rather than with the husband, who is considerate and tries to make her happy. It is another matter that because of her pathological sensitivity, and is always high-strung. Raman is a businessman living in a joint family. Raman’s family members are quite accommodative and considerate towards Sita, but she is always grudging. Raman’s is a traditional Hindu family where even men do not smoke openly, but Sita, just to spite her in-laws, smokes openly. Things become so bad that Raman shifts to a flat to avoid daily tensions. But even here, Sita is not happy. She is irrational, childish, and petulant.

In *'Bye, Bye Blackbird'*, the immigrants live a happy and satisfactory life of fantasy in a foreign country. But Adit undergoes a conflict - whether to believe in this world of make-belief or not. He resolves it by going back to India. In *Fire on the Mountain*, fantasy is used in an entirely different way. There are two kinds of fantasy worlds which exist side by side - one is consciously woven by Nanda Kaul to interest her great grand daughter, Raka; and the other, which is shared by Raka and Ram Lal, and is based on his belief in the supernatural. Nanda, too, lives in a world of illusion that she is happy at Carignano, and this is what she was striving for.

A confrontation with reality shatters her and she is unable to bear the shock and commits suicide. In *'Clear Light of Day'*, the worlds of individual fantasies are juxtaposed, until, in the end, their boundaries are shifted and they merge in some measure with the world of normative reality. Bim travels through a world of fantasy in order to come to terms with reality of their situations. Her anger, as a result of this conflict, paves the way for adjustment. In *'In custody'*, too, we see a conflict between illusion and reality.

Deven and Nur are caught up in the world of illusions. For Deven it was an illusion to think Nur's world was an escape into a wider world, but he realizes Nur is also trapped in his life like him. And he gets the courage to face the realities of life. Deven realizes that Nur is nothing but a poet. Instead of finding his genius in his creations, Deven tries to seek him in the man. Only in the end of the novel does Deven realize that his commitment is to Nur's poetry. The poets 'soul and spirit' are to be found in his works, nowhere else. While the man ages, decays and dies, his creations endure.

In *'Baumgartner's Bombay'*, illusion has been used as a mode of escapism. Hugo lives in a world of childhood days in Germany and with the letters that were sent by his mother. These things give him sustenance to bear the pangs of loneliness in India. The reality is too harsh and sordid for him to bear. The character of Lotte, his friend, we find another aspect of feminine psyche, that of a kept. She is the kept of a Calcutta-based *Marvari* Seth, Kantilal, who maintains her in Bombay and comes periodically to her for booze and sex. Lotte, in her declining years, initiates sex with Baumgartner and he obliges. In her case it is physical need.

Anita Desai has also touched upon a very vital aspect of the feminine psyche, viz. eroticism. In different novels she has portrayed different facets of human feminine psyche. Her characters cover women of almost all age groups. In Raka, one has a child going to girlhood. In Maya, a married woman; in Lotte, a middle aged woman; and in Nanda Kaul and Ila Das, an old woman each of different age groups but all of them are also different types and different characters.

The last chapter is "Conclusion". The emergence of women novelists in Indian English literature took place as early as the last quarter of the nineteenth century. But, it was only after independence that they could make solid contribution to Indian English fiction. The post-Independence period has brought to the forefront a number of noted women novelists who have enriched Indian English fiction by a creative release of feminine sensibility. The woman has been the focus of many literary works in this period. Writers like Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande etc. have achieved recognition in recent times.

The treatment of the theme by women novelists is a three- faceted affair. A personal story slowly develops into a wider conflict in which are involved the individual's identity for supremacy and social demands. The personal story, thus, is used as a springboard to explore social change in India in all its complex manifestations. They seem to examine the transition from a traditional society to an urban industrial metropolitan society in its comprehensiveness. The comparative achievement of Anita Desai

becomes clear when we notice that her fellow women writers seldom try to portray the psychic elements involved in these themes in their fullness.

Anita Desai's feminism emphasizes difference between man and woman on the bases of essentialism. Her essentialism, it seems, is determined on the basis of biologism. She tries to explain social structure from the gender perspective, but she is suspended between the "Father tongue" and "the language of the womb" to end up with a split relationship. Her quest is to construct identity through difference and she is oriented at attainment of autonomy. She focuses on the principle of right to reject terms on which equality is measured. Her woman characters, therefore, resist the homogenization of separate struggle based on sex.

At this point, it sounds as if she comes very close to suggesting that heterosexuality inevitably oppresses woman. Through the eyes of these women writers, one gets a glimpse of a different world, not represented in literature till now. Women, who were till then treated as second class citizens, were assigned their due place in these novels. These novels present a picture of the impact of education on women, her new status in the society and her assertion on individuality. The works of Indian women novelists like Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande can be compared with those of the Canadian novelists like Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence and Aritha van Herk. All these writers write like as seen by women and life as affecting women.

Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande are specialists in depicting the undulations of the female ego or self under the pressure of critical human situations and emotional relationships. Their attention is also focused on feminine suffering in the complex cultural stresses and strains in Indian society, having strong past moorings. Both Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande explore human relationship in modern Indian society, particularly the husband-wife relationship. Shashi Deshpande's women, like those of her predecessors, are tolerant, obedient and submissive, but a feminist awakening and upsurge is all along notable in their feelings and conduct.

Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai interrogate the limited frame of reference within which women's lives are structured in Hindu culture. The domestic world, for a large number of Hindu women, is still held to be the equivalent of the satisfaction of their material and spiritual desires. A Silence of Desire and Clear Light of Day evoke the widely differing, yet similar, difficulties that confront women in their unconventional search for inner peace and tranquility. Both novelists emphasize the need for a modified form of female renunciation, especially in a cultural context, that denies full personhood to women. In an act of subversion against such a circumscribed milieu, Markandaya and Desai permit their female protagonists new patterns of spiritual subjectivity which take into account their justified need for *samnyasa* or spiritual repose.

Anita Desai thus tries to introduce a modern psychological vein and projects a sensibility, generally not encountered in other Indo-Anglian writers of fiction. As a novelist, her distinguishing qualities are many, the chief among them being, the subordination of the background to the characters and the deft handling of language, imagery and syntax in order to convey an intimate expression of the inner world of her characters.

In *Cry, The Peacock*, in order to probe the psyche of Maya, the narrative is not chronologically straight and moves to and fro, between past and present in her mind. Anita Desai has used animal imagery to depict the disturbed mind of Maya. The prophecy of the albino priest is used as a leitmotif which haunts her mind throughout the novel.

In the novel *Voice InThe City*, Anita Desai has used symbolism, especially in the context of the city of Calcutta. She has also used diary writing to show the trapped feelings of Monisha. Similarly, she has effectively used dream sequence to describe Nirode's complicated relationship with his parents. In *Bye, Bye Blackbird*, she has used descriptive prose and rhetoric as a technique, and has made effective use of irony to describe the hollowness of Dev's character.

In the next novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Anita Desai uses symbolism to describe Sita's psyche through the symbol of wounded eagle. A structural division of the novel is related to the three stages in the development of Sita's character. The novel also makes use of poetry in a significant manner. It offers a vision of life and is the medium, through which, the final point is reached in the novels. The loneliness of Nanda and Raka is portrayed mainly through nature imagery and nature symbolism. The bare mountainous terrain and a deserted burnt-out bungalow on hill top which fascinates Raka, symbolises her emotionally void character. The title refers to the last act in the novel by Raka when she sets the forest on fire.

In *Clear Light of Day*, 'Time' plays an important role. As is explained by Anita Desai, time passes but things remain the same except that the pattern changes. She has made effective use of poetry with music which provides the implication of clear light of day that dawns upon Bim, making her way clear, dispelling all her confusions.

Anita Desai has made use of music in other novels too, but it is either incidental or part of the atmosphere. Poetry has been quoted in *In Custody*, not of Nur, but of the romantic poets. It shows that he still lives in the days of Rajas and Zamindars of pre-Independence India. The animal imagery has been used to portray the trapped life of characters. The title of the novel is symbolic yet ironic because in reality Deven is in the custody of Nur's personality and his personal circumstances. The novel Baumgartner's Bombay, uses flashback technique to describe the childhood days of lonely Hugo. There are several German songs and poems used in the novel since he is a German by birth. Anita Desai has done justice in portraying the mind of Baumgartner, his confusions and maladjustments, both in his own country and his adopted country.

Desai's Journey to Ithaca starts with Cavafy's poem:

"Always keep Ithaca fixed in your mind. To arrive there is your ultimate goal. But do not hurry the voyage at all. It is better to let it last for long years; and even to anchor at the isle when you old, rich with all you have gained on the way, not expecting that Ithaca will offer your riches."

That is, the journey is far more important than the destination. In this novel, India, more specifically, spiritual India, becomes a kind of 'Ithaca'. The main characters are Sophie and Matteo, a European couple who come to India as hippies in the early 1970s in search for spiritual enlightenment. Rather, it is Matteo who is drawn to this India of yogis, sages, and mystics, partly through a reading of Hermann Hesse's *The Discovery of the East*. While Matteo is a dreamy Italian with unhappy childhood, his wife, Sophie, is a hard-headed German who is practical and quite materialistic in her approach. Most of the novel is from her point of view. *Journey to Ithaca* marks a departure from the Desai canon. It introduces a different style and a different subject from what has kept the author pre-occupied so far. No current trends of thought or questions of feminism, identity or racial problems seem to surface here; not even the intricacies of personal relationships which is her forte. All such issues have been carefully kept outside the purview of the text.

This novel is unique among most of Desai's other novels in its central theme. It is not about an exile but about an exit from one's nation. It is not only on an individual's disappointment, but also on the

determined pursuit of another. What is being pursued, is neither physical nor psycho-logical, but spiritual. It is no longer a loss, but a finding of Truth. Journey to Ithaca describes the journey of Matteo from what is false to what is true; from ignorance to wisdom; from legendary India to real India; from earthly love to Divine Love; from ordinary to extraordinary achievements in life and from communion with men to communion with God and god-like earthly beings.

It narrates the journey of 'Mother' from Laila to Motherhood; from one religion to no religion; from physical experience to spiritual experience; from human love to super-human love; and, from darkness to Eternal Light. It also depicts the journey of Matteo's wife, Sophie, from Germany to India; from ignorance to intelligence; from misunder-standing to understanding of the Mother and from sexual passion to a sensible decision.

Anita Desai in Journey to Ithaca has united varied groups of people from different parts of the world in order to present cosmic vision of human life. The novel transcends the barriers of caste and creed. The incomplete journey of Hugo in Baumgartner's Bombay for his spiritual quest comes to its completion in Journey to Ithaca. The chief protagonist of this novel, Laila, defies her social code and comes above the narrow round of caste, creed and a particular religion for attaining the higher vision of human life. The novelist thus professes the universal validity that all religion of the world come to a single stream, representing the religion of humanity. The novel thus ends with a hope of mankind's regeneration through self-analysing process.

Journey to Ithaca is supposed to be a big leap on Desai's part as a novelist. Since spiritual lust is the motif, one thinks that there is a great advancement. But, a closer look reveals that the attitude and intention of the author is the same as in her earlier novels. It is interesting to watch how an individual is ever a captive of her attitudes and intentions. Deven's search in '*In Custody*' for intellectual interaction and recognition; or that of Maya in Cry, The Peacock for reciprocity is no different from Matteo's search for meaning in life in Journey to Ithaca. Matteo wants an alternative definition of this world, its inhabitants and of his own self. The crisis that Desai presents is that of the whole human race. Through her novel, Fasting, Feasting (1999), Anita Desai finds a marvelous opportunity to mock at some of the favourite Indian beliefs.

Belief number one: a family must have a son. After the disappointment of two daughters, PapaMama suddenly realizes, most unexpectedly, that there will be another child. This is Arun - an asthmatic child, temperamental, spoilt, a bully; nevertheless far preferred than the sisters. So precious is the little baggage that Uma the eldest, is withdrawn from school to help in his upbringing.

Belief number two: girls can get married if the dowry is sufficiently large. Someone, somewhere has to be lured into a marriage with bespectacled, plain, dull-witted Uma. It is of no consequence that she is a caring, sensitive and fun-loving person. An engagement fails; so does a spurious marriage. The important question whispered in anxiety is, "Did he touch you?"

Belief number three: a boy must receive the best possible education, preferably "abroad". So, Arun coached and trained by the best of tutors barely scraps through the Indian examinations. Next is the dream fulfillment of having a son in college in "Massachusetts". In spite of having a Kashmiri shawl to keep himself warm in that dreadful snow, and packages of Indian tea just not to miss the flavour, Arun is miserably coping with the library books, bland food and an unfamiliar society.

Belief number four: when in trouble, turn to religion. A little bit of ritual practice will see you through an ordinary day in an average family. But if you are a modestly endowed widow or a young woman

without matrimonial prospects, you better find your favourite deity and a congenial ashram. As women, develop your culinary skills so you are useful to your hosts.

Anita Desai's expertise lies in the way she weaves a fine, clever story around them. Fasting, Feasting is structured on a notion of contrast as the novel is clearly in two parts, the first given over to Uma in India and the second to Arun in Massachusetts. While Desai's inwardness with the complex dynamics of Indian homes is evident, her description of the American family relies heavily on stereotypes. Mrs. Patton is a compulsive shopper in the local food mart, Mr. Patton insists on cooking bar-be-cue steaks every weekend, son Rod is a health freak, daughter Melanie suffers from bulimia. Arun, during his stay with the family in summer vacation, observes the excesses with horror and distaste, more so because he is a vegetarian.

Mrs. Patton tries to be friendly, kind and helpful, for, Arun brings an exciting unfamiliarity into her abundant and full life. But awkward Arun would rather disappear into customary privacy than see those steaming, blood red hunks of meat on the plate or eat the glutinous bean sprouts cooked especially for him. He would prefer to stay out of that other American ritual of a day on the beach and he would rather not see the mounds of exposed flesh on the sun deck at home.

So, who is 'fasting', and who is 'feasting'? It is quite obvious to say that India is the land of deprivation and therefore, 'fasting'; and America is brimming over with the goodies of a modern day cornucopia, therefore, 'feasting'. This novel, *Fasting, Feasting* of Anita Desai shows curious links with her earlier writing. While Baumgartner's *Bombay* and *Journey to Ithaca* brought foreign sojourners to India, *Fasting, Feasting* takes an Indian abroad.

In this novel one gets a bipolar world, clearly separating people, social and cultural practices. This novel can be said to be issue-based one, unlike the earlier ones which were character-centered. The various concerns that have marked Desai's previous nine novels are brought together with practiced skill in her *Fasting, Feasting*, which was short-listed for the 1999 Brooker Prize. As in her earlier novels, notably those up to and including *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, there is a clear focus on the family, and in particular the lot of women trapped in traditional family structures in a rapidly changing postcolonial world. *Fasting, Feasting* is a carefully balanced novel of contrasts: between foods; between Indian family life and American family life; as well as between East and West in a broader sense, between lack and excess; and, between lack of ambition (for Uma and Melanie) and too much ambition (for Arun and Rod). But, what the novel ultimately reveals are the similarities rather than the differences.

The Zigzag Way (2004), Anita Desai's latest novel, is the story of twentieth century Mexico, through the turbulence of the revolution and personal calamity; of the exploitation of the Mexican Indians, and their dubious saviours, such as the formidable Dona Vera, widow of a mining baron, and Eric's own grandmother, a young Cornish girl whose grave lies in a hillside cemetery. While trying to unravel the dark, often violent histories on the day locals celebrate and remember their dead, *Dia de los Muertos*, Eric comes face to face with his own story, its past and present; even, the afterlife.

In her long career in fiction, Anita Desai has won well-deserved praise for her elegant, evocative prose and for the keen intelligence with which she explores culture and character. *The Zigzag Way* is the story of a young American, Eric, seeking to learn more about his grandfather who, he knows, made an improbable journey from Cornwall, England to the silver mines of Mexico. In this novel, the half-Bengali, half-German Desai, who has often focused on India and on Indians living elsewhere, turns to another land: Mexico. She illuminates that country's vistas and history, and the intertwined lives of three very different foreigners who venture there, with characteristic grace, skill, and insight.

One first meets Eric, an aimless American graduate student struggling to expand his thesis on immigration into a book. He follows his more disciplined and competent scientist girlfriend on a research trip to Mexico. Eric fortuitously becomes aware that his Cornish grandfather once worked in the mines of Mexico and sets out to learn more.

His quest takes him to the estate of the elderly, imperious and eccentric Doña Vera, who fled Austria during World War II -possibly because of Nazi connections - and married a Mexican man whose family fortune was made in mining. She now lives as “Queen of the Sierra” and self-appointed protector of the Huichol Indians. An ego-centric, autocratic woman suffering secret torments, she resents Eric's inquiries about the mines. Doña Vera's library, however, teaches him about the miners' labors. Learning that porters carried heavy bags up thousands of stairs in a zigzag direction to take advantage of air currents that helped them breathe, Eric ruminates on his own zigzag journey, his effort to enter the past.

That journey brings him to a near-deserted mining town, just before the Day of the Dead. We are then returned to the past, where we meet Eric's grandmother, Betty Jennings, a plucky, appealing young woman who travels to Mexico in 1910 to marry a Cornish miner. Soon Betty's intriguing life in Mexico is thrown into turmoil by the outbreak of revolution and ends abruptly in childbirth.

The book's magical, haunting final section follows Eric on the Day of the Dead as he seeks Betty's grave and encounters both past and present. Desai shines when describing Mexico, bringing city and country, past and present, vividly to life. Her slim novel brims with these descriptions, and with fascinating historical fact and detail.

This novel is set in Mexico, with not an Indian character in sight. Anita Desai had previously written in *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* about Indians facing the reality of an England that did not want them; she had looked at foreigners coming to India in search of enlightenment in *Journey to Ithaca*, and of course the marvelous isolation of a German Jew stuck in Bombay in *Baumgartner's Bombay*.

In her style, Anita Desai is very much occupied with the skill of communication, irrespective of ‘the nature of experience’, embodied in her novels. Anita Desai's penchant for sound of words persists in all her novels. She is carried away by the music in words. Her lyricism appears a mere flourish of words for their alliterative potentiality. But, her imagery is quite picturesque, for instance, she describes the wind as;

“blowed along cold and free. It slapped them sharply, with chilly smacks that made the women hold their hair down about their ears”.

At times, her imagery is purely imaginative and has nothing to do with reality. It has been observed that Anita Desai changes her style of writing with the change in the themes. In her earlier novels, her prose had the quality of lyric poetry forming a pattern of symbols and images. Her writings turn reflective and go deep into the psyche, acquiring a different form and character, affecting the heart and mind and leave their imprint there. She reveals her delicate sensibility of sounds, colours, smells, beauty which lie hidden in familiar objects. But in her later novels, emphasis has shifted from internal to external. There is absence of passages of lyric beauty. There is more of action and story element.

In the novels of Anita Desai, the theme of disharmony and discord is confined to the family and, at times, to the maladjusted or ill-adjusted self. Loneliness and unrequited love drives Desai heroines to the jaws of death, often manifesting in madness or suicide. Desai deals with the alienation of upper middle class people of society. Her protagonists suffer from lack of parental love, disturbed infancy, broken homes and Oedipus or Electra complex.

Disgruntled with their existence, they often opt out of the mainstream of life. Alienation in Desai characters often manifests in immoral ties and activities which we hardly find in any other Indian woman novelist, other than Shobha De.

Anita Desai's fiction has covered themes such as women's oppression and quest for a fulfilling identity, family relationship and contrasts, the crumbling of traditions, and anti-semitism. The Euro-centric and social biases that are sometimes detected in her fiction, therefore, may be more productively read as the result of the author's focus on uprooted and marginalized identities. She is realm of Indian English Literature for the consummate craftsmanship and literary beauty that they exemplify.

The most significant contribution of the reform movement was the emergence of women writers in India. Here was a new powerful way in which they could express their hopes, fears, experiences strength and weaknesses. Women in India, especially then educated middle class started writing about their experiences. Twentieth century witnessed a revolutionary change in the field of writing. Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha's voluminous work entitled *Women Writing in English: 600 BC to the Early Twentieth Century Vols. I and II*, highlights how women all over India responded through their creative writing, to this new awakening and social orientation. The inequalities, restrictions, denials and limitations experienced by women are voiced in their writings.

This was one way of breaking their silence. Novels, poems, manuscripts, short stories, drama and critical analysis were deployed by women. They were slowly in the process of building "a literature of their own" a phrase coined by Elaine Showalter. Most of the women writers at the beginning formulated their thoughts and writings on the existing model of male tradition. But slowly the emergence of a female subculture along with new self-awareness led to the establishment of a different female literary tradition.

Women writers were interested in capturing the subjective world of women. In the beginning with their limited mobility, and limited exposure, they could write only about the world they knew intimately. Novels especially became a very popular genre through which they could effectively express their views and experiences. The form was very flexible and it could be easily manipulated by those educated middle class and upper class women. The contact with the west also influenced this settling of a female literary awakening in India now as

"... the feminine values relegated by sexual division of labour to the private realm are now returning to transvaluate the ruling ideologies themselves, the feminization of discourse prolongs the fetishizing of women at the same time as it lends them a more authoritative voice." (Teny Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa* (Oxford; Blackwell, 1982), p.13)

Women writers in India are using the scriptures for voicing their powerlessness and for getting a new image. They are convinced about the power of writing and are using their discourses to create a "new space" and a new self-image. The value, force of expression and the power of writing have been ingrained in the women writers.

They have realized that it has more power and sharpness than steel. This female literary awakening to a certain extent focalizes the dichotomy that exists between their real world of women and the represented world. It has finally arrived at a stage where it reciprocates power-fully against the violence and oppression in the existing system.

The Feminist network in English and *Manushi* in Hindi were some of the first women's newsletters and magazines to appear. They raised the issues of violence against women and very effectively tried to raise a new awareness among women.

The Indian writing in English is very popular and powerful, as English is the lingua-franca of this country. The birth of this form is definitely connected with a moment in history and that is the British supremacy in India. During the colonial period itself, Indian writers in English evolved a style of their own. Novels especially became very popular. The pioneers of modern novels in India namely Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, in their novels they depict the Indian life with all its complexities. They discuss socio-political and cultural issues. The women novelists also more or less, modeled their novels on their male counterparts. The novels of Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Bharathi Mukherjee and Sashi Deshpande have become very popular not only in India, but also in the west. They mainly focus on the social, political and psychological struggles that women undergo.

The many victories, defeats, frustrations, sense of rootlessness, dailiness of their lives and the evolving consciousness of women are integrated in their novels. The significance of psycho-logical novels. In Desai the main focus is the individual especially the Indian woman.

Reaffirming it she says that “to a novelist it is the individual and not the anonymous multitude that is important”. (Ketaki Sheth, “Anita Desai Talks to Kelaki Sheth p.58.)

Anita Desai’s female protagonists are victims of those inequalities resulting from social stereotyping. Indian women who constitute half the population are forced into subjugation by patriarchy. Desai in her novels depicts the different kinds of oppression and marginalization that exist in society. Due to sex-role stereotyping women unconsciously experience guilt and shame when they deviate from the roles assigned to them.

The most powerful stereotyped belief that curtails women in the Indian context is the belief that women are constitutionally weak and they need protection. The action of the individuals in a society is shaped, appraised and evaluated by the cognition of roles. The rapid urbanization, education and job opportunities have changed the status of women in India to a certain extent. Women are vocalizing their rights and their privileges. Feminist groups do try to make women more aware of their oppression.

Non-Feminists are also becoming conscious of the exploitation that exists in society. But social stereotyping is the most powerful weapon used by patriarchy in making women submissive. Desai in her novels has dealt with victimization of women due to stereotyping.

Desai establishes the fact that women with new concepts of their self is fighting the battle against their exploitation. Only by stabilizing our self and by establishing a new identity can we achieve success.

Desai feels that the ontological insecurity makes women vulnerable to many mental illnesses. They are depersonalized by the patriarchal system. Maya in *Cry the Peacock* is shocked at the way in which a woman’s body is exploited. When she sees the cabaret girls she feels that

“on their costumes of black net, they wore bright spangles and each spangle was a price tag, each price proclaimed the price of their breasts, their rumps, their legs. The spangles were bright, the prices were low.” (Anita Desai, *Cry the Peacock* P. 85.)

Maya’s reaction typifies the reaction of a woman who can identify the exploitation of her body. She vehemently lashes out at Gautama who is influenced by the stereotyped belief that “. . . they are merely physically aberrant women of small ambition who think it a compliment if men leer at their thighs.” (P.85) But Maya says that they must have been victims of sexual exploitations. Here Desai very powerfully depicts the impact of social stereotyping. Maya, Monisha, Sita, Nanda Kaul, Mira Masi are all victims of stereotyping.

Monisha's suicide makes one rethink about the root cause of woman's marginalization within the family. According to Desai when women develop a new self-image she is isolated by society and family. Monisha feels "different" from others in Jiban's family. Monisha reacts thus to this new awareness in her.

"It brings me to the edge, again and again catches me up and draws me to the edge, I am plunged down into something too intense to be borne or caught back rebuffed, at the last and most urgent moment. Utter humiliation and desolation." (Anita Desai, *Voices in the City* P.122)

Roles thus to a certain extent contribute to many conflicts. In the Indian context roles take precedence in the case of woman. The most important role she has to perform is the role of the mother. Desai punctures the concept of motherhood and its glorification. The commitments it ensures stifle Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain* and Bim in *Clear Light of Day*. Otima, Monisha's mother, Bim's mother, Sita as a mother are portrayed in a different manner. They are first of all 'Being-in-itself' and then a mother. Thus she takes a firm stand against the patriarchal concept of motherhood. Syed Aman uddin says that

"writing for Anita Desai is a process of discovering truth - but this truth for her is not metaphysical reality, nor is it the superficial reality." ('Anita Desai's Techniques', P.155)

The intensive studies in psychology support Desai's view that these roles are created for women and that the indoctrination takes place at a very early stage. Bim in *Clear Light of Day* never strives for the stereotyped image. Sita relinquishes her conformity after marriage and Amla moves on to a new space after the death of Monisha.

Nanda Kaul, Maya and Monisha are victims of the voices interject. They live in frustration, rejection and self-pity. The ill-treatment of a widow is depicted through Mira Masi in *Clear Light of Day*. Desai's description of her loneliness and neurosis haunts the reader:

"A drudge in her cell, which sealed into her chamber. A grey chamber woven shut. Here she lived; here she crawled, dragging her heavy wings behind her. Crawled from cell to cell, feeding the fat white canvas that lived in the cells and swelled on the nourishment she brought them. The cells swarmed with them, with their little tight white glistening lives. And she slaved and toiled, her long wings dragging." (Anita Desai, *Clear Light of Day* P. 89.)

Desai establishes the fact that the bonds created by society are absolutized by gender based stereotyping. Even the self-image of Indian woman is battered by the so called socio-political imperatives that restrict their mobility and action. Only a proper concept of the self will have the power to fight against the establishment.

Desai is ". . . the authentic cartographer of inward terrain" (Ramachandran Nair N, "In Custody: The Road not Taken", *Indian Women Novelists* P.78.) And this is what makes her unique among the women writers in Indian writing in English. In Chapter V, Desai's psychological perspectives are highlighted. She uses the stream of consciousness technique to depict what is going on in her character's mind. It is not merely a string of words but it attempts to present the inner most feelings of the characters.

Thoughts and feelings which are the intimate part of the self are projected on to her fictional canvas. One sees through one's eyes and hear through one's ears. s "Her novels are not political or sociological in character but are engaged in exposing labyrinths of the human mind and in indicating the ways to psychological fulfillment." (Jena Seema, *Voice & Vision of Anita Desai* P. 13.)

Desai uses the stream of -consciousness technique to probe the inner most recesses of the mind. Using this technique she analyzes the human mind, its intricacies, its mysteries and the way in which it is modified by the empirical reality.

Her critics unanimously agree on this point. R.S. Sharma considers Desai's *Cry, the Peacock as*

"the first step in the direction of psychological fiction in Indian writing in English" (RS. Shama, Anita Desai P.24.).

He feels that the success of Desai is mainly because of her "exploration of the interior world, plunging into the limitless depths of the mind, and bringing into relief the hidden contours of the human psyche." (A Shyam. S. Asnani, P.5.)

According to Meena Belliappa, "Desai has a rare ability to capture the atmosphere of the mind, and directly involve the reader in the flow of a sparticular consciousness." (Meena Belliappa, Anita Desai: p.1.)

In Desai's fictional canvas the individual is more important than social and political milieu. But she qualifies the individual by connecting it with the physical environment and that is the locale of her novels. The locale in Desai's novels also assumes a lot of significance. In other words it becomes the objective correlative of the emotions displayed by the character.

"One important ingredient of her art is that in her novels, Desai paints ornate, engrossing portraits of the outer world with its rich peripheral details, projecting the turbulent chaos of the inner world of the protagonist." (Madhusudan Prasad, *Anita Desai, The Novelist* p. 44.)

In *Bye-Bye Blackbird* the beautiful as well as unwelcoming English countryside is beautifully described. It merges with the character of Dev who does not like England and Adit who loves the English countryside. Chakradhar Prasad Singh says that the passages describing the beautiful countryside of London

". . . display the capacity of the novelist to render common place scenes and sights with a rare poetic touch. One of the main sources of attraction of the novel is this richness of imagery . . . (Chakradhar Prasad Singh, "The Visitor and The Exile, p. 238)

This creates a two dimensional effect and the private world of the self assumes a special significance when it merges with the locale. All senses of the readers are activated by this unique technique. The happy and carefree childhood of Bim and Raja, the closeness between the brother and sister is described by Desai thus:

"There were still those shining summer evenings on the banks of the Jumna when they went together, Bim, and Raja, bare foot over the sand to wade across the river, at that time of the year no more than a sluggish trickle, to the melon fields on the other bank to pick a ripe, round one and cut it open with Raja's penknife and bite into the juice-suffused slices while the sun sank into the saffron west and the cannon boomed into the city to announce the end of the day's fast in the month of Rarnzaan" (Anita Desai, *Clear Light of Day*, P.121.)

The whole landscape comes to life by this description. The pure and simple pleasures of childhood are set against the back drop of the banks of Jumna. The painful experiences of Bim are contrasted against her happy childhood days in the company of Raja.

PremaNandakumar says, "sombre are the shadows, no doubt in Anita Desai's world of imaginative fiction, but snatches of sunshine, the sudden revealing and guiding lights, are not wanting either." (Prema Nandakumar, 'Sombre the Shadows and Sudden the Lights', P.198.)

This study establishes the fact that there is a new self-concept of the Indian woman emerging from the novels of Anita Desai. The self-concept of Indian woman has suffered many setbacks. The revolutionary changes that swept over the socio-cultural casework generated many inter-conflicts as well as intra-conflicts among women. The self of the Indian woman is caught up in the winds of change. But there are still the residues of patriarchal oppression, violence and other negative forces which affect the self in an adverse manner.

According to Desai the coexistence of these two opposite things create anguish, trauma, and frustrations and sometimes they result in mental illness. Desai asserts the fact that there is a new awareness among women that gives them courage to go in the opposite direction, to finally arrive at the stage of 'being-in-itself.' This new self-image will ensure consistency in behaviour and woman can resolve many of her conflicts. It solves many intra-conflicts and inter-conflicts. These conflicts that are portrayed by Desai are discussed in detail in this thesis. Since conflicts are a part of growth out of conflicts a new awareness arises, which propels the self to wholeness.

The female psyche experiences intense conflicts when it is framed within the traditional family.

"Anita Desai's narratives not only give shape to separateness and connectedness that emerge from a family saga, but dramatize the way in which the self receives wounds, which are either aggravated or healed by the socio-cultural matrice, which is its soil and sustenance." (Rajendra Prasad V.V.N, "Anita Desai and 'Wounded' P.148.)

This chapter focuses on the various wounds received by the self, when engaged in many battles and when they experience intense emotional conflicts. The tool for analysing the conflicts galore is psycho-analysis, psychology, socio-psychology and Transactional Analysis. Battles fought and unfought are analysed in order to prove that there is a new self-concept that emerges from the novels of Anita Desai.

Desai deals with the chaotic fabric of human life. The stream-of-consciousness is used to depict the various kinds of conflicts experienced by the self.

"She stresses the individual and individuality. In her novels the protagonists desire and strive for a more authentic way of life than the one offered to them." (Usha Pathania, P. 12.)

Thus all her female characters rebel against their destiny. They do not accept life meekly in the traditional manner. What is it that causes conflicts? One asks oneself. Desai gives one an answer. If one meekly accepts the 'Being-For-Others' there is no conflict. But when she moves into a

"Being-in-itself conflicts are generated. Desai's protagonists are all women with more than ordinary sensibility and they search for their real self or authentic self. She focuses on how women in the contemporary urban milieu are bravely struggling against or helplessly submitting to the relentless forces of absurd life." (Madhusudan Prasad, P.140)

Desai through Baumgartner depicts one negative aspect of depression and that is regression. Baumgartner's Child ego state is activated when he is emotionally disturbed. G.R Taneja feels that Baumgartner's Bombay is the study of the humanity's need to find sustenance within itself. It is a story of love that binds, sustains and ennobles, love that draws human beings to one another.

The alien land generates an intense conflict and existential agony in man. The agony in searching for one's roots, one's identity is also analysed in this Chapter. The negative aspect of alienation is effectively brought to light by Desai. The alienated ones move away from people. NandaKaul, Sita, Monisha and Deven feel defenceless and hence try to live in isolation. They are victims of patriarchal power structure and traditional belief system. Desai brings out through Deven, Gautama, Raman, Bakul, Dharma, Jiban and Nirode, the stereotyped attitudes towards women. Deven never recognizes Sarala as a 'being-in-itself.' For him she is always a being-for- others.

Sarala is also not happy with her marriage and hence they live in conflicts. The battle fought by Sarala is ineffective as she does not have the power to vocalize the frustrations of a wounded psyche. Jiban (*Voices in the City*) is partly responsible for his wife's death. He also fails to treat Monisha with an understanding. He never communicates with her. A.V. Krishna Rao remarks that

“Jiban Monisha's husband is the prisoner of a conventional culture. . .” (A.V. Krishna Rao, “Voices in the City: A Study” P.169.)

Gautama , Maya's husband, is a distanced, serious person with whom Maya cannot adjust. Maya reacts in the Child ego state and Gautama behaves like an Adult. Maya is very much aware of the negative aspects of stereotyping, but the lack of coordination between her behaviour and the body results in psychosis. She murders Gautama and then kills herself.

Desai uses the technique of psychologizing or seeing through to establish that there is a new self-concept emerging from the novels of Anita Desai. According to Desai it is the stratification of men above women in the patriarchal framework that contributes to the conflicts between man and woman. In Maya negatively toned information is encoded more powerfully than positively toned information which results in her neurosis.

Pathological verifications also categorically prove that in depressed individuals the self image will also be defective. The main reason for a defective self-image is hence analysed here. Bitter experiences in childhood, the absence of a mother or father, the irresponsible fathers, physical or mental abuse are the factors that cause mental illness. Death wish is also a part of their hysteria and neurosis.

Marriages are more or less settlements according to Desai. Her female characters with more than ordinary sensibility fight against the constraints placed on them. It is the lack of a strong identity that places women in these psychological role-slots. Using the psycho-analytic theory subjectivity of woman is analyzed. Girls are conscious of their 'lack' from the beginning and the 'lack' imprints a sense of weakness in them. The biological lack is transformed into natural weakness. The gender-based discrimination creates a lot of conflicts. Bim with a new self-image achieves wholeness while Amla decides that she will not marry in haste and victimize herself.

To find out whether woman's oppression is rooted in sexuality, the theories Freud, Karen Homey, Kate Millet, Lacan, Derrida and Michel Foucault are used. One comes to the conclusion that femininity is acquired due to 'cultural policing.' The biological differences do not make women weak. The 'so-called infirmity and feminine weaknesses are encouraged by patriarchal society to suppress common women. This is the main reason for the oppression of women.

A striking similarity exists in the texts of Socrates Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes, Solon, the Greco-Roman philosophers and the law givers, during the time of Dharma Shastras. May be, it was ignorance on their part that made them frame laws of such kinds which lead to the marginalization of women. To homogenize and to interpret this complex ensemble of psycho-social- relations which marginalize women, has become an ordeal for feminists and women activists. The psychological battles between man and woman in Desai are thus grounded in sexuality and gender based subjectivity.

The marital conflicts in Desai's novels are analysed in the light of the psychological facet which concerns self and emotions. Desai has deeply probed the cognitive and emotive orientation of women. The results of quantitative psychological tests, psychiatric interviews and researches have concluded that 'brain is the organ of the mind.' Piaget the genetic epistemologist is his theory of 'Constructivist Structuralism' has spelled out in detail the nature of interactions' position of the self in relation with brain. The origin of mental structures is to be sought in the interaction between the self and the

environment in which the self strives to adapt using the processes of Assimilation, Accommodation and Equilibration.

They are automatic processes which are programmed or structured in the brain to help the self to interact with the environment. Assimilation and Accommodation are functional invariants of intelligent behaviour, at every level of intellectual development, from infancy to adulthood; they *are* operative in the over-all process of adaptation. A full development of the self must hence include not only the influence of stimuli on respondents (S →R) but also the influence of the responding organism on incoming stimuli (S←R).

Assimilation is thus the conservative side of intellectual development. It is the process which helps the self to draw environmental events towards it. This ensures coherence and continuity to the mental structure. Accommodation is the outward tendency of the inner structure of the self to adapt itself to a particular environment. And equilibration is a dynamic system which establishes a balance between Assimilation and Accommodation.

The cognitive structure of higher intelligence is referred to as Operation. In an Adult ego it is the operational self that is always activated. At this level the cognitive ability serves the function of the evaluator, the coordinator, the integrator, the motivator and the appraiser. At this level the self achieves totality. It is the ideal situation when the intellect and will are not enslaved and all sensory abilities are integrated. The unique organization of a person's experience is influenced by the conscious and unconscious elements.

The self-image of a person is thus the sum total of all these processes. The self-image is directly connected with Drawing which is a semiotic function which starts appearing at about 2 or 2 1/2 years. Mental or self-image is the product of perception itself. It is not directly given by the perceptual input alone, but is constructed by the processes of Accommodation. Cora Dubois and F.C. Wallace have demonstrated through projective testing and interviewing those even small societies, with relatively homogeneous culture do not have a basic personality.

Culture and tradition through their norms, restrict the personality development to a certain extent. It provides opportunity for their expression in a limited manner. Cultural policing that is done in the case of women, the indoctrination of femininity; sex-role stereotyping can be explained in this light. It proves that these fundamental constraints on individual action, especially in the case of women, do not have any scientific relevance but they are continued by the patriarchal structure with a definitive purpose.

In the light of these findings Desai's novels, especially her female protagonists, acquire a special significance. Very appropriately she pinpoints the root cause of female oppression. In the Indian context, the repressive measures are used by family, patriarchy, tradition and culture. People in socially disadvantaged positions have shown higher rates of psychiatric disorder than their more disadvantaged counterparts. The English sociologist George Brown has documented that

“lower class people have less confidence than those in the middle class and this contributes to their vulnerability to undesirable life events.” (Quoted in Ronald. C. Kesler, “Sociology & Psychiatry”, P. 302.)

In community surveys of psychiatric stress women are between two and three times as likely as men to report a history of mood (affective) disorders. Women for the past few decades have been in a very disadvantaged position in relation to men because their 'typed roles' expose them to very chronic stress. Desai's female characters, Maya in *Cry the Peacock*, Monisha, Amla, Otima, Aunt Leila in *Voices in the City*, Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, Nand Kaul, Ila Das and Raka in *Fire on the Mountain*,

Bim, Mira Masi, Tara Misra Sisters *In Clear Light of Day*, Sarala in *In Custody*, represent the Indian women who are in a deprived and disadvantaged position.

But these women have awareness, a focused consciousness, about their false image that is imposed on them. This definitely attributes to their deviant behaviour. They are not ready to converge to the so called idealized image, to wear the mask that is placed on them by patriarchy. This establishes the fact that there is definitely a new image, a new self-concept, of woman emerging from the novels of Anita Desai.

To establish that there is the presence of Operational self, the Adult ego state in these female protagonists, is analysed using the tool of Transactional Analysis. This is used to assess the psychic structure, the cohesiveness of the self, its organization and potential. The self, once it is stabilized through conflicts, and as it secures a strong identity, will move towards actualization. The emotional pressures will not disrupt the sense of cohesiveness and the psychic schema of the self. Freud has substantiated that neurotic conflicts can be resolved when the psychic drives are completely brought into harmony with the outer world. The female protagonists are analysed using 'game' and 'script.'

Bim, Tara, Sita, Amla after regressing into Child ego state move forward to the Adult ego state. This establishes the fact that the identity of Indian woman is changing from 'being-for-others' to 'being-in-itself.' The new self-concept will definitely help her to fight the ineludible battles that exist in the patriarchal society.

Only women with a new self-concept will be capable of re-vision - the act of looking back or seeing with fresh eyes, what a woman is and what her prerogatives are. In these 'revisionist' women it is the Operational self that is activated. Once new self-concept emerges, man and woman relationship itself will change.

The change within her will be projected or transferred to the person with whom she interacts. The man and the family that infantilizes her, that prevents her from achieving Adult ego, will also change, as she has the power within her to transeffect an identity, not only hers, but also of her male counterpart. Desai's Sita, some critics feel, makes a compromise with her life. But the objective analysis here proves that her husband Raman also changes. He is willing to come and live in Manori, as he says at the end.

Women, according to Desai, accept the false security offered by the patriarchal structure which will never give them wholeness or self-actualization. The mother-daughter relationship is also analysed using theories in psychology. The main inference that one evolves again, establishes the fact that it is the mental aberration of the mother that is reflected in the daughter. The daughters are extensions of their mothers. The fractured self will always project negative feelings or Voices interject, which will sabotage one's self. It results in the thwarted aspirations and goals in a person's life. In order to overcome this trauma we have to have a solid self-image, a strong identity which will enable one to establish 'real peace' with the environment. The disowning process of the pretentious social self will not cause a crisis of the real self. The negative values will be powerless against this authentic selfhood. It is this reaffirmation of self-hood that propels Bim to freely forgive Raja and enables her to move towards self-actualization.

According to P.M. Nayak and S.P. Swami 'Bim rejects Aurangzeb as an example of ego-centricity, and in disowning him attains self-awareness. Rejecting her fake self and its obsessive perversions, she moves towards the realisation of an emerging self. Bim, that 'mothering presence' owns all, identifies with all.' ('From Alienation to Identification: PP.30-40.)

It is the same transformation that Sita, Amla and Otima undergo. Thus this thesis establishes the fact that there is a new self-concept of Indian women emerging from the novels of Anita Desai. This study also establishes the fact that a woman's identity is not related to her 'assigned role' of patriarchy. Education, Social mobility and Economic independence will give woman the right to self-determination. This ESE factor will make a person realize that gender is learned, indoctrinated and it is not to be confused with biological difference. The new self-concept will definitely empower women to negotiate with value systems that exist in a structured society. When woman intelligently starts analyzing value systems, she discards what is hell for her. Her strong sense of identity will help her in choosing the right values. The loyalty to right values will help her to achieve goals set in her life and will give her freedom to choose. This self-conscious choosing of one's values will definitely precipitate positive changes - personal as well as social.

Anita Desai the writer conveys the same message that is given in the Upanishads. "The way is long; it is as it were, walking on the sharp edge of a razor, yet despair not. Awake, arise and stop not until the goal is reached." (Samala Roy, *The Concept of Self*, P.305.)

Anita Desai through her fictional canvas proves that the tendency towards the treatment of the female which makes her more often a sexual object can be resisted by women themselves. What she requires is a dynamic self-concept which will save her from the pernicious effects of social beliefs, ideology and tradition. Her characters become role models for one to emulate and thus they help one to break one's silence and the taboos in one's life. Desai does not offer an improbable possibility like the post modernist writers but she presents a probable possibility that can definitely take place within the minimal conditions, but it implies enormous social and political changes. It is not a radical imagination which will carry one beyond one's place, beyond one's struggle that one sees in Desai, but a penetrative imagination which gives one a lucid recognition of one's possibilities and the course to strive for a better self-image rather than remaining resigned to one deplorable predicament. Desai as a writer fulfils what Mayaumi Oda has expressed in her poem "*Seito*" (*Blue Stockirlgs*):

"Women, when you paint your own portrait Do not forget to put a golden dome at the top of your head. (Quoted in Helen Diner, P.151).

Desai has definitely given the Indian womanhood a 'golden dome' and that is the new Self-concept. Women readers of Desai definitely get the inspiration and spirit to face challenges in life boldly. Thus her novels are really worthy to be read undoubtedly.

References:

1. **Primary sources:**
2. Desai, Anita, Baumgartner's Bombay, New Delhi: Penguin Book, 1989. (All parenthetical reference of the text is to this edition).
3. Desai, Anita, Bye Bye Black Bird, Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1985 (All parenthetical reference of the text are to this edition)
4. Desai, Anita, Clear Light of Day, New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1980. (All parenthetical reference of the text is to this edition).
5. Desai, Anita, Cry, The Peacock, Delhi: Orient Paperback, 1980. (All parenthetical reference of the text is to this edition).
6. Desai, Anita, Fasting, Feasting, London: Chatto & Windus, 1999. (All parenthetical reference of the text is to this edition). Friedan, Betty, *The Second Stage*, New York : Summit Book, 1981.

7. Desai, Anita, *Fire On The Mountain*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1977. (All parenthetical reference of the text is to this edition).
8. Desai, Anita, *Journey to Ithaca*, Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 1996. (All parenthetical reference of the text is to this edition).
9. Desai, Anita, *In Custody*, London: William Heinemann, 1984. (All parenthetical reference of the text is to this edition).
10. Desai, Anita, *Voices in the City*, Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1965. (All parenthetical reference of the text is to this edition).
11. Desai, Anita, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1982. (All parenthetical reference of the text is to this edition).

SECONDARY SOURCES INCLUDING VARIOUS INTERVIEWS:

1. Acharya, Shanta, 'Problem of Self in the Novels of Anita Desai', *Indian Women Novelists*, Book 2, ed. R. K. Dhawan, New Delhi: Prestige Book, 1977.
2. Asnani, Shyam M., "Desai's Theory and Practice of the Novels"; *Perspective on Anita Desai* ed. Ramesh K. Srivastava, Delhi: Vimla Prakashan, 1984.
3. A.V. Krishna Rao, "Voices in the City: A Study" *Perspectives on Anita Desai*, ed. Ramesh K. Srivastava (Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakashan, 1984).
4. Bande, Usha Bande "The Outsider Situation" in *Baumgartner's Bombay*, *Indian Women Novelists*, Book. 4 ed. R. K. Dhawan, New Delhi: Prestige Book, 1991.
5. Bande, Usha, "Amla-Dharma love : Voice In The City", *Indian Women Novelists*, Book 3, ed. R. K. Dhawan, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991.
6. Bande, Usha, *The Novels of Anita Desai*, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1988.
7. Bande, Usha, "Bad Faith in Where Shall We Go This Summer?" *Indian Women Novelists*, Book 2, ed. R. K. Dhawan, New Delhi: Prestige Book, 1991.
8. Bande, Usha, *The Novels of Anita Desai*, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1988.
9. Banks, Olive, qtd. *Face of Feminism*, New York: St. Martin's press, 1982.
10. Bannerjee, Uma, "Marital Relationship in Anita Desai's Novels" *Indian Women Novelists*, Book 2 ed. R. K. Dhawan, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991.
11. Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Second Sex*, New York: Bantam, 1953.
12. Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, Bantam, New York. Bressler, E. Charles, *Literary Criticism : An Introduction to Theory and Practice*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1994.
13. Belliappa, Meena, *Anita Desai : A Study of Her Fiction (A writers workshop publication)* Belliappa, Meena, *Anita Desai: A Study of Her Fiction*, Calcutta: Writers Workshop
14. Bhatt, Indira, "Voice In the city", *Indian Women Novelists*, Book 3, ed. R. K. Dhawan, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991.
15. R. K. Dhawan, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991.
16. Brownrigg, Sylvia, *Book Review : Fasting, Feasting by Anita Desai*, [http\www\Salon.com](http://www.Salon.com). Feb, 17, 2000
17. Chakradhar Prasad Singh, "The Visitor and The Exile: A Study in Anita Desai's *Bye Bye Black Bird*", *Response: Recent Evaluation of Indian Fictions in English* (Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1983).
18. Coleman, J.C., *Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life*, Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons and Co. 1969.

19. Coleman, J.C., *Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life*, Bombay: D.B.Taraporvala Sons and Co., 1989.
20. Dalmia, Yashodhara, 'Interview with Anita Desai' *The Times of India*, April 29, 1979.
21. Dalmia, Yashodhara, "Interview with Anita Desai", *The Times of India*, April 29, 1979. Desai, Anita, "Replies to the Questionnaire" *Kakatiya Journal of English Studies*, Vol. 3, No.1, 1978.
22. Fromm, Enrich, *The Sane Society*, New York : Rinehart and Co Fuller, Edmund, *Man in Modern Fiction*, New York, 1958.
23. Fromm, Eric, *The Sane Society*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956.
24. Gopal, N.R., *A Critical Study of The Novels of Anita Desai*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors 1995.
25. Gopal, N. R., *A Critical Study of the Novels of Anita Desai*, New Delhi: Atlantic publishers, 1995. (All parenthetical reference of the text is to this edition.)
26. G.R. Taneja, *Indian English Literature: Since Independence*, ed. Ayyappa Paniker (New Delhi: The Indian Association for English Studies, 1991).
27. Ibsen, Henrik, *Four Major Plays, Vol. I*, New York: Signet Classic, 1970. Iyengar, K. R. Srinivasa, *Indian Writing in English*, New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1993. (All parenthetical reference of the text is to this edition.)
28. Iyengar, K.R.S., *Indian Writing In English*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1983
29. Jain, Jasbir, 'The Plural Tradition : Indian English Fiction', *Spectrum History of Indian Literature in English* ed. Charu Sheel Singh, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1997. Jain, Jasbir, "The use of Fantasy in novels of Anita Desai" *Indian Women Novelists*, Book 2. ed. R. K. Dhawan, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991.
30. Jain, Jasbir, "Stairs to the Attic" *The Novels of Anita Desai*, Jaipur: Printwell, 1987.
31. Jain, Jasbir, "Interview with Anita Desai", *Rajasthan University Studies In English*, Vol. 12, 1979.
32. Jain, Naresh K., *Women In Indo-Anglian Fiction (Tradition and Modernity)*, Manohar Publishers, Replica Press, 1998.
33. James, Henry, "The Art of Fiction" *American Literature of 19th Century: An Anthology*, India: Eurasia Publishing House, 1965.
34. Jena, Seema, *Voice and Vision of Anita Desai*, New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1989. Jena, Seema, *Voices And Vision of Anita Desai*, New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1993.
35. Jena, Seema, *Voice and Vision of Anita Desai*, New Delhi: South Asia Books, 1990.
36. Jha, Uma Shankar & Pujari, Premlata, *Indian Women Today (Tradition, Modernity and Challenge) Volume 1*, New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 1996.
37. Jung, C.G., *The Psychology of Jung : The Nature and Structure of the Psyche*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1942.
38. Jung, Anees, *Unveiling India*, Delhi: Penguin Books, 1987.
39. Justman, Stewart., *The Apple of Discord*, Published by Viva Books, Raj Press, New Delhi, 200
Language in India ISSN 1930-2940 13:10 October 2013.
40. Kachru, Braj, *The Indianization of English: The English Language in India*, Delhi: OUP, 1983.
41. Kamala Roy, *The Concept of Self* (Calcutta: Firma. K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1966).
42. Ketaki Sheth, 'Anita Desai Talks to Kelaki Sheth about Her Life, Her Work and Indian Writing in English in Rare Interview', Imprint, June 1984.
43. Kohli, Suresh "The World of Anita Desai" *The Tribune (Saturday Plus)* 11 July, 1992.

44. Lawrence, D. H., "Morality and The Novel", in David Lodge Ed. 20th Century Literary Criticism (London: Longam Group Ltd. 1972)
45. Lukmani, Yasmin, "Poiseel Control", (A Review), Debonair, June, 1989.
46. Madhusudan Prasad, Anita Desai, the Novelist (Allahabad: New Horizon, 1981).
47. Meena Belliappa, Anita Desai: A Study of her Fiction (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 197 I).
48. Millett, Kate, Sexual Politics, Great Britain : Abacus edition, Sphere Books, 1972.
49. Mori, Tori, Sexual/Textual Politics : Feminist Literary Theory, London, 1985; Routledge, 1989.
50. Mohini Sharma, B.A. (English Honours), M.A. (English), B.Ed., M.Phil. (English), M.Ed., Ph.D. Research Scholar in English Marital Discord in Anita Desai's Novels 3 29Kohli, Devindra & Just, Melanie Maria., Anita Desai (Critical Perspectives), Published by Pencraft International, D.K. Fine Art Press, New Delhi, 2008.
51. Murchland, B., The Age of Alienation, New York, 1971.
52. Naik, M.K., A History of Indian English Literature, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982.
53. Panigrahi, Bipin B., "The writer's obligation" in *In Custody*, Indian Women Novelists, Book 4. ed. R. K. Dhawan, New Delhi: Prestige Book, 1991.
54. Panigrahi, Bipin. B. and Viney Kirpal, "The Individual and the Search for Self-identity in Cry, The Peacock, Indian women Novelists, Book 3, ed. R. K. Dhawan, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991.
55. Pathania, Usha, "Human Bonds And Bondages", The Fiction of Anita Desai and Kamala Markandya, Delhi: Kanishka Publishing House, 1992.
56. Paul, S.L., Cry, the Peacock: A Critical Study. New Delhi: Harman Publishing House, 1998. P.M. Nayak and S.P. Swain "From to Identification: A Study of Anita Desai's Novels", Commonwealth Quarterly, 19, No.47 (December-March, 1994).
57. Prasad, Madhusudan Anita Desai : The Novelist (Allahabad: New Horizon, 1981).
58. Prasad, Madhusudan, Anita Desai: The Novelist, Allahabad, New Delhi: Horizon, 1981. (All parenthetical reference of the text is to this edition.)
59. Prasad, Hari Mohan, "Sound or Sense - A study of Anita Desai's Bye-Bye Blackbird", The Journal of Indian Writing in English, 9, 1981.
60. Prasad, Madhusudan, Anita Desai : The Novelist, Allahabad : New Horizon, 1981.
61. Pratt, Annis, Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fictions, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.
62. Prema Nandakumar, "Sombre the Shadows and Sudden the Lights", Perspectives on Indian Fiction in English ed. M.K. Naik (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1985).
63. Quoted in Ronald. C. Kesler, "Sociology & Psychiatry", Comprehensive Text of Psychiatry Volume I, eds. Harold I Kaphan, Benjamin J. Sadock (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkin, 1989).
64. Quoted in Helen Diner, Mothers and Amazons (New York: Anchor Press, 1965).
65. Rajendra Prasad V.V.N, "Anita Desai and Wounded Self Indian Women Novelists" Set. I Vol II, ed. R.K. Dhawan (NewDelhi: Prestige Books, 1991).
66. Ramachandran Nair N, "In Custody: The Road not Taken', Indian Women Novelists Set I, Val IV, ed. R.K. Dhawan (New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991).
67. Ramaswamy, E.V., Periyar On women's Rights, Madras: Emerald, 1989.
68. Ram, Atma "Interview," World Literature Written in English, I (April 1977).
69. Rogers, Carl S., "Self concept" in Self in Social Interaction, ed. Chad Gordon and Kenneth J. Geron, New York: John Wiley & sons, Inc., 1908.

70. Rao, A.V. Krishna, "Voices in the city: A Study," Perspectives on Anita Desai, ed. Ramesh K. Srivastava (Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakashan, (1984).
71. Rao, B. Ramchandra, The Novels of Mrs. Anita Desai : A Study, New Delhi: Kalyani Publishers, 1977.
72. Rao, Vimala, Anita Desai's Where Shall We Go This Summer?An Analysis, Commonwealth Quarterly. 3/9 December, 1978.
73. R.S. Shama, Anita Desai (New Delhi: Heinemann, 1981).
74. Sambamurthy, V. Indira, "Anita Desai: The Sexist Nature of Sanity", The Women In Indian Fiction In English, New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1984.
75. Seeman, Melvin, 'On the Meaning of Alienation', American Sociological Review, 24/6 Dec. 1959.
76. Segal, Julia, Phantasy in Everyday Life, Pelican, 1985.
77. Sharma, R.S., Anita Desai, New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1981.
78. Sharma, Atma Ram, "An Interview with Anita Desai, World Literature written in English, Vol. 6, No. 1, April 1977.
79. Sharma, R.S., Anita Desai, New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1981.
80. Shaw, Bernard, The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw, London: Paul Hamlyn, 1965. Showalter, Elaine, A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte of Lesing, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1977.
81. Shrivastava, Ramesh K., Perspectives on Anita Desai, Vimal Prakashan 1984.
82. Shrivastava, Ramesh K., "Anita Desai at work: An Interview" Perspective of Anita Desai ed. R.K. Shrivastava, Vimal Prakashan 1984. (All parenthetical reference of the text is to this edition.)
83. Shyam. S. Asnani, "Desai's and Practice of the Novel", Perspectives on Anita, ed. Ramesh. K. Srivastava (Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakashan, 1984).
84. Solanki, Mrinalini, Anita Desai's Fiction: Patterns of Survival Strategies, New Delhi: Kanishka publishing House, 1982.
85. Srinivasan, K.S., The Ethos of Indian Literature: A study of its Romantic Tradition, Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1985.
86. Srinivasa Iyengar, K.R. Indian Writing In English (New Delhi: Sterling, 1984). Surenran, K.V. Women 's Writing in India : New Perspectives (New Delhi : Sarup and Sons, 2002)
87. Syed Amanuddin, 'Anita Desai's Techniques', The Fiction of Anita Desai, ed. R.K. Dhawan (New Delhi: Bahri Publications, 1989).
88. Teny Eagleton, The Rape Of. Clarissa (Oxford: Blackrnell, 1982). The Writers Creative Individuality and the Development of Literature, Moscow: Express Publishers, 1977.
89. Usha Pathania, The Fiction of Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishing House, 1991).
90. Vinson, James, ed. Anita Desai's Comments on 'Contemporary Novelists, New York : St. Martin Press.
91. Williams, H. M., Indo-Anglian Literature, 1800-1970 : A Survey, Madras : Orient Longman, 1976.
92. William, H.M., Galaxy of Indian Writings In English, Delhi: Akshat, 1987. Jain, Jasbir, 'Anita
93. Desaian essay published in Indian English Novelists: An Anthology of Critical Essays, Ed. By Madhusudan Prasad. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1982, 2-50.
94. Woolf, Virginia, The Common Reader (1st series), London: Hogarth press 1953.