CHAPTER-III

NEUROTICS
Neurotics

The Oxford Dictionary defines the meaning of neurosis as irrational or disturbed behaviours pattern, associated with nervous distress. The terms psychoneuroses and Neurosis may be used interchangeably; likewise, psychoneurotic and neurotic. Some specific social and cultural conditions help in generating neurotic trends. Neurosis is a deficiency disease and it is classified as a deviation from normal pattern of social behaviour, “Most neurosis involved along with other complex determinants, ungratified wishes for safety, for belongingness and identification for close relationship and for respect and prestige.”¹ The neurosis arises out of a clash between an individual’s attempt to adjust to some situation and the constitutional inability to meet the challenge. The neurotic anxiety is often intensifi ed by symptoms which are recognized as irrational fears of accidents, illness, death or insanity:

A Neurotic is not flexible. He is driven by the compulsive nature of his inner necessities. The difference between neurotic drives and healthy strivings is one between spontaneity and compulsion; between recognizing and denying limitations; between a focus upon the vision of a glorious end product and a feeling for evaluation; fantasy and truth.²

Longstanding problems, such as severe childhood frustrations or marriage conflicts can be predisposing factors in mental disorders. They may leave an individual vulnerable to a precipitates extreme maladjustment. There are several specific instance in Desai’s works where her characters
turn neurotic. Psychological researchers have shown that psycho-neurotics
are generally intelligent people, and Anita Desai’s characters are certainly
bright. Desai is interested in “Peculiar and eccentric characters.” Their
characters’ personal problems play a significant role in perpetuating their
neurosis. Like Horney, Anita Desai also believes that childhood experiences
determine conditions for neurosis but they are not the only cause of later
troubles. But her solitary and introspective characters’ childhood is observed
in the interview with Jasbir Jain:

I agree that the experiences of childhood are the most
vivid lasting one’s. But I’m quite sure that even adult life
contains many traumatic experiences, for instances
fighting in a war may be a traumatic experience for a
soldier.³

Thus Desai does not fully expose the childhood of her personages but
whatever flashbacks are provided are enough to understand them. Desai with
the nostalgic flashback reveals childhood or relates the present structure of
psyche to their past and determines the time when they lost their real self
such a child undergoes traumatic experience. If he is made to feel rejected or
uncared. Here it may appear to be a temporary mood tantrum of a child, but
his sulkiness suggests that Mrs. Desai’s characters are sensitive to failure
and neglect. They often struggle to achieve triumph – be it through
unhealthy drives like neurotic compulsions or healthy epiphany.

*Cry, The Peacock* is considered to be first psychoanalytical fiction in
Indio-Anglian literature. Maya: young, beautiful, intelligent and very
sensitive as well as sensuous, fails to grow out of childhood. 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.”

Maya’s basic needs for love and belongingness are not gratified in the real sense. Healthy development of her personality is blocked. The father-obsession, unfulfilled womanhood, emotional stimuli unrestness, debilitating husband and the over-ridden death-phobia make her neurotic in her behaviour. Maya’s neurosis is based on “marital discord” arising out of her “morbid preoccupation with death” and it shatters the identity of Maya in which longing for love is driven mad. The death of a pet dog, Toto, becomes a prime force in throwing her inherently imaginative mind into a state of fearful neurosis. Death becomes an obsession and it turns her into introvert. Anita Desai has succeeded in bring out the mental fulminations and unhindered thought processes of its heroine, Maya, who causes a lot of harm not only to herself but also her husband. Ramesh K. Shrivastava is right when he says:

Maya’s nervous imagination magnifies everything out of proportion – a petty remark, a trivial situation, an insignificant thing or an unimportant incident - and these evoke in her a neurotic response reminding her, by associating of ideas, of her approaching death.

Maya, the central character of Desai is obsessed almost from the beginning of the novel with the gloomy prophecy of an albino astrologer. According to the prophecy, she or her husband would die during the fourth year of her marriage. Her father dismisses the prophecy as nonsense and orders that it should be forgotten obeying his wish. Maya keeps the prophecy rigorously repressed in her unconscious until her marriage with Gautama enters the fourth year. Now triggered off by the death of her pet dog, Toto, it
assumes during the course of the novel the shape of an obsessional neurosis and keeps gnawing at the core of her being like an oversized pest feeling on a tender leaf. Maya’s obsession with prophecy holds the promise of examining her irrational and superstitious belief from an entirely new angle. Freud attributes superstitious beliefs to suppressed hostility:

It can be recognized most clearly in neurotics suffering from obsessional thinking ... that superstition derives from suppressed hostile and cruel impulses.⁶

It appears that Maya’s superstition too originate in her suppressed hostile and cruel impulses. It reveals that there is immense suppressed hostility in her unconscious against her husband, Gautama. Being a “creature of instinct”⁷ she seems to hold Gautama responsible for her unfulfilled instinctuality in the marital relationship. After the four years of marriage Maya grows anxious on account of the threats to her self-preservation and neurotically perceives Gautama’s death as a solution.

Maya, a young sensitive girl obsessed by a childhood prophecy of disaster, whose extreme sensitivity is rendered in terms of immeasurable loneliness. The relationship of Maya and Gautama reminds one of that of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay in Virginia woolf’s novel To The Lighthouse. Maya, an introverted favourite daughter of a wealthy artistic father, is married to an older man, a detached, sober, industrious lawyer. In their temperaments and attitudes to life, the two are completely opposite to each other. Because of Gautama’s age and attitude to sex she remains a much disappointment woman. At the beginning of the novel Maya makes a frank admission of her sexual dissatisfaction born of Gautama’s unpardonable negligence. She fails
to understand the total lack of communication on the part of Gautama: “he did not give another thought to me.”

We become fully aware of Maya’s hypersensitive and highly disturbed state of mind but her husband remains undisturbed. His attitude antagonizes her. An over-widening gap in communication between the husband and wife is felt throughout the novel. She muses: “Had there been a bond between us, he would have felt it pull.... But, of course there was none.... There was no bond, no love – hardly any love.” A restlessness always boils within her and the strainedness holds them apart. She says: “...there were still spaces of darkness in between us, above and around, and it was that which gave the air such weight.... Death lurked in those spaces, the darkness spoke of distance, separation, loneliness- loneliness of such proportion that it broke the bounds of that single word and all its association.... I cried to myself – what is the use? I’m alone.” Maya’s neurosis arises out of her need for Gautama is concern for her. As a husband, he tries to help her avoid worrying. But her mind always finds something to worry about. Her helplessness arising out of neurosis is gnawing her. Therefore, she says:

So, rambling, he drew me away from my thoughts of anguish which rose, every now and then, like birds that awake from dreams and rise out of their threes amidst great commotion, circle a while, then settle again, on other braches.

She is certain that in Gautama’s family “one did not speak of love far less of affection.” This makes her lonely and dejected. She craves for her father and consoling words. Similar consolation she tries to get from her
husband, but he is unable to give her these. Virtually, whole of her neurotic life is imperceptibly linked with her father's undivided attention. Her marriage to Gautama only serves to highlight her total involvement with her father. She constantly thinks of him and unconsciously searches him in her husband. Father daughter love is, in fact, the liet motif of the novel. However, when we analyze her psychological complexities, we find that there is much more in her character “Father-fixation.” Maya’s tendency to depend on her father and them on her husband in a clinging relationship is in response to the demands of her psyche to guard against the hostile world. She has lost the ability to master her life and constantly needs a psychological prop. This is perhaps the reason why she agrees to marry a man much older to herself. She can lean on him and feel secure. Gautama’s irritated exhortations, “You have a very obvious father-obsession” is neither incorrect nor misplaced in the sense that for Gautama, Father is the most important and strongest motivating force in life.

Considering her child-like dependence and her inability to master her life, Maya would be lost without the protection of love around her. The flow of love, admiration and sympathy is suddenly interrupted when Gautama shows an aversion to too much physical contact. She feels neglected, rejected and unwanted. But as long as Gautama attends to her, she feels grateful and flooded with “tenderness and gratitude.” She thinks of him as protector and guardian. A slight touch of his fingers brings out spontaneous reaction of joy: “Fall, fall, long fall into the soft velvet well of the primordium, of original instinct, of first-formed love.” When he does not respond in the expected manner, her neurotic pride is hurt; she feels the insult of rejection.
In part II of the novel, Maya complains of Gautama is callousness. He is unconcerned about her misery, her physical and psychological demands.

Frustrated by his coldness she gives herself up to a fit of pillow beating. It is the cry of an agonized woman feeling lonely and unwanted. Maya suffers actutely. Anita Desai establishes an identity between setting and the mental state of Maya, in order to show her desire for love and her dread of death. That Maya wants a sexual union is clearly perceptible in her contemplation and exultation on seeing the male and female papaya trees in the garden. The description is richly erotic:

I contemplated that, smiling with pleasure at the thought of those long streamers of bridal flowers that flow out of the core of the female papaya tree and twine about her slim trunk, and the firm, wax-petalled blossoms that leap directly out of the solid trunk of the male.... Besides, if I could pleasure in contemplation of the male papaya, how much more food to delight in this male companion surely.\[^{15}\]

Her longing to drown herself in love is further enriched and intensified by the vibrating insect and bird imagery. She begins to experience hallucingtony vision of lizards and birds copulating in weird settings:

Of lizards, the lizards that come upon you, stalking you silently, upon clawed toes, slipping their clublike tongues in and out, in and out with an audible hiss.... They have struck you to a pillar of salt which, when it is motionless they will mount and lash with their slime -dripping
tongues, lash and lash again, as they grip you with curled claws, rubbing their cold bellies upon yours, rubbing and grinding, rubbing and grinding. 16

What Maya experiences here seems to be a symbolic gratification of the sexual desire which remains unfulfilled in actual life.

The image of fighting and mating peacock, apart from being central motif of the novel, underlines Maya’s sexual frustration too. The memory of her innocent enjoyment of their call in her childhood becomes a foil to her present over—crowded mind, full of bird and animal imagery:

But sleep was rent by the frenzied cries of peacocks pacing the rocks at night peacocks searching for mates, peacocks tearing themselves to bleeding shreds in the act of love, peacocks screaming with agony at the death of love. The night sky turned to a flurry of peacocks, tails, and each star a staring eye. 17

In spite of her total frustration, Maya’s moral scrupulosity does not allow her to cross the bounds of marital morality. Nor is she able to sublimate this powerful biological urge in the manner of her friend Leila who selflessly serves her tuberculous husband. A continuous frustration of the body’s sexual needs can be disastrous to somebody like Maya, given her fierce instinctuality. A healthy emotional and sexual life would have given her a sense of security and stopped her psychic from decaying. This view acquires validation from Freud’s observation: “Experience shows... they are subjected to disillusionments of marriage, fall ill of severe neuroses which permanently darken their lives.” 18 Freud attributes neurosis of women

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to sexual dissatisfaction resulting from the rigours of civilized sexual morality and he continues:

…and in the conflict between her desires and he sense of duty, she once more seeks refuge in a neurosis. Nothing protects her virtue as securely as illness.\(^\text{19}\)

The significant cause for the mal-adjustment of their married life is that they converse without communicating. Gautama does not understand Maya’s internal trouble. She is vocal about it:

You were bored…. Didn’t you feel anything more?....
You weren’t stifled in that house? You didn’t weep you saw that pregnant woman?... \(^\text{20}\)

This agony is felt only by her. She craves to be understood. But Gautama is ignorant of Maya’s mind. Through this Anita Desai is unique in probing the depth of the “mind diseased”. As a neurotic she momentarily calms down, realizes her mistake and sees herself in the mirror: “like a foolish baby… a round faced child in a white petticoat”\(^\text{21}\) Gautama pacifies her as does a father figure:

You are a grown woman now, Maya. No light-headed child. You must not allow yourself to grow so upset....
What if they live in a grubby house? What if she is pregnant again? \(^\text{22}\)

The cause of Maya’s neurosis is her getting too involved in others. This is exactly the agony of a neurotic. Therefore, her doctor’s orders are that she must be kept free from anxieties and excitements. Gautama rightly puts the blame of her neurosis at her father’s door. He said, “Neurotic, Neurotic, that’s what you are. A spilt baby, so spoilt she can’t bear one
adverse word. Everyone must bring a present for little Maya that is what her father taught her.”
Gautama’s diagnosis of her neurosis is correct. He says “from a passion of wonder and excitement you are led surely to a passion of unhappiness in its loss, depression and disillusionment.” From *Gita* he could advise her to remain detached. Gautama detects the physical symptoms of Maya’s neurosis. She has temperature and a damp hand. Moreover, her meaningless waiting for the postman confirms Gautama’s conviction about her Neurosis. When Gautama goes to office, her comfortable house appears to her no more than a tomb. This feeling of Maya is a major achievement of Anita Desai as a psychic portraiture of neurotics. For a neurotic, an ice cream bar buring summer night appears no less than a hell full of demons drinking blood. The neurotic prefers to run away from that place. The morbid thoughts crowd in upon her leisure hours as when Gautama is with her. When he returns home from office in the evening, her thoughts dwell on their lonely future existence:

One of us would be left alone to always pour out or her tea, in loneliness, and I felt the shroud of death blur my vision... 

This fear of Maya is another corner in the region of fear of a neurotic’s heart. Neurotics always fear death, loneliness, poverty, and destruction. Maya’s abnormality is best understanding through Freud’s psychoanalytic theory in which he classified the idea of the original undifferentiated mind, “The repository of inherited urges and instinctual energy. It contained the instincts of Eros the life or sexual instinct, and Thanatos – The death instinct.” Maya is guided by death instinct as a result
of the astrologer’s horoscope. Therefore, she lives in the present as if she were living in the past.

Maya’s obsession drives her to a curious insanity. She herself admits: “Yes, I am insane.... I am moving further and further from all wisdom all calm, and I shall soon be mad, if I am not already.”27 The unnaturalness of her life and stance keeps on haunting her. She says: “this is not natural. There is something weird about me now, whenever I go, whatever I see, whatever I listen to has this unnaturalness to it.”28 Desai depicts the neurotic state of Maya’s mind. The impression given is that of mental fever when she sees weird things. The image of a lizard, a repulsive creature, has been repeated in the novel. In chapter VI we find:

Will it be fire? Will it be flood? Will the lizards rise out of the desert to come upon us – either upon him or upon myself – with lashing tails and sliding tongues; to crush us beneath their bellies?
Will there be blood? Will there be screams?
And when? When? 29

Here the imagery reveals a sick mind. The image of lizard occurs again after two pages. This time the image is realistic but later it is followed by another weird image of rats which clearly suggests Maya’s mental breakdown:

Ant yet, in the neck of the lizard spanned above me on the ceiling, its pulse throbbed, and seemed a giant pulse for so small a creature, beating furiously as though it were holding its breath till its blood boiled. And then, in
the very height of stillness, its tail switched. One small, brief twitch. But I saw it, and immediately a thousand rats twitched their tails – long, gray, germ-ridden. Just once, before they were still again stiff.... Anger lurked in that gesture, defiance. A growing restlessness that could explode to violence.\textsuperscript{30}

The rats become the objective correlative of Maya's own spirit, violent and restless foreshadowing the impending tragedy. There are several other examples of such weird animal imagery used for externalizing the mental state of Maya. Later in the novel Maya had pushed of Gautama from the rooftop, she goes back to her father's house in Lucknow. She retreats into the world of her childhood, absolutely cut off from the present reality. She becomes a girl again lost in her world of picture books and toys:

...child like serenity of the girl, Maya. Who sat somewhere upstairs, delightedly opening cupboards, pulling out drawers, falling upon picture-books and photographs with high shrill cries... and frantic in its ceaseless movements, like a being that is hunted.\textsuperscript{31}

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 of her protected and pampered childhood, the best part of her life. Thus 	extit{Cry, The Peacock} is a psychological study of neurotic fears and anxieties caused by marital incompatibility and disharmony. The process by which Maya's neuroticism turns homicidal can also be traced to forces of repression. The issue of female neuroticism, a popular subject in
feminism, is handled by Anita Desai with sensitivity. N. R. Gopal has correctly pointed out in this connection:

Anita Desai not only explores and portrays the feminine psyche of a common woman but also of the subnormal bordering on abnormal women. These are the women who because of various factors are under so much of mental stress that they cannot be called insane but then certainly they are not normal.\(^{32}\)

In *Voices In The City* Monisha: a will-less, helpless and passive woman stands in direct contrast to Maya. If Maya’s trouble lies in her rich sensuality, Monisha’s difficulties arise due to her passivity. Anita Desai uses the narrative technique of diary in order to record Monisha’s psychic turmoil. Married into a placid, middle-class family, and to a prosaically-dull husband, she is unable to adjust to her environment. Monisha is similar to Maya in that she is also childless, sensitive and victim of ill matched marriage. Her own ideas and her vulnerability are noteworthy. So she stoically refuses to identify herself with her in-laws family. She is charged of theft and at last commits suicide. Monisha suppresses her emotions and makes no attempt whatsoever to analyze herself. Her great will-lessness is symptomatic of severe neurosis: “Monisha does not suffer existential angst but only neurotic anxiety.”\(^{33}\)

Monisha’s suffering arises due to her childless state. It is true that traditional Indian society looks down upon a childless woman. A woman gains status only as a mother. Monisha develops a neurotic behaviour for her unfulfilled womanhood. She tries to seek her existence as a woman, but fails due to the “blocked tubes” of her ovary. She can’t be mother any longer. She
feels tense after listening to her sister-in-laws “discussing her ovaries and theirs” leading to sterility. But the desire to give birth to a child constantly obsesses her. As she says:

> I think that what separates me from this family, heaving and rolling beneath me in its dreams of account books, pensions, examination results, stores, rooms, births, marriages, ovaries, wombs, dowries, locks, keys, property, litigation, wills, bequests, orphans, adoptions, relations, marriages, birth and property.\(^{35}\)

Monisha feels cut off and vulnerable and alienated from him. She suffers intensely from lack of solitude, her most important inner need. She wants to raise herself above “the dense well”\(^{36}\) of Jiban’s house. Instead of human company she seeks solace in silence and darkness:

> Only the dark spaces between the stars, for they are the only things on 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.\(^{37}\)

The “dark spaces between the stars” which sadden Maya, comfort the parched soul of Monisha. The ‘emptiness’ of this darkness, the silent stillness, is something she cherishes. But when she looks at the street dancer, Monisha feels that the woman’s “enormous and brilliant black eyes” would dissolve and disintegrate her into “a meaningless shadow.”\(^{38}\) She is afraid not only of the raw passion poured out into the songs but of the “great empty white distance set between her and this moist crimson flowering of emotion in the street below.”\(^{39}\) White is used here in negative connotation referring to the passivity in her, whereas ‘crimson’ suggests the raw passion and emotion
in the singer. Suddenly Monisha develops a burning desire to reduce the empty distance, to reach out, to feel, to communicate. But Monisha feels trapped behind the barred windows of Jiban’s narrow-minded family. All her ambitions, talents and potentialities are reduced to be mere a housewife and she can do nothing beyond mundane household chores. Desai has very effectively described the position of a bahu, caged inside the house. The suppressed feeling comes from 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 the Bhagvad Gita and the Ramayana, in the dim light of sooty lamps. Lives spent in waiting for nothing, waiting on men self-centered 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…. The eyes of these silent Bengali women are not dead, but they anticipate death, as they do everything with resignation. There is no dignity in their death, as they do everything with resignation. There is no dignity in their death as in the death of that proud and glorious beast, but only a little melancholy as in the settling of a puff of dust upon the earth….

Monisha’s overwrought nerves, her feverish intensity makes her want to put an end to that mindless, meaningless monotony of empty sound and secure a permanent silence. It only indicates her death wish. Jasbir Jain
observes that Manisha’s suicide is an “attempt to rebel against this meaningless death-like isolation. It is an attempt to give meaning to her death for her life has not been able to acquire one. Here suicide is proceeded by self-knowledge and it asserts her freedom: it is an exercise of her choice.” The writer, however, contends this view that Monisha dies neurotically without any self-knowledge.

Monisha is driven to commit suicide as she fails to find a single avenue which can show her the way out of the darkening gloom of her environment and she says that “No faith, no alternative to my confused despair, there is nothing. I can give myself to, and so I must stay... a life can not be lived - a life dedicated to nothing” and she is left only with “a choice between death and mean existence.” This inner turmoil leads her to neurotic state. While Nirode accepts it existentially, Monisha lacks the courage to make any choice either to break free from Jiban and the family. In the absence of any striving or struggle for life-affirming, impulse, she is soon overtaken by the life destroying impulse of suicide. Monisha seeks escape but as she had neither a vocation to channelise her emotions nor faith in religion and love to sustain her, she turns to death as a release from her external as well as inner prison: “Here it was, on her eyes- her face, here it came-there, all over - with her arms, she wrestled with it, she fought it, it was not what she wanted - she screamed ‘No! No! No! screamed, screamed. Fell unconscious very quickly fell unconscious.” She thus dies a miserable way.

Nirode comes Calcutta and seek his an identity as a literacy critic. He begins a literacy journal, Voice, in this city with a proviso of accomplishing his existence. But he meets failure on every front. Every new edition of his
journal makes him nervous, for “I like the deluged city, it hardly looked worth the hard work of making it survive.”\textsuperscript{44} with the recurrent disappointment and nervousness resulting from his failure, he is in the grip of the negative emotions in his mind. The issue after issue of his journal puts him in financial loss. The economic hardship makes him so miserable that he becomes neurotic. Nerode’s repeated failure results in frustration and anguish. It creates in him a longing for loneliness. He himself knows that he is a man for whom “aloneness alone the treasure worth treasuring.”\textsuperscript{45} After his repeated failures, he becomes obsessed with the idea of failure: “I want to move from failure to failure, step by step to rock bottom.”\textsuperscript{46} The city of Calcutta seems to him a “dark pandemonium” and on all sides “the city pressed down alight, aglow and stirrings with its own marsh bred monster life that like an ogre, kept one eye open through sleep and walking.”\textsuperscript{47} In the world of commerce and crowed, he feels life is unfair. As O. P. Budholia observes:

\begin{quote}
The over-indulgent behaviour of his mother and his sister Monisha’s suicide in Calcutta make him a neurotic man who fails on all fronts of life. Here after; he remains a marginal man in this gigantic city of Calcutta.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

Anita Desai touches childhood to display Nirode’s causes of being neurotic. From his childhood Nirode’s basic needs have been frustrated, so he alienates himself from his essential nature. As Usha Bande points out that Nirode is “developing neurotic wants which are destructive, both for self and for others.... Neurotic wants are destructive... so disturbs the course of his development.”\textsuperscript{49} Desai stresses the most damaging situation to Nirode is the open hostility and contempt between his parents. It is not enough that Nirode
is Neglected by his father but his father gives greater confidence in Arun, his favourite. Consequently, Nirode starts losing his “basic confidence” and turn a “congenital failure.” Nirode recollects the memory of his childhood by which he links his past with the present. After bidding farewell to Arun, Nirode broods over his unfortunate boyhood:

It might have been he, he knew that, had he not, as a child, an emotional and disorderly school boy, fallen from his horse and declared to his father, through tears, that he hated horses, sports and would never ride again. .... If Arun had not ridden like a prince, captained the cricket team and won top honour in all examinations. If his father, while dictating his will to an obese solicitor, had not weighed these distinctions before laying aside a sum of money for the education of one of his two sons. If Arun had not been the favourite and Nirode a congenital failure.\(^{50}\)

Nirode is an “emotional and disorderly school boy” who falls down from the horse and declares to his father that he hates horses and sports. The sound of train “hoot-hoot tooting a long and melancholy whistle”\(^{51}\) elicits varied responses from Nirode and David, while Nirode hears ‘good-bye’ in that sound mocking at his indecision and inability to travel, David hears ‘invitation’ to visit the wonderful places. Nirode’s inability to start a journey denotes the uncertainties in his temperament, the novelist points out his lack of volition that he is powerless to act and set out on his journey:

The suitcase is never packed, the tickets never purchased, and the ship sails, leaving one ensnared in the net of
sleep. He was not one of those born with a destination balanced like a boiled egg upon a silver spoon in his mouth. He was merely a traveler and the only reasonable thing to do was to accept the journeying as meaningful in itself.\textsuperscript{52}

Nirode’s wish to begin the journey is just a desire to escape. With the whistle of the train or hooter of the ship, he hears the call “escape, escape.” Having negative attitude, Nirode feels failure at everything.

One single factor, which damages and destabilizes Nirode’s personality, is his mother-fixation, from his childhood he loves his mother and hates his father. After his father’s death he wishes to be a protective force for his mother, but as he suspects her intimate relationship with Major Chadha, he grows jealous of his rival, Major Chadha, and is completely alienated from his mother. He is constantly hunted by the morbid thoughts of his mother’s amorous relations with the Major. Nirode’s caustic invectives against his mother are a defence against his haunting oedipal love for her that lies hidden in his unconscious. Alienated from his mother, Nirode turns rootless. He loses his faith in life and develops an attitude of “complete negation.” But Nirode is unable to release himself from oedipus complex till the end.

Anita Desai takes up familiar theme of a married woman’s neurosis in \textit{Where Shall We Go This Summer}? Sita, the protagonist has had a strange, unusual childhood spent amidst crowds, without having any sense of identity or belonging. Her father, a freedom fighter, who settles later in an island to carry out his social and spiritual experiments, her sister and brother are all alien and enigmatic to her. The neglect, the confusion and the isolation she
suffered during her formatic years make her a very unpredictable, excessively emotional and intolerant woman. If Maya's neurosis is a result of her father's over protective indulgence, Sita's results from a total neglect and indifference. Here is a strange case of neuroticism where Sita does not want to give birth to a child. She returns to the island with an obsessive desire to capture the purity and innocence of her childhood. She wants to recapture the pristine world of her childhood both for herself and for the child. For it she thinks to live under a magic spell. She sees that:

...island illusion as a refuge, a protection. It would hold her body safely unborn, by magic [for she is in her advance stage of pregnancy]. Then there would be the sea- it would wash the frenzy out of her, drowned it. Perhaps the tides would lull the children, too into smoother, softer begins. The grove of trees would shade them and protect them.\textsuperscript{53}

This vision is the motivating force that urges Sita's leaving her home, much to the dismay of her husband Raman, who sees the absurdity of the plan a pregnant woman leaving for an unreal place as if she were bewitched:

She has escaped from duties and responsibilities, from order and routine, from life and the city, to the unlivable island. She had refused to give birth to a child in a world not fit to receive the child. She had the imagination of after it an alternative – a life bewitched.\textsuperscript{54}

Sita is reminder of Maya, and suffers from an existential neurosis. Like Maya Sita is obsessed with bizarre thought about the impending disaster. Highly sentimental and totally alienated from her husband, Sita to
suffers the pangs of an incoherent and fragmented matrimonial relation. Sita's problem seems to be due to Maladjustment with her husband; the home life and surrounding atmosphere nauseating her. Her husband's complete lack of feeling brings her to the verge of insanity. And a deep change takes places in Sita, from a proud mother of four children, "sensual, emotional, Freudian"\textsuperscript{55} to a woman of "rage, fear and revolt", for "control... had slipped out of her hold."\textsuperscript{56} As a result, the husband-wife relationship is dragged into the difficulties. In order to seek a means of escape she takes to smoking, abuses her children for trifles and rages when the servants talk in the kitchen. In such a situation, she breaks code of her family and begins to smoke. The use of nicotine lulls her nervous system:

She had vibrated and throbbed... the more she thrummed, as though frantic with fear that their sub humanity might swap her.... she started smoking, a thing that had never been done in their household by any woman and even by men only in secret – and began to speak in sudden rushes of emotion, as though flying darts at their smooth, unscarred faces.\textsuperscript{57}

The root-cause for her smoking lies in her provocative behaviour. She develops anxiety in herself. The cause of her anxiety lies in "congenital analyesia, or insensitivity, to pain. Such a person develop psychologically a defence mechanism for her anxiety ridden psyche."\textsuperscript{58} Here there is a question why Sita has broken the social ethics of her family now she becomes neurotic and her developed neuroticism makes her "frantic with fear" and "the more stolid". She is completely alienated from the world around her and starts living in a world of dream and fantasy. Her neurotic

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behaviour vexes Raman who was “dedicated unconsciously to the middle way.” Sita describes his business associated as animals. From psychoanalytical point of view, this shows her hostile-aggressive drive, not only for a vindictive triumph over Raman but also the restore her neurotic pride. It is an attempt at self-preservation.

To arrive at a proper evolution of Sita’s character, it is necessary to consider her unusual childhood. She is motherless child. Her mother father relationship was one of the strangement, for her mother deserted her father before she had headed for Banares from where she did not return. Even her father, who had been a saint to his chelas, a charleton to his critics and a wizard to the villagers, led a strange life. Her father has relationship with another woman and her father’s unusual tenderness towards her step-sister, Rekha, confuses her with internal question which never became articulate and were kept repressed. Usha Bande rightly comments:

Her situation is just the reverse of Maya’s in Cry, The Peacock. If Maya’s father is overprotective who creates a conflicting situation, Sita’s father neglects her completely. He has not time for his children. A public figure, admired and revered by the people, he is too far-off formidable a person for Sita to approach with filial affection.

Desai shows that childhood experience is of vital importance in the study of character’s behaviour, for that lies embedded in the individual consciousness. So Sita is subject to neurosis. She suffers from nervous disorder being herself faced with this void, emptiness, irreparably continuing to exist even after her marriage resulting in her loss of identity, self-
confidence and inability to reassure love and security to her children. As Usha Bande again comments "This experience breaks feeling of worthlessness... It seeps down her psyche as a bad human experience." 61

Sita has been searching for a father figure all her life, but Raman is far from being so. The desire for security, tenderness and gentleness grows all the more increasing in her present state of defeat on the island. She feels agony for her insensitive husband remains unchanged, dull and impotent to her on his second coming to the island, is clear:

... he had nothing more to give her, or he was just unaware of her needs and demands, he raised his hand and stroked Karan’s hair with a gentleness she herself ached to attract, and she stared at him, bored into him with her eyes, wanting and not being given that she wanted. 62

Thus her realization of life that makes she unnerved because her husband does not know the "basic fact of her existence" 63 her soul’s existence, her instinct’s existence, this is shock for Sita. Once more she becomes hysterical and to an introverted person this is bound to happen. She lives in a world of phantasies incongruities and violent out bursts as a means of escape from reality. Her entire life is woven in the strange manner of inscrutably. It is at such a moment that her mind recaptures the image of the two lovers in a park:

A Muslim woman - she was wrapped up in her black burka. Then she raised her veil and I saw her face. I saw her face lying in those black folds like a flower – a dead - white flower. Like Persian lily, or tobacco flower at
night. She as young woman, very, very pale and beautiful – beautiful, she stammered, speaking faster and faster. Her head- this white, ill, beautiful head- lay in the lap of an old man. Much, much older than her. He had spectacles and a long gray beard: He looked down at her and caressed her face – so tenderly, so tenderly. I have never seen such tender, such gentle movements.64

The sight of a young Muslim woman in the lap of an old man in the Hanging Garden reflects as a situation having intense psychological pressure on Sita, who is torn between a desire to have that husband wife intimacy and shocking lack of it. The whole situation is to aggravate her introverted nature, finds a kind of wish fulfilment in the evocative manner. This may truly be characteristic symptom of introversion as put by Freud:

Introversion describes the deflection of the libido away from the possibilities of real satisfaction and its excessive accumulation upon phantasies previously tolerated as harmless. An introverted person ... is in an unstable condition; the next disturbance of the shifting forces will causes symptoms to develop, unless he can yet find other outlets for his pent-up libido.65

Sita is a woman of compulsive Nature. Her attitude discloses itself in her neurotic fear of violence. She becomes upset even after reading the newspaper, which is full of the news of brutality and violence and destruction all over the world:

... her husband casually handed her the newspaper on his way out to office. They all hammered at her with cruel
fists — the fallen blocks, the torn watercolours, the headlines about the war in Vietnam, the photograph of a woman weeping over a small grave, another of a crowd outside a Rhodesian jail; articles about the perfidy of Pakistan... timeless war of destruction that had begun with time and was now roaring around her, battering her and her fish-foetus so that survival seemed hopeless. How could civilization survive, how could the child? How could she hold them whole and pure and unimpeached in the midst of this bloodshed? They would surely be wounded, fall and die.⁶⁶

Being sensitive to violence and brutality in the world is one thing but to be affected by it so much as not to lead a normal life is a different thing bordering on mental disease. In the novel we find other instances also where apparently trivial things upset Sita. She gets panicly at the “small incidents”⁶⁷ of life. But a normal person takes “small incidents” as usual.

*Fire on the Mountain* presents a study of the trauma of a housewife leads a life of deprivations, of unfulfilment in a house a vice-chancellor apparently teeming with plenty in everything but love. Her husbands lead a life of “sanguine full-blooded romance” in her own knowledge with Miss David and she is an “idle spectator of the scene; rather an agonizing victim.”⁶⁸ The life-long faithlessness of Mr. Kaul to Nanda Kaul and the hypocritical situation force her to avow this severance. But Nanda Kaul has concealed this after passing through psychic suffering and bitter experience of a marital life. Mr. Kaul does not love her as a wife. She plays the gracious hostess all the time and enjoys the comforts and social status of the wife of a
dignified person. But in actuality she is a woman unloved and discarded. A brief moment of self-scrutiny allows her a glimpse of her lovelessness and misery. Usha Bande describes:

... a schizoid person as cold, aloof and detached, and calls it “a complex mask for a repressed longing for love,” which may erupt in violent aggression. Although Nanda is not a schizoid case, she has neurotic compulsions.69

The novel present the trauma of a housewife through the following passages:

The old house, the full house, of that period of her life... but intense and busy world, had not pleased her. Its crowding had stifled her.... There had been too many guests coming and going.... The many rooms of the house had always been full... so that there was storage of privacy that vexed her... and irritating.70

These lines depict Nanda Kaul’s intense awareness of ‘lost privacy and busy world’. She is at the most vexed when guests pour in leaving no privacy. Nanda Kaul is not only helpless in the face of her circumstances but also rendered weak and unassuming by her self-effacing drives. Her husband is too immersed in his affairs with miss David to notice the self-sacrificing devotion of his wife. The novelist portrays her defenselessness, in the imagery of the lapwing. Nanda thinks of the bird as “nervous and agitated.” It is a “hunted fearful bird, distracted and disturbing.”71 Symbolically, she is like the bird, disturbed, agitated, unable to light and defend herself. Consciously she thinks of herself as a “night cat” prowling in the dark, but
unconsciousness forces tell her that she is like the bird flying unevenly “through the funeral moonlight.” This image flashes across her mind when her husband leaves her alone to carry on his love affair with Miss David. To relieve the tension of the situation, she considers her aloneness as “a moment of private triumph cold and proud.”

“Life would swirl on again, in an eddy, a whirlpool of which she was the still, fixed eye in the centre” indicate traumatic state of Nanda Kaul. Externally Nanda burns with a fire of frustration. She feels lonely and neglected. Above all, Mr. Kaul carried on a life-long illicit affair with Miss Davidson. He invites her for badminton and compels her to stay at night and comes back secretly to his separate bedroom. To stop all these perceptually, Nanda Kaul craves for a blessed widowhood, the complete separation. These are the situations, which have forced her to such a dream house at Kasauli:

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 life long affair with Miss David, the mathematics mistress whom he had not married because she was a Christian but whom he had loved. All his life loved. And her children – the children were all alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them. She did not live here alone by choice she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing.

It shows in Nanda Kaul such a disease of spirit that she distrusts all attachments and affairs. After the death of her husband she has been so glad when it is over and grunes “I’d have discharged all my duties. Discharg.”
She has been violently injured and disappointed in her life as a wife, mother and housewife. So she prefers seclusion in Carignano. She feels upset and perturbed, puzzled and disgusted outside world and asks: "Have I not done enough and had enough? I want no more. I want nothing. Can I not be left with nothing? But there was no answer and of course she expected none." Now she longs for a quiet, retired life. She does not like the idea of Raka's staying with her. Her feelings prevail her life as her desires are suggestively painted through an eagle:

An eagle swept over it, far below her, a thousand feet below, its wings outspread, gliding on currents of air without once moving its great muscular wings, which remained in repose, in control.\(^77\)

The eagle is the emblem of total detachment here, a free soul that is not bound by any type of responsibilities of duties. Though the use of the poem is not so significant in the novel yet it has some connection with the character of Nanda Kaul who quotes it and the poem depicts her desire to be away from the humdrum of life and far from the madding crowd. And the poem is:

I have desired to go
Where springs not fail.
To fields where flies on sharp and sided hail
And a few lilies blow,
And I have asked to be
Where no storms come
Where the green swell is in the heavens dumb
And out of the swing of the sea.\(^78\)
Both Nanda Kaul and Raka’s self-alienation lead them towards neurosis. Raka is unusual child, her name does not correspond with any of her physical characteristics:

Raka- what an utter misnomer thought Nanda Kaul...
Raka meant the moon, but this child was not round-faced, calm of radiant... Nanda Kaul thought she looked like one of those dark crickets that leap up in fright but do not sing, or a mosquito, minute and fine, on thin, precarious legs.79

Raka is the most unchildlike child. Nothing appeals to her. She was the child who never “played games.” Instead of listening to the fanciful tales from Nanda she prefers to go out doors, roaming in the desolate hills and forest. She is obliquely defiant and is mistress of herself. Once coming from her usual ramblings through the hills and forests she speaks to herself, “I don’t care – I don’t care – I don’t care for anything.”80 Her unchildlike quality and introvert nature is the result of her traumatic childhood and abnormal circumstances around her. She is prey of parental perturbations:

Her father, home from a party, stumbling and crashing through the curtains of night, his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at her mother with hammer and fists of abuse harsh filthy abuse that mode Raka cover under her bed clothes and wet the mattress in fright, feeling the stream of urine warm and weakening between her legs like a stream of blood, and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes and wept. Under her feet, in the dark, Raka felt the flat, wet jelly of her
mother is being squelching and quivering, so that she didn’t know where to put her feet and wept as she tried to get free if it. Ahead of her, no longer on the ground but at some distance now, her mother was crying. Then it was a jackal crying.81

It is this traumatic childhood experience that has such a dehumanizing effect on Raka’s mind that she becomes a pathetic to find any interest in childish games and there is nothing childlike in her character. Like a normal child, she is not attracted towards the colourful and beautiful aspects of nature – like flowers, butterflies as well as. She is allured by the uncanny places and things. She is fascinated by the ugly, lonely, rugged and barren aspects of nature like the burnt house, fire the smoke coming out of the Pasteur Institute and the ravines. She has a weired imagination and loves solitute. She sings in celebration of her isolation: “I am shipwrecked Raka exulted, I’m shipwrecked and alone. She clung to a rock- my boat, alone in my boat, alone in my boat on the sea, she sang.”82 Raka loves privacy and seclusion and disappears suddenly, silently for hours without informing her great grandmother. Her arrival and disappearance disturb Nanda but Raka ignores her so calmly that it makes Nanda breathless: “She eyed the child with apprehension now, wondering at this total rejection, so natural, instinctive and effortless when compared with her own planned and willful rejection of the child.”83 So Nanda Kaul realizes that Raka is not a normal child L. H. Scott rightly says that Raka is a victim of “emotional deprivation.”84

Unlike normal child, Raka avoids the company of an elder while visiting tourist spots or other places. She wants to do everything on her own

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wish. For example, while going to Monkey Point, Raka does not want her great grandmother to accompany her:

She had planned to come to Monkey Point alone on a solitary afternoon expedition. Without anyone's knowing, secrecy was to have been the essence of it, she relished it so- Raka had all the jealous, guarded instincts of an explorer, a discoverer, she hated her great grandmother intently watching her ascent, clenching her hands with tension when the goats nearly knocked her off her feet or when she slipped on the loose pebbles.85

By these passages it is clear that Raka has a strange fascination for being left alone. The ways in which Raka moves about in the dark makes her appear queer and strange. It is impossible for any normal child for that matter even adult to wonder about in the dark like Raka does. She finds darkness, rather than light, friendlier to her. It is abnormal that laughter and happiness do not appeal to Raka. Raka goes to such places where no ordinary person dares to go. She is attracted to a land "where there was no sound, only silence, no light, only shade, and skeletons kept in the beds of ash on which the footprints of jackals flowered in grey."86 What attracts Raka will be frightening enough to any normal child:

The scene of devastation and failure some how drew her, inspired her.... It was the ravaged, destroyed and barren spaces in Kasauli that drew her: The ravine where yellow snakes slept under grey rocks and agaves growing out of the dust and rubble, the skeletal pines that rattled in the wind, the wind-levelled hill tops and the seared remains
of the safe, cosy, civilized world in which Raka no part
and to which she owed no attachment.\textsuperscript{87}

On being encouraged by Ram Lal, Raka goes to the club to the vision
of “ladies dressed as queens and men as princes”\textsuperscript{88} shocked her. She thinks
that the scene is lunacy rampant. The drumming of the band and blowing of
paper horns frightens her: “She wishes she could close her eyes. She wished
she were a million miles away from the band. She tried to think she was
asleep and this was a night mare.”\textsuperscript{89} The perverted acts of the people dressed
in a bizarre fashion unlock the hidden memories of her own father and his
wild behaviour at home. Raka comes to the world of reality only when a
jackal howels. After the club incident a peculiar change comes over her thin,
pale face: “Her eyes darkened, as if with a secret she would not divulge. She
was no longer the insect, the grasshopper child. She grew as still as a
twing.”\textsuperscript{90} Shanta Krishna Swamy comments rightly: “Her traumatic
childhood has hardened her into a hard little core of solitary…”\textsuperscript{91} Intimated
since birth, anything destructive, uncompromising and ruthless excites her.
As Krishna Swami again comments:

The conventional sweet smells and sounds of childhood
are ignored, she feels drawn by scenes of devastation and
failure. The forest fires tingle her and she bursts from the
shell of Carignano like a sharp teen edged explosive to
set fire to the mountain.\textsuperscript{92}

In \textit{Clear Light Of Day}, Baba is portraited “lively, human, normal yet
awful.”\textsuperscript{93} He is not like a normal child who always plays with pebbles alone
and listens to the gramophone ceaselessly. He is incapable of normal
human activity whenever he tries he badly fails. He is innocent and silent
and uncomplaining. He is tied by affection to Bim. Baba himself, fascinated by the gramophone of Benazir, brings it to his house and starts playing the records of American foxtrots and quick steps. The image of “a tight tunnel”\textsuperscript{94} suggests that Baba is struggling to come out of his stifled, voiceless world. And his playing with music is voicing his protest against the unfairness in his birth and growth “… the song rose to its raucous crescendo as though the singer had a dagger plunged into his breast and were letting fly the heart felt notes of his last plaint on earth.”\textsuperscript{95} The tension of Baba’s inarticulate world are brought out in the image of train:

In Baba’s room, a strange rasping roar started out of the stillness, grew louder like a train approaching through a tunnel, and emerged not in a whistle, but in a woman’s voice smokily wailing.\textsuperscript{96}

Here ‘a train approaching through a tunnel’ suggests Baba’s fear of darkness and loneliness.

Baba’s world eludes this kind of possion, and music becomes his main defence. Music helps him to keep away the rest of the world with its strangeness, and unfamiliarity:

The music had come to a halt…. For a while Baba paced about the room, his head hanging so low that one would have thought it unnatural, physically impossible…. The silence of the room, usually so loud with the rollicking music of the 40s seemed to admit those other sounds that did not sooth or protect him but, on the contrary, startled and drove him into panic…”\textsuperscript{97}
In *Baurngartener’s Bombay* Hugo meets Kurt, the German Hippie, who has come to India in quest of peace. Hugo has already undergone deception after deception and he is deeply hurt by the city and its inhabitants that isolated him as a foreigner or a “firanghi.” This time, the deception comes from the neurotic boy, Kurt, who depended on indulgent parents for regular remittances to support him in India. When the sums of money is delayed, according to Farrukh, Kurt and his fellow hippies would “go to shop - I have seen them myself, picking up bread, picking up bananas, saying I’m hungry, no money, my mummy-daddy send no money, please give me.” It shows his neurotic behaviour. For Kurt “H. Baumgartner. The name made his mouth twist with sarcasm, with ferocity. To come halfway across the world and meet H. Baumgartner, what an irony. Then he bunched his lips together and paused as he got a small pen knife out of his pocket and inserted it into keyhole... the knife has a sharp enough point... turned in a certain way.” These lines show disturbed behaviour of Kurt. However, before Hugo could keep his ‘tryst with destiny’, Kurt enters the flat of Hugo; he appears clumsy that night. His hands seem “… colossal, weighty and with a will of their own.” He is infused with all demoniac powers Kurt plunged a knife again and again into the sleeping Baumgartner out of frustration.

Further, Anita Desai’s novels have generally been preoccupied with neurosis in individual. Maya, Sita, Nanda Kaul and Raka all have shown symptoms of varying degrees of neurosis. *Fasting, Feasting* is no exception to this. After being rejected in the marriage bond, Uma feels disillusioned with life. The home is no longer a place of security for her. Gradually Uma becomes neurotic because of again and again rejection in marriage. As Uma is an unfortunate child born under inauspicious stars. Her first negotiation
for marriage fails because the boy selects Aruna, the younger sister, and not Uma whereas the second (The Goyals) cheat her father of a flat sum of money without solemnizing the marriage.

Ironically, it is Uma, the so-called handicapped child in the family, who senses intuitively, a welcome bond in her relationship with another handicapped cousin in the family, Ramu, Bakul uncle’s son. Both Uma and Ramu feel not only at home with each other, but in their gregarious movement, find themselves in harmony with the entire world at large. Uma suffers with fits and Ramu’s suffering is so obvious, as suggested by another telling metaphor in the novel:

There is silence for a bit because both parents seem to have decided to use silence as a weapon... in that silence, Ramu lowers himself into a creaking basket chair and spreads out his legs and throws back his head. A mynah on the neem tree that overhang the terrace is watching his movements and 'lets out a series of whistles as if to comment upon them. Ramu bhai returns a whistle to it.¹⁰¹

Mrs. Syal’s son, who comes to have a view of Uma in connection with his marriage, but prefers for the Younger, smart looking sister Aruna and the proposal for Uma’s hand is instantly dropped. Uma casts off the ring: “Uma had always loved that ruby ring and tried to submit to the torture without crying, but when she looked at the swollen finger, and the bluish caused by its tightness... all through that painful afternoon, she sat trying to tear if off her finger.”¹⁰² It shows her neurotic behaviour, once growing impatient with a servant, she loses self-control: “Where has she gone? Uma

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cries and bangs this phone down. The furniture looms around her, threateningly. She pushes past it and goes out on the veranda.\textsuperscript{103}

Here Anita Desai describes Uma’s neurotic behaviour when Dinesh, Aruna’s son, spent most of time in seeing his schoolboy uncle Arun’s collection of America comic books and reads them with very interestingly. Being neurotic Uma feels irritation seeing it and suddenly she cries, “It was Dinesh who was more worrying, although, on the surface, much more tractable”\textsuperscript{104} with regard to his neurotic behaviour shows a sadistic trait:

Uma was woken out of her sleep by some sharp cracking, splitting sounds in the next room, and got up to see what it was. She found Dinesh standing there with the air gun in his hand, looking down at a pigeon he had shot off the skylight ledge and which now lay dying in a tumult of blood died feathers on the floor. It was not wounded badly enough to die and made helpless to bring it wings together and rise to its feet. The way the beak hung open and the eyes bulged, however, did not seem hopeful signs, and it tottered around blindly. Uma cried to Dinesh, “shoot it, quick! Kill it, please! …” it was Uma who made him kill it.\textsuperscript{105}

Being a Neurotic, Uma may regard herself as a disembodied spirit. She makes two attempts to drown in the river and feels that “here was someone who could pierce through the dreary outer world to an inner world, tantalizing in its edour and romance. If only it could replace this, Uma thought hungrily. It was her passion to attempt.”\textsuperscript{106} Uma wants to merge with the river when she goes along with Mira Masi on a ritual dip when
everybody was warned not to go near the water and has not considered to put a foot into river or a toe as they were conscious about their health and safety. But only Uma, “tucked her frock up into her knickers and waded it with such thoughtless abandon that the pilgrims, the washer men, the priests and boatmen all shouted… she sank up to her chin and the current carried her away. It had not occurred to her that she needed to knew how to swim, she had been certain the river would sustain her.”

Uma is obsessed with the idea of death, her second attempt at making a watery grave for herself is even more deliberately sought. All the family members are enjoying this trip on the river in the big boat. It is hired to hold all the guest who has come to take ritual bath. At that time every one is in a state of high excitement and screaming with pleasurable panic. But Uma:

Thrilled by this license, simply sprang off the prow and plunged in without hesitation, as if this were what she had been preparing to do all her life. Immediately she disappeared into the water, having leapt not onto the sandbar where the others stood splashing but into the deep dark river itself. She went down like a stone while the women screamed, ‘Uma, Uma! Where is she?’

After dragging out from the current or flow of river she realized that:

It was not fear she felt, or danger, or rather, these were only what edged something much darker, wilder. More thrilling, a kind of exultation- it was exactly what she had always wanted, she realized. Then they had saved her. The saving was what made her shudder and cry.
In one of her interviews Anita Desai admits of having been influenced consciously by Kawabata, Chekhov, D. H. Lawrence, Dostoevsky and Proust. Her protagonists undergo a struggle to find their real self, because of the cramping pressures of anxieties, they lost it.

Like Horney, Anita Desai also believes that childhood experiences determinate conditions for neurosis. But they are not the only cause of their troubles. Commenting on introspective character's childhood, Desai shows in her interview with Jasbir Jain: "... the experiences of childhood are the most vivid and lasting ones." The feeling of being isolated and helpless arise in Uma from her childhood when she does not get favorable conditions to grow according to her individual needs. Lack of her parent's genuine love, she develops profound insecurity. Consequently she unconsciously diverts her constructive energies towards alleviating "her basic anxiety." According to Mama Papa, Uma is dull and is not permitted to complete her schooling, nor allowed to go out on her own wishes. She is compelled to look-after the baby boy. "Uma, do this, Uma, do that" is the order of the day. Uma images that she is like a caged bird in her own home and singing to the tunes of her Mama Papa. Uma is denied a normal woman's life a life of her own. Papa also resents her use of phone:

Papa kept shouting, Costs money! Costs money! Long after. Never earned anything in her life, made me spend and spend on her dowry and her wedding. Oh, yes, spend till I'm ruined, till I am a pauper. 

Anita Desai describes in her first novel, Cry, The Peacock the heroine Maya is marked with the tendency towards her neurotic behaviour. She is obsessed with the idea of death. Like Sita in Where Shall We Go This
Summer? Uma is marked with the tendency of neurotic behaviour. Uma is obsessed with the idea of death. She also tries twice at ritual dip in the river. Commenting on characters neurotic behaviour, Desai shows in her interview with Jasbir Jain: "... solitary and introspective people are always very aware of living on the brink." Mrs. Desai’s characters are hypersensitive to failure and neglect. They after struggle to achieve triumph through unhealthy drives like neurotic compulsion. As Horney says that neurotics make secret claim toward life and want that their lives should be as they visualize it. So they cannot face facts. Melanie’s frustration and defiance become apparent when she shouts at her mother: “I hate scrambled eggs. Why don’t you ask me what I want? Why can’t you make me what I want? What do you think we are garbage bags you keep stuffing and stuffing?” The gravity of Melanie’s neurotic condition is recognized by Arun. He conceived:

What she is crying for, she cannot tell. This is no plastic mock-up, no cartoon representation such as he has being all summer; this is a real pain and a real hunger. But what hunger does a person so sated feel?

At last Melanie has to resort to treatment for neurosis in “an Institution in Berkshires where they know how to deal with the neurosis of adolescent girls.”

Thus on the basis of the textual properties it seems apparently that Desai’s neurotics are either from their birth or through the negative treatment of human relationship. Generally Men and women aspire to fulfill. The question of human relations and if they are not satisfied from the warm or cold reception of human behaviour. They show a kind of negative
behavioral approach that finally makes them abnormal. This abnormality if continues in their behaviour becomes the problem of neuroticism.
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