CHAPTER II
Evolving Feminine Self in Early Novels.

Anita Desai is the writer with commitments. She is one of the few Indian novelists in English who have tried to understand closely the predicament of their female characters. Desai's preoccupation with Indian women is genuine. Being woman, Desai seems to be more aware of the predicaments of women. She presents them as lifelike human beings. In all her major novels, Anita Desai has dealt with feminine sensibility more emphatically than the description of the man and his exploits. Of all the contemporary Indian English novelists Anita Desai is, perhaps, the most perspective and consistent explorer of inner life, especially that of Indian women. This chapter studies the early novels by Desai with the focus on the evolving feminine self of the female protagonists. These novels are: *Cry, the Peacock (1963), Voices in the City (1965), Bye-Bye Black Bird (1971), Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Fire On the Mountain* (1977).

*Cry, the Peacock* is Anita Desai's maiden and a trendsetting novel by which she appeared on the Indian literary horizon in 1963. It is primarily a psychological novel, probing the workings of its female protagonist, Mays' psyche. It is a pioneering effort towards delineating the psychological problems of an alienated person, Maya. The novel presents a panoramic picture of highly sensitive, interval, agitated and childless obsessive woman, Maya. It is the cry of Maya's alienated self. Anita Desai's serious concern is with, "the journey within" of her characters. The novel depicts how Maya’s feminine self evolves out of her experiences in her family as well as in the society. Anita Desai captures the vitality and changing roles of contemporary Indian women. She depicts her characters feminine personality and feminine psyche better than most other Indo-Anglian novelists. She tries to explore different aspects of feminine psyche.
Her female characters are generally neurotics, highly sensitive and out of harmony with their husbands and circumstances. The result is marital dissonance. The psychological and temperamental reasons for the problem of marital dissonance are different from one couple to another in her novels. Anita Desai locates the problems of marital dissonance in the socio-economic factors. Maya, the central character in the novel, is beautiful, intelligent and very sensitive as well as sensuous but she fails to grow out of childhood. She faces marital discord, differences and struggle in her married life. It is something different from that of the traditional marriage in which the bride is sacrificed at the altar of man's dominance over woman who suffers like a speechless goat. She tolerates all tortures and pains.

Maya is a spoilt and pampered daughter of Raisahib, a rich Brahmin advocate of Lucknow. Being alone in family, and her mother being dead and brother Arjun having gone to America for his own independent destiny, she gets the most of her father's affection. She is married to Gautama who is the protee of her father and also senior to her. Raisahib finds Gautama agreeable for marriage with his daughter on two counts: first he resembles himself in age and is intelligence. He perhaps feels that a person of Gautama's age and understanding will give the kind of protection to Maya which he himself has been giving. Secondly, Gautama presents a complete contrast to Arjuna in his elitism and is similar to Maya in her submissiveness. Reacting to this arrangement, Maya says, "our marriage was grounded upon the friendship of the two men, and the mutual respect in which they held each other, rather than upon anything else"(39). Though Gautama is a successful lawyer practicing in Delhi, there is apparently nothing that is common to them-social status, educational background, intellectual training, emotional make up and religious and moral outlook. While Maya is dreamy, sensitive and emotional, Gautama is rational, insensitive and practical. Maya is poetic and instinctive while Gautama is detached and philosophical. Their incompatible temperaments make it difficult for them to have a warm harmonious relationship and
subsequently pave the way for their estrangement. Yet, they have managed to complete three years of their married life. K.K. Sharma rightly remarks the novel "highlights the problem of unequal marriage" (174).

Cry, the Peacock is divided into three parts. Part I of the novel depicts Maya as a hysterical character and forebodes the impending tragedy in her life. The death of her pet-dog Toto, throws her into a frenzy of grief. She wishes to provide a decent burial to her dead dog but the unsympathetic gardener fails to understand and fulfill her wish. Later on, Gautama comes home very late in the evening. As soon as he comes home, he takes steps to dispose of the body. He acts in a very formal and indifferent manner as if he has no emotion for the pet dog of the house. Dogs love their masters dearly, naturally and they get love of the master in equal measure. But Gautama is devoid of emotions. Therefore, he rings up to the Public Works Department which takes away the corpse in its truck to cremate it. Gautama says like an unconcerned person that it is all over implying that the Toto chapter is closed forever. In a matter of fact way he advises Maya to take tea and stop crying. Part II of the novel is Maya's long narration of her inner life and her relation with the world outside. It is here we see Maya’s feminine self evolves. We also see new aspects of the characters of Maya and her husband Gautama. Part III of the novel mirrors how Maya loses the equilibrium. It completes the tragedy. She holds herself responsible for Gautama's death. Like a noble character, she goes off the balance, not physically like Gautama, but mentally. She dies grief stricken.

The novel describes the feminine psyche of neurotic woman, Maya and touches upon a very vital aspect of the feminine psyche. Prabhat Kumar Pandeya observes that: 

Maya's tragedy is that there is no one to share her feelings. Childless, with an uncaring husband, she is lonely and loneliness is the bane and burden of her psyche. And to cap it all she is not even sexually satisfied (83).
Maya, in the novel, lives to use her own words like, "a toy prince in the world". She suffers from father obsession. With a busy husband, uninterested in her feelings and emotions, Maya is totally out of tune with her surroundings. She looks for the typical father image in her husband. She is brought up in a protected atmosphere. She is unknown of unpleasant realities of life. From her childhood, Maya regards world as "a toy specially made for me, painted in my favorite colours, set moving to my favorite tunes" (35).Maya fails to grow out of childhood. No wonder that her childhood world of fantasies and adult world of realities clash, producing more imbalances in life. Inner demands and outer realities also create a conflicting situation. In Gautama's family the atmosphere is heavily charged with intellectual, social and political discussions. Maya cannot participate in these discussions and they know it. With her, they discuss babies, shopping, meals and marriage for she is their toy, not to be taken seriously. Gautama, critical of her temperament says that:

Neurotic... Neurotic, that is what you are. A spoilt baby, so spoilt she cannot bear one adverse world. Every one must bring a present for little Maya that is what her father taught her (98).

The atmosphere of Gautama's family is so impersonal that Maya feels choked in it. It gives glimpses of her feminine self. Her efforts to create a family atmosphere failed completely. She notes down her surrounding and at the same time wants to leave permanently:

When I surged open-armed towards them, all receded to some distance background and were merely a part of that multitude for which I ardently and futilely longed, to whom I was about to say good-bye, for I might never see them again (48).
The very important childhood event in Maya's life is her visit to temple with her Ayah and the prophecy of the albino priest whose memory becomes the leitmotif in the novel. Maya's memory about her visit to temple with ayah is vivid. She recalls that memory to her mind:

The weak flame of the single lamp suddenly guttered and died. We all sprang up, and the darkness was filled with crowding, pushing, grasping bodies moist with perspiration, reeking with evil (30-31).

The memory of the prophecy of the albino priest makes a traumatic effect on Maya's life. She tries to recollect the albino astrologer:

He had been- large or small? I cannot remember, but his eyes I do: they were pale, opaque, and gave him an appearance of morbidity, as though he had lived, like a sluggish white worm, indoors always, in his dark room at the temple gates, where the central lingam was painted a bright, vicious red, as though plunged in sacrificial blood, and light burned in a single lamp from which oil spilled into a large, spreading pool (29).

Maya has a decent living unfortunately Gautama does not that living. So that the indecencies and ribaldries of cabaret dancers shocked Maya. She is disgusted and shocked from the cabaret dancers attempt to show their bosoms, legs and posterior. Maya notes their movements:

This is my bosom a flagrant label read. 'And these are my legs,' proclaimed a second, as she stood on her head and it herself a cigarette with her feet, while her legs writhed and kicked and waved provocatively. In between these antics, she pranced to little dance tunes, perspiring and panting to get back her breath, and her symmetrically rounded pneumatic posterior bore its own inviting label, Here is my bottom pinch it! (73-74)
As the dancers shamelessly display the parts of their bodies, men and women present there also make vulgar remarks. In such a company Maya can not stay longer. She cries to her husband that, 'I have to go. Gautama, I must go’(75). Maya is a woman of so delicate sensibilities that the doctor has to be called to give her a little morphine so that she can sleep in peace. This is Maya’s feminine sensibility. Her evolving self makes her disgust with the dancers. On the whole, the party hosted by Mrs. Lal, is horrible. But Gautama does not feel uneasy because he does not have a decent living as Maya has, nor is he an over-protected child like Maya. He remarks:

Why on earth should I be wretched because a party, or my host, or the guests did not measure up to my conception of wit or charm?... Frankly, if a man were to react to the sight of pregnancy by bursting into tears, Maya, no court of law would consider him sane or sober... Facts are made to be accepted to be studied. Not to be wept over...(58).

Maya is distressed to see that her husband is so much devoid to the sense of decency. She snubbes at him:

All the truth in living just passes them by, and I am so sorry for anyone. Yes even you, unsuspecting husband who misses it. It is like spending seventy years of one’s life in a graveyard being born in one and dying in one. It is a waste—a waste. And one life time is so short, it’ short, it’s over before you know it. ( 79).

These comments by Maya underline her awareness of the situation she is put in. This is an example of her evolving self.

Maya has the longing to be with him, to be close to him. She wants to possess Gautama. Illusion wants to capture reality. She wants neither the freedom nor the responsibility of an adult world. She is aware of her petulance and childhood. She, in her life
succeeds neither in getting the company of her husband nor physical, sexual satisfaction. Her basic needs for love and belongingness are not gratified. Her desire for love remained unsatisfied. Maya's urge for contact, relationship, communion remains unfulfilled. There are moments when she shows an almost aggressive urge for sexual reunion with Gautama. But, asleep or awake, he is a far off figure who can not be one with her in the world of senses. She expresses her agony with the help of the imagery of withered flowers. The lifeless roses and carnations on her dressing table "belonging to yesterday, corpses of today", are very much like her desires. Maya's want of sexual union is clearly perceptible in her contemplation and exultation on seeing the male and female Papaya trees in the garden. She tells:

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 – petal led blossoms that leap directly out of the solid trunk of the male... Besides, if I could pleasure in contemplation of the male Papaya, now much more ford for delight in this male companion surely (80).

Maya's unsatisfied desire for sex troubles her. As she lay on the bed, she remembers how the advances of young woman in the party, succeeded in getting the response of a stranger. She also remembers that a young woman, holding a white dog on a leash, smiled to a young man, "and he smiled in reply, and went up the steps behind her." The image of the woman with the white dog hunts her. Her unsatisfied desire for sex troubles her so much that she starts getting fearful visions:

Upon this bed of hot, itching sound, I summoned up again the vision of the tenebrific albino who had cast his shadow like a net across me as I had flowed down the corridors of years (82).
Maya also remembers the call of peacocks "Pio, Pio-lover, lover". Without the love she feels very insecure. Maya's position is like a trapped bird. She cannot escape from her present. Her childlessness adds to her miseries. She is caught in the net of inescapable and there is no mercy.

Maya thinks of Gautama as her protector and guardian. But the moment she finds he does not respond in the expected manner, her neurotic pride is hurt. She feels insulted and rejected. She feels that he is unconcerned about her misery, her physical and psychological demands. She says:

But then he knew nothing that concerned me. Giving me an opal ring to wear on my finger, he did not notice the translucent skin beneath, the blue flashing veins that ran under and out of the bridge of gold and golfed me into smiling with pleasure each time I saw it. Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me, to either the soft, willing body or lonely wanting mind that waited near hid bed (14).

Maya is romantic and thirsty for love while Gautama is realistic and cold. According to Maya, Gautama is entirely different who is preoccupied with his work, a typical husband. He wants to keep her at arms length and treats Maya as a child, a light-needed woman. Maya is passionately hungry and for her Gautama is like, "a meticulous, ". He is calm as "the mediator beneath the sal tree" evoking the image of Budha a great Yogi or Sanyasi and religious figure. To Maya:

He looked every very much the mediator beneath the bo tree, seated upon a soft tiger skin, too fastidious to touch the common earth, with those long, clean cut hands of his, too fastidious to admit such matters as love, with its accompanying horror of copulation,of physical demands and even,
overbearingly, spiritual demands of possession and rights won and established(113).

Maya is always under strain due to the death of her pet dog. The astrologer's prediction haunts Maya. Her unsatisfied desire for love, insensitivity and indifference of Gautama toward Maya, her in-laws pinching on account of her childlessness which create continuous fear of death in Maya's mind. She becomes neurotic. Her mental growth is obstructed. Her real self is banished. She is alienated from herself and depersonalization takes place. Hence, in the fit of sorrow, she feels as if she has gone insane and is in need of immediate help. Maya cries:

Or it is madness? Am I gone insane? Father! Brother! Husband! who is my saviour? I am in need of one. I am dying, and I am in love with living. I am in love, and I am dying. God, let me sleep, forget, rest. But no, I'll never sleep again. There is no rest any more- only death and waiting. (84)

This outburst of Maya is nothing but the result of her evolving feminine self. Maya is deeply scattered at the Gautama's indifference nature. His indifferent nature is also exposed during the time of a poetry session arranged in Gautama’s house. In the poetry session Urdu couplets are being recited by the people. Maya has inherited a taste for Urdu poetry from her father who uses to say that Urdu poetry is evocative. Maya, therefore, has a strong desire to join the party. But Gautama does not seem to relish her entry and therefore she quickly quit the place and in her more of disappointment, she hears the couplet in a gentle voice. Maya feels:

Already we belonged to separated worlds, and his seemed the earth that I loved so, scented with jasmine, colored with liquor, resounding with poetry and warmed by amiability. It was mine that was hell. Torture, guilt, dread, imprisonment these were the four walls of my private hell. One that no one could survive in long. Death was certain (88).
It is the natural desire of all women that they should share their ambitions and aspirations with their husbands, but Gautama seems to be well insulated against the current of love. She wants to transmit it to him. But in the absence of any response from her husband, she feels lonely. She becomes nervous. The behaviour of Gautama in the party also gives her the impression that there is no love last between them. She observes:

Had there been a bond between us, he would have felt its pull, I thought on him so deeply ... there was no bond, no love ... hardly any love (93).

It is Gautama's philosophy of detachment which adds misery in the life of Maya. He exhorted in the spirit of the Gita that attachment with men or action would lead to sorrow and misery. He endorses the philosophy that one should live like a lily, "rooted in water" yet untouched by it, or like a tortoise "with its limbs withdrawn from the external world." He has also argued against the passion of love he has opined that emotion of love does not last long, death cuts it short with one quick blow. He also discards the theory that the life is meaningless when it is lived for nothing but one's own pleasure.

Sinner goes to hell and the virtuous goes to heaven. Hence, Maya is in great distress. In this condition, Maya has some sort of premonition that she is to get a letter from her long lost brother, Arjuna. She has recalled that Arjuna was courageous and adventurous. She has got first letter from Arjuna. Maya shows that letter to Gautama who is surprised to know that Maya has a brother who has left home when he is twenty two years of age and her father has disowns him. Maya, with regard to the content of letter has fear. Gautama wants to know about the horoscope that Arjuna had referred to in his letter. Maya does not want to let Gautama know that an astrologer has predicted death of one of them within four years of their marriage, fearing that Gautama, who is unsentimental, utilitarian, might put her in peril of life. Here she suffers from hallucinations.
Maya is a woman of delicate psyche. She goes to the station to receive Gautama's mother and sister. She sees there a train load of monkeys being taken to the laboratory at Bombay. The monkeys are packed into cages in such a way that they don't have space enough to stretch and move. The sight of monkeys is very painful enough to move anybody to pity. It moves Maya for more deeply. Maya cries:

They are thirsty and hungry. There is not even a bowl of water for them. And those cages! ...something must be done about it immediately, and rushed away to order water to be fetched. My father might have come. Look for him. Help me look for him, Gautama. He'll open the cages and let them out (130-131).

Maya has sympathy or rather empathy for the imprisoned monkeys so much that she feels as if she is herself in the cage. She says:

There I was amongst them, not one of those who sat quietly, in an infinity of sadness and resignation, but one of those who clung, clung to the bars till they cut into my flesh, and rattled them, shook them, crying over and over again,

'Let me out! I want to live Gautama, I want to live!( 131).

It is the classic example of Maya’s evolving self that she associates her own condition with that of packed monkeys. Gautama has no choice but to bring her back to home and keep her within doors quietly and safely. The company of Nila and her mother, in the house, is very courageous for Maya. Gautama's mother is an image of persistent hard work. She is a woman engaged in multifarious activities of life. She offers to take Maya out for shopping. The company of these two women is much more humane than Gautama.

Maya wants their love because she is not getting so much care and love from Gautama who is very unsentimental. Maya's fear starts appearing once again. She feels that it is not Gautama's life but her own that is in danger, as it has become clear to her that she would die within four years of her marriage as the astrologer has predicted. Gautama is
always more concerned with his professional work than Maya's health. She is passing through
the inner conflict which causes the headaches and hallucinations. Yet Gautama is absorbed in
his studies. Naturally, May feels whether her death would disturb him. She is overtaken by
questions regarding death life after death, damnation and fear. Unfortunately, Gautama thinks
it is Arjuna's letter which has upset her or the loss of her confidence in her father. Maya
wants company and consolation from Gautama but he is damnably busy. Gautama's
indifference to the eternal problems such as death, heaven and hell exasperates Maya. She is
intensely in need of love but Gautama is insensitive though she has put herself in his arms.
Gautama's insensitivity couples with his busy schedule which makes him blind to the desire
and biological needs of Maya. Hence, Maya sees in her dreams:

   Peacocks searching for mates, peacocks tearing themselves to bleeding shreds
   in the act of love, peacock’s screaming with-agony at the death of love. The
   night sky turned to a flurry of peacocks’ tails, each star a staring eye (146).

Maya, at least feels that like her father in Gautama's house no one has the power to soothe
and console her. She feels so because none loves her like her father. That exactly is
tormenting her mind and heart. Therefore, she wants to return to her father for love and
comfort:

   I wish to return to my old home with its garden, its arbours and roses and
azurenecked pigeons ...my summer home in these hills, in Darjeeling, and my
little knock. Kneed pony that took me for rides while my father preceded me
on his horse typhoon and the pear tree outside they bay window of my
bedroom, bearing its autumn load of ripe, juice-jammed, golden fruit, and the
terraces stretching out ...where waterfalls spin unending skeins of white spray,
chill as ice, and spotted dear roam, friendly and gentle(148).
Maya, yearning for her own-world, is taken for madness. In fact, she has lost the peace of mind. Her meditation upon all the past and present incidents causes excruciating pain:

Past, present and future, truth and untruth, they shuttle back and forth, a shifting chiaroscuro of light and shade; of blood and ashes. And I am tired of it. My body can no longer bear it. My mind has already given way. I am grown thin, worn, my blouses hang on me, my rings slip off my fingers (149).

As her garden is neglected, so she is wrecked for “I am ill, I am in a fever, God, in a fever” (150). Maya, thus is suffering from psychological depression. She has imprisoned herself in the world of imaginary fears and memories of past life, and cut off from the realities of life. Perhaps her meeting with Gautama's mother and sister has given her the strength to live positively in the world of day to day life. It means, Maya has been recovered from the abyss of psychological depression. Her psychological state has been changed. Hence, she notices the season is changing, summer is setting in everything seems to be changing. She comes to know that she is destined to see and face the reality.

Maya wants to be free from the obsessions or the deep seated conceptions. Hence, she has to descend into her own self. She has been emerged from the morass of psychological complexes. The result is that she is felt exuberant and exultant. She says, “Here was a carnival to enjoy, merry go rounds and roller coasters brass bands, fried food stalls, cavorting clowns” (157). She feels being flooded by multifarious stage lights of variant shades. She is in heaven, well protected against the pursuing devils. Thus, Maya, has been recovered and become a new Maya. Her attitude has changed all together. She becomes a good housewife unfortunately, Gautama has remained indifferent and detached. His intellectual attitude and unemotional mind does not provide complete peace of mind to Maya. Gautama has treated her with a bit of indifference. However, Maya has love for Gautama. She feels that life has denied him even ordinary and common joys of life. She takes him out to the roof where she
feels that she has become one with the limitless sky. But Gautama has no interest in such things. Hence, she feels pity for Gautama:

Not be able to notice the odour of limes, not to hear the melancholy voice singing somewhere behind plantains, not to have time to count stars as they came out one by one, poor Gautama, my poor husband (171).

The world of Maya is beauty and emotions, yet she loves music and the moon. Gautama pursues logic throughout his life. As they are talking on the terrace, Gautama, who is lost in his logic and arguments make a mistake, his last, decisive one. She says:

In talking, gesturing, he moved in front of me, thus becoming between me and the worshipped moon, his figure an ugly crooked gray shadow that transgressed its sorrowing chastely. Gautama! I screamed in fury, and thrust out my arms towards him. Out of him, into him and post him saw him fall then, pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom (173).

Gautama might have fallen down to his death due to his own mistake, but Maya certainly has repulsion for Gautama in the last moments of his life.

After the death of Gautama, Maya goes mad and is to be sent to the asylum. She looses the equilibrium because she holds herself responsible for Gautama's death. Lastly, Maya is brought to the house of her father (Lucknow). Nila and her mother come to take care of her in the absence of her husband and her father. Both the ladies have love, sympathy and admiration for Maya. They are well aware that Maya is innocent and noble. Nila is sad to hear the mad laugh of Maya. They discuss the whole issue with great concern. Maya, in the house, sits somewhere upstairs. The old woman goes upstairs to meet Maya and both of them disappear. Maya’s innocence, emotion of love, desire for beauty, sorrow for her husband lead her towards tragic end.
Maya, finds herself tortured by a painful sense of alienation. Maya is alienated from her surroundings, from her husband, Gautama and even from herself. She is made a victim of institutionalised marriage and rigid social customs. The incompatibility of her and Gautama’s nature cause deep alienation in her mind and she becomes intensely neurotic. She finds that her feelings are not cared for, and that she is being neglected, isolated and alienated in her own home. Her urge for contact, relationship, communion remains unfulfilled. There are moments when she shows an almost aggressive urge for sexual reunion with Gautama.

Maya's divided self, lack of self-analysis, the fast withering spirit and the receding contact with outer world leave the core of her integrity impaired. Out of frustration she contemns Gautama to death and burdened with death haunted by self-contempt, self-accusation, self-hate and drags into complete darkness of the world of the insane. The alienation between Maya and Gautama is because of Maya's intense involvement in her own world of phantasm. She is deeply attached to past. She lives almost in world of memories while Gautama values the importance of action because of his rational nature. One of the causes of Maya's loneliness and alienation lies in the romantic and delightful life that she has once led at her father's house. Maya being a motherless child, her father focuses all his attention on her. Maya has lived a protected life that hampers her freedom of growing as an individual. As a grown up woman now, she cannot relate herself to the realities of married life. She feels inferior. Maya and Gautama live in two different isolated worlds altogether. She has lost even order and symmetry of her life in her deep despair. Her mental peace has deserted her completely.

Maya projects herself as a helpless, suffering martyr, a childless woman, gripped by a misfortune of her pet's death. Her act of pillow beating and crying piteously enables her to see herself as a helpless child. She becomes vindictive when finally the self alienates itself
from the real center. The accidental death of Gautama undoubtedly completes Maya's alienation and aloofness and she becomes a strangely isolated character of Anita Desai.

Maya’s journey is from frustration to death. She has suffered from moritual dissonance. Anita Desai has a definite idea of a happy conjugal life. To her, marriage is a union and communion of two different minds. The concept of marriage has not been properly realized in most of the Indian male-dominated families. Woman's individual identity, her desires, her feelings, her psychological temperament have not been positively studied in Indian social life. It is very unfortunate that in India women have never been accepted as full human beings. The causal attitude of man towards woman is responsible for her consistent suffering and miserable fate.

Anita Desai has presented different aspects of woman through several women characters that have their individual voice and personality. The voice is metaphorical, not necessarily speech, but coming through the personality and character of the women. These women characters unravel the mystery of the feminine in several ways. Gautama’s mother is described as 'pillar of life'. For Maya she is a versatile lady with extra-ordinary strength and extra will power. She is gay with plenty of ideas and ambitions and occupations. As a house wife, as a mother and as a social worker, she keeps her quite engaged. Maya is told by Nila that her mother never goes to bed before twelve and is always up at five. She is an image of persistent hard work "If she was a figure of old age, she was as much a figure of fire and energy "(132). Maya finds mother substitute in mother-in-law. So she is unable to forget her. At the time Maya craves for maternal tenderness:

[...] 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 try, I knew it, in a while, and dreaded it, in their sane presence. 'Please, I whispered'(136).
Gautama's mother is a lady, dedicated to human service, but sometime she does not understand Maya's finer sensibility. She, like other members in the family, is too busy in her social welfare activities to pay attention to distraught Maya, 'She looked at me absentely yet smiled warmly before she rushed away' (49).

The role of mother-in-law and Nila is very much significant in the life of Maya. Maya is thankful to them who make her forget her nightmares and give a meaning to her life. But her peace comes to an end as soon as Nila and her mother announce their decision to go back to Calcutta. She becomes frightened as she thinks of her loneliness in their absence. She says:

What, the house empty again, and I alone with my horrors and nightmares?
No.... God, be alone with him again, my unknowing, unsuspecting and steel-hard adversary in this oneiric battle, all night, all day, for how many more nights, how many more days? God, to have to start counting them again, in utter loneliness? (162).

Nila is another woman in the novel. She is the sister of Gautama. She represents symbolically strength and vitality. She has the boldness to find solutions to her problems. Her courage to find a lawyer for her divorce is contrasted with Maya's blusterous life. Nila wants to consult Gautama about the legalities of her divorce case, but Gautama refuses point black to help her saying that he is not one of the two rupee lawyers that squat under the neem tree and that she has made the mess by "being too bossy and self willed and bullying." But Nila is not put down. She engages another lawyer, and has the courage to do all that herself. She tells Maya: "After ten years with that rabbit I married, I've learnt to do everything myself" (135).

In the neurotic condition of Maya, the company of Nila and her mother are living examples of hard work and courage for her. She wants their love because she is not getting so
much care and love from her very unsentimental husband. Through the character of Nila, Anita Desai wants to know the boldness which is essential for any woman for living life.

Leila who stands for patience and fortitude love, and sacrifice is Maya's friend. She has eloped and married a tubercular man against the wishes of her parents. Leila, who made all sorts of adjustments with life without any grouse or grudge, is a teacher of Persian in a girls' school. She is gloomy and her attitude towards life is fatalistic. She marries a man knowing his disease of T.B. She never lost control and composure. When her husband lies dying with tuberculosis, yet she takes upon herself to minister to the wants of her sick husband. Maya remembers: When I saw her in her movements an aching tenderness subdued by a long sadness into great beauty and great bitterness."(52) .

When Maya goes to see Leila, her husband has another attack and is lying stupefied. Leila is found sitting at the foot of his bed, correcting paper of her students in frenzy. Maya's presence has no doubt calmed her, to a great extent. Leila has no desire for any sort of diversion. Maya invites her to come to her and go out on a long drive, but she says that her life has pleasures of its own:

You cannot imagine what fun it is laying hare the ignorance of my pretty little dunderheads. Even when they see it spread out and dissected before them, they can't recognize it, poor things (53).

In spite of so much of ill-luck Leila is patiente and loveliness personified Maya recalls:

"But when I saw her tend him, and the loveliness that entered her closed face as she did so, I could not grudge her what had become the meaning of her life.

Leila was one of those who require a cross, cannot walk without one ( 53).

Leila is a contrast to Pom, Maya's another friend. She wears no jewellery or bangles. In her fatalism there is a masochistic strain. Fatalism is common to both Maya and Leila. If Maya is obsessed with the albino priest's prediction, Leila has accepted her destiny and does not
grudge or complain "it was all written in my fate long ago"(54). If Maya is the pampered child, Leila's parents have broken all relations with her, they had not seen her, written to her or in any way communicated with her since the day of her elopement.

As opposed to Leila, Maya's another friend, Pom never speaks of fate, has never been ill, or over-worked or bitter. Pom is foil to Maya. She is the typically uprooted woman of India who swarms the big cities. In the context of the prophecy Maya compares herself with Pom. Maya is traditional, refined and sensitive woman while Pom has none of these qualities. Maya describes her as living in her painted world where there were no shadows of family, tradition and superstition. Maya describes:

Logic, tact, diplomacy nothing mattered to her who chattered so glibly & gaily all the day long, jumping up now and then to bring out a new pair of shoes, a new set of rings to show me, talking with eagerness and animation of anything that was new and bright, and never, never referring to family, tradition, custom, superstition, all that I dreaded now. I was certain she hated such talk as much as I did, even if she had no reason to fear them. such things simply did not step over the bright enamelled horizon of her painted world, for such things bore shadows, and shadows were alien to her as once, in a similar world, if a richer and more refined one, they had been alien to me, who now constantly looked behind to see where the purple ghost of the albino followed on silk swathed, oil-softened feet (55).

Pom is fashionable, paintes her mouth, outlines of her eyes, her finger and toe nails. She has a lust for new things, for brightness colour and even for a new house. She wants a brand new flat in a new colony. She has a very good house and luxurious living yet she does not like to live in it. Pom said, "To live here like two mice in one small room, not to creep out, for fear
they'll pounce on you, ask you where are you during going, when you'll be back, why you are not bearing the jewelry they gave you...oh"(55).

Leila and Pom have presented the philosophy that contentment and happiness arise from within and not from without. One can be contented without any comforts of life and one can be discontented in spite of all the comforts of life. These women characters, no doubt, help Maya in the process of evolving her feminine self.

In *Voices in the City* too Anita Desai continues her focus on evolving feminine self. This time she describes the evolving self of Maya and Amla. The story of the novel centers round Nirode, and his two sister's Monisha and Amla who have come to the monstrous city of Calcutta in quest of identity. Nirode, Monisha and Amla are brought in the serene hills of Kalompong by an over-indulgent mother. While Monisha, the elder sister, leads a life of servile existence within the rigid confines of a traditional extended Hindu family, Nirode is absorbed in a bohemian life in metropolis. Amla, younger sister, arrives in the city after studying at an art school in Mumbai and becomes involved with an aged artist Dharma. Disillusionment and frustration are their lot in Calcutta. The only one member of the family is exception to it. Arjun makes his good escape from the city and leaves for higher studies in England.

Nirode is a typical Bengali youth representing the diseased generation of the post independence era. He is highly sensitive and introvert character. He starts his career as an, "anonymous and shabby clerk in a news paper, calling himself a journalist, for that is a fine, crisp and jaunty word" (10) in Calcutta. In Calcutta, Nirode is dissatisfied with his life, although he calls himself a journalist to keep up his dignity. But his real job is cutting out "long strips of newspaper and paste and file them, occasionally venturing out to verify a dull fact in some airless office room"(10). This job offers him no opportunity to express his creativity. He is an artist at heart and can see beauty even in the turmoil and darkness of the
city. The artist in Nirode makes him despise his present job of a clerk and thinks about another job. In fact, Nirode is a rootless character without any definite goal. He is merely a traveller with no destination. This is his real problem.

In Part II, the dairy-technique lends tone of immediacy and anguish to Monisha's accounts of her miserably empty married life. The tragedy of husband- wife alienation, as already delineated in *Cry, the Peacock*, is re-enacted here through the Monish- Jiban tale. In this novel Anita Desai presents the feminine psyche mainly through the character of Monisha. Monisha is the central woman protagonists of the novel. She is a close observer of reality. The novel is a touching account of the unhappy, loveless life Monisha, the married sister of Nirode. Like Maya, she is utterly a frustrated woman who tries to search for a real meaning in life.

Monisha is married against her wishes to a bureaucrat Jiban. She lives in a large house in Bow Bazar in central Calcutta with Jiban's middle-class stolid and extended family. The elders in the family are addicted to the "feet before faces"(109) syndrome. Monisha has to touch their feet all the time and how she hates it. She also cannot stand the noise, the sights and the smells of the large household where she is consigned to an iron-barred rooms upstairs. The family of Monisha is a joint family: “Through the thick iron bars I look out on other walls, other windows-other bars” (109). Monisha is so sensitive to the oppressive domestic environment that she is repelled by the mechanical and monotonous recitation of the Sanskrit lessons by Nikhil:

What sound? "It seems to come from that house, that windows there' " Oh. Probably one of the children they’re preparing for a test an exam. What kind of an examination could it be that exacts from a child this mindless, meaningless monotony of empty sound, hour upon hour, for it seems to have no end ? I long to thrust my head out of the window- and cannot, the bars one
closely self and scream: 'Stop!' When I have achieved silence, I will shout, 'You are not preparing for an exam. You are preparing for the devil a black devil' will that secure silence for me and make it permanent? Or will this continue this low, hurried, fevered recitation through all my days here? I expect there to be many of them. Everything in this house is impressive in size and duration (110).

Monisha, in such a monotonous environment remembers Nirode smiling at her mockingly and winking with sympathy when she was getting married to Jiban. When he comes to her house she does not know what to say to him but elders in the family ask Nirode the usual questions regarding his job, his salary, accommodation, prospects and Nirode doesn't have a satisfactory answer to all these queries.

Monisha is always haunted by a sense of her life dedicated to nothing. She is also childless like Maya. She wishes to have peace and silence which she does not get. In her laws house, she does not mind the great amount of work she is made to do. But the fact that she is always under the scrutinizing eyes of others and she is treated indifferently and looked upon as an outsider by everyone. It causes discomfort. It seems to threaten her individuality. This sense of being scrutinized testifies the process of evolving her feminine self.

Monisha's incapacity to bear a child is subject of ridicule amongst the elderly female members of the family. They discuss her fallopian tubes are blocked. She is filled with distaste when other talks of her organs and the reasons she has a child:

Like a burst of wild feathers, released full in my face, comes the realization that they are taking of me, my organs, the reasons that I can not have a child. I can't leave these vegetables I am cutting up for them – that would create a disturbance – but I stop listening and regard my insides : my ovaries, my
tubes, all my recesses moist with blood washed in blood, laid, open, laid bare
to their scrutiny (113).

Monisha's sensitive nature and educational background do not make it easy for her to
accept her role as the eldest daughter—in-law of a traditional joint-family in which she is fed
up with life full of drudgery, faithlessness, and lack of privacy. Living in "many headed
family", she yearns for privacy:

I am glad they give me so much work to do. I an glad to be occupied in cutting
vegetables, serving food, brushing small children's hair. Only I wish I were
given some tasks I could do alone, in privacy, away from the aunts and uncles,
the cousins and nieces and nephews. Alone, I would work better and I should
feel more whole. But less and less there is privacy. Even my own room, which
they regarded at first as still bridal, now no longer is so (115).

In such circumstance, neither her husband nor her in-laws, try to sympathize with Monisha. In
this world the relation between husband and wife is very delicate and it is based on the better
understanding between two. She is failed to win the love and companionship of Jiban. Her
relationship with Jiban is characterized only by loneliness and lack of communication. There
is a total lack of dialogue with Jiban. She realizes Jiban is unable to understand and fulfill her
emotional needs and consequently she is all the time suffering from an oppressive sense of
loneliness. She expresses her pathetic condition: “Jiban remains sitting with us but Jiban is
never with us at all” (111). Jiban is the prisoner of a conventional culture in which a woman's
most important roles—child-bearing, cooking, cutting vegetables, serving food and brushing
small children's hair, are under the authority of a stern mother in law. She thinks that her past
memories are scattered here and there like leaves in autumn season. For her there is nothing
that consoles her disturbed mind. Her married life has been the life of discontentment, life of
maladjustment. Her purpose of life is only to breath but to breath is no life. It is worse than death.

The family in which Monisha is a married curbs her individuality and restricts her within the ritual of an ideal wife and homemaker. Monisha says:

Look at me, my equipment, my appurtenances. My black wardrobe, my family, 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 (111-112).

Monisha suffers from mental agony. The reasons of it are the absence of love, maladjustment with her husband, loneliness. All these torture her mentally and make her shriek in agony. She, like Nirode, wants to be free. But she finds it difficult to free herself of her duties because life follows a subdued pattern or monotonous activity, without acquiring any meaning. She is more and more tormented. Gradually, Monisha comes to know that the absence of love has made both brother and sister all alone.

Monisha is not only a highly educated woman, but she has intellectual accomplishments of a high order. She has a library of her own which consists of the classics of different languages. The tragedy of her life is that she gets no leisure and privacy to go through these books. She is deeply pained to observe that her love for books is also laughed at and she makes a pointed reference to the reference to the remarks of Kalyani. Monisha says:

The whole wardrobe full of book to my perplexity she says, "I got a hundred and eleven," and I am no longer perplexed: I see that of course she cannot know that there is nothing to laugh at in Kafka or Hopkins or Dostoevsky or my Russion or French or Sanskrit dictionaries. But I wish they would leave me alone, sometimes to read or that Nirode would come again and take me away to sit under a tree with him. He has not come (116).
It is Monisha's dairy which serves as her only reliable means of communication in atmosphere of distrust, envy, ignorance and lack of privacy. In addition to the diary, Monisha finds that Nirode is the only other medium of communicating her feelings and ideas. Neither her husband nor her in-laws try to sympathies with Monisha. She fails to adjust herself in the family. Her heart is always thirsty of love. Therefore, she loves for her mother's love and seeks her brothers' sympathetic company. She is alienated in a joint family. She feels life to be hollow and existence a burden. She makes pertinent remarks about those things which separate her from that joint family in which she is married:

I think that what separates me from this family heaving and rolling beneath me in its dreams of account books, pensions, examination, results, store rooms, birth, marriages, ovaries, wombs, dowries, locks, keys, property, litigation, wills, bequests, orphans, adoption, relations, marriages, births and property I think that what separates me from this family is the fact that not one of them ever sleeps out under the stars at night. They have indoor minds, starless and darkles mine is all dork now. The blessing it is (137).

Monisha by getting nostalgic about her days at Kalimpong tries to escape from suffocating domestic environment in which she lives. She thinks:

Almost as often as I catch myself thinking about Kalimpong, I find myself thinking about Jiban's last posting, out in a district, away from the city and the family. The solitude of the jungles there, the aqueous shadows of the bamboo groves and the earth lay with great fallen leaves. The bell like dignity of the elephant on which we rode through the jungles. Jiban away on tour, I alone with myself, no visitors at all (116).

When Monisha goes out to see the sights with the uncles, she is taken to Belur Math, the Jain Temple, the Kali Temple, New Market (Hogg market) Monisha sees both the faces of
Calcutta rapacious and weary. Monisha sees another face of this devil city, "a dull, vacant and hopeless face".

Monisha is the typical daughter-in-law of the middle class Bengal family. Her domestic life has been shattered to pieces. Monisha while observing the sights with the uncles, sees the middle class and lower middle class married women invoking images of women behind the bars who with least resistance surrender their individuality and identify to the roles cut out for them. Howsoever, enlightened or well read the daughter-in-law may be, as Monisha is. She has to mould herself into the persona of a respectable daughter-in-law meeting the expectations of the society. The image of the woman behind the bars is used to reveal the oppression and plight of women. The plight of women saddens Monisha all the more:

I see many women, always Bengali women, who follow five paces behind their men. They wear saris of the dullest colours, beige and fawn and off white, like the female birds in the cages... 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 Bhagvat Gita and the Ramayana, in the dim light 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 house in the old city(120).

Being a sensitive and intellectual woman, Monisha is suffocated in uncongenial atmosphere of her in-laws house. Because of her intellectual nature she, like her brother, is not much interested in religion even though she reads the Bhagwad Gita, several Shlokas from it have
been quoted. The faith in religion and spirituality can console and encourage a person in adversity. But Monisha lacks faith in religion. She laments:

If I had religious faith, I could easily enough renounce all this. But I have no faith, no alternative to my confused despair, there is nothing I can give my too and so I must stay (121).

Monisha leads a life dedicated to nothing and of utter humiliation and desolation life, for hers is only a conundrum. She seems to suffer from claustrophobia. The over crowded house makes her uneasy. Monisha is trapped in incompatible marital life. She is seen as unreliable, capricious in terms of the social norms. She is found in unresolved conflicts. She cries out:

Is this what life is then, my life? Only a conundrum that I shall brood over for ever with passion and pain, never to arrive at a solution? only a conundrum is that, then like? (124).

This cry by Monisha is a superb example of her evolving self. She comes to know that the life is completely weathered away. Her life has no attachment, no enthusiasm, no inspiration, no charm and no desire to live in this meaningless world.

Monisha, one day, goes to see Nirode who is sick. He has high fever and needs to be hospitalised. Monisha looks after him. He is diagnosed as suffering from starvation combined with heat exhaustion by the doctors. He is in a state of delirium. Monisha takes Jiban's money that he has given her for safekeeping for paying Nirode's hospital bill. But her act creates the furore in the household. She is accused of theft. Jiban's mother shouted:

"Money has been stolen, you know, Jiban's money... He left it in the cupboard when he went to the offic: My son is always careful of his things. Only you were in the room at that time. When you left, you shut the door and none of the servants could have gone in. Of course the servants will be dismissed, all of them. I will not have a thief in my house, I say, I will not have a thief in my
house. Who is to tell who this thief is? After all, you were the only person who was in the room all day (136).

This is the greatest catastrophic event in Monisha's life. She feels total alienation not only from the family, but also from Jiban who destroys whatever meaning their relationship might have had. He, instead of her right to the money, questions it: "He did not say 'why you did not tell them at once? He said 'why didn't tell me before you took it?'"( 136) Monisha withdraws from the material concerns of family and retreats behind the barred windows from where she advises Amla, her sister to go always in the opposite direction, it is an advice to rebel. Amla notices her stillness and death like submission and thinks of her as a lifeless statue. The charge of theft is the greatest catastrophic event in Monisha's life. The charge of theft strikes her most. She decides to end her life:

I am accused of theft. These pettiest people, they regard me as meaner than them. They think me a thief. To be regarded so low by men and women themselves so low, it is to be laid on a level lower than the common earth. I find that I am alone here. I find on this level that solitude that becomes me most naturally. I am willing to accept this status then and to live here, to little beyond and below everyone else, in exile (135).

After the charge of theft, aloofness suits Monisha. Locked in her room, she reads books and feels self-imponant at night. She craps up the top most floor and enjoys a communion with vast, dark emptiness. She considers this is an hour of freedom. But it is in fact a flight from conflict. She goes through a tremendous amount of psychological crisis. Monisha is like the female bird trapped in the cage. Her bitter childhood, ungratifying married life, torturing in-laws, traditional Indian social atmosphere, her alienated self, humiliated by the charge of theft caused her mental imbalance she becomes neurotic. And begins to live in an ivory tower of her pride, cutting all her relations from her family she opts for a violent end to establish
her triumph over her in-laws by defeating their attempts to subjugate her. Monisha's morbid fear of confined places, her oppressive lack of privacy, her inability to bear a child, the total lack of communication with her disinterested husband, the absence of love in her life and the resultant tormenting loneliness within all these develop in her the feelings of "self hate" which ultimately turn into self destruction. Monisha ultimately decides to end her life in a gruesome manner by setting herself on fire as if to seek release from the burden of life:

The bathroom door stood open, silently but preparedly inviting, she went in and put down the container... she lifted it as high as she could, with some effort for it was heavy... Her body was braced against its fire, but it was barely warm and soothing, a bath of oil... pungent odour of kerosene. When her blouse and sari were soaked, she lowered the tin ... To her astonishment, the very first match struck fire, and its clear flame was as straight and golden as a promise kept... The oil soaking her garments responded with a leap of recognition ... there, all over... she screamed... Fell unconscious. Very quickly fell unconscious (239-240).

The charred and mutilated body of Monisha socks her brother Nirode and her sister, Amla and puts Jiban and mother to shame. Later on, Jiban gently covers the charred body and begs for forgiveness from her relatives. Her death at last severs the bonds that mutilated her soul and body in life. Monisha's death, caused by her marital dissonance disturbs us. The maladjustment in marriage between Monisha and Jiban is due to the settlement of their marriage by their parents without considering their attitudes, feelings and outlooks. The hostility of her in-laws and the social conditions are equally responsible for the marital dissonance of Monisha and Jiban. Monisha's journey towards her horrible death presents her spiritual and physical transformation in black mourning colours. She is transformed from a
quiet, sensitive, mild, self-centered, beautiful girl into a barren, neurotic, dairy writing woman.

The marital disharmony between Monisha's father and mother affects her character. It transforms them into mental monsters. The father turns into a drunkard, debased dishonorable creature absolutely different from an easygoing, sports loving fond father. The mother is also transformed from a sensitive, accomplished beauty into a coldly, practical and possessive woman having no human warmth and tenderness for her children. Amla tells Dharma, her painter friend:

I saw such terrible contempt and resentment in her eyes ... when he came to Kalimpong ... he never followed her. He used to lie back against this cushions, idle and contented, contented I think, in his malice (204).

Monisha's existentialist quest for her love and freedom is the lack of parental love and care. She has seen her mother and her brother living without genuine feelings of love and so she also lacks feelings of love for her husband. Her parents do not provide Monisha the conducive environment for the natural growth of her personality. In short, like disintegrating forces of Kolkata city, her parents are equally responsible for her magic end. Monisha's tragedy occurs because she lives too much in the world of her own dreams because she is not in touch with reality of human existence, because she failes to see through the limitations of human perception beyond time. She also fails to recover the original strength of her real self by self realization. Her decision to stand in rebellion against the meaninglessness, futility and boredom is for the sake of her personal growth and happiness. She feels that it is necessary to be independents from men, emotionally and economically, in order to secure a room of one's own. Monisha's suicide symbolizes assertion of her quest for freedom and a meaningful existence.
Amla Ray is the second important female character in the novel. She along with Monisha represents the diverse facets of feminine live. The third section of the novel is entitled by her name. She is a younger sister of Nirode and Monisha. She is also an existential character. Amla's attitude towards life, youthful excitement and wonder is entirely different from her bohemian brother, Nirode and introvert sister, Monisha. Amla is a young, beautiful girl who has come to Calcutta in search of joy, independence and to establish herself as a commercial artist. She has come fresh from school of art in Bombay. Nirode true to his bitter and cynical temperament disapproves of the very idea of commercial art, “Commercial artist, sounds too bloody and full for words. Poor old Amla do you really expect anything from a career stamped commercial”(153). Amla moves about in the company of Jit Nair, a boxwallah, attending parties, dinners, dance and watching horse races only to get herself engulfed by this all pervading hollowness:

Lassitude overcome her like a fever, weighing against her temples, making her rest, her elbows on the table and her head drop over her unfinished work (173).

Her life appears meaningless to Amla. Her experience at the party, which she attends at Mrs. Basu's house, proves unpleasant, and her need for friendship and communication remains unfulfilled. She feels frustrated and wants to escape her fears and anxieties. She goes to dharma with Nirode. Dharma is an artist friend of Nirode. Dharma's daughter has eloped with her cousin and in order to escape humiliation, he has left Calcutta and settled down in a suburb. Landscape is his main interest but association with Amla shifts his attention to portrait painting. Dharma requests Amla to sit for a portrait. Dharma seems to take interest in Amla not as a person but as a mode. For Amla this meeting with Dharma becomes miraculous force, within no time she discovers herself in the image of a love lorn maiden. Amla is prudent enough to know that this kind of intimacy is unrewarding and unhealthy. In
the beginning Amla thinks this relationship to be beautiful and satisfying but her dream of love and involvement with Dharma is mercilessly shattered when she comes to know that he is a married man, a self-righteous, unfeeling zealot capable of turning his only daughter out of the house for having done something which he thinks to be unnatural and shameful. While turning his daughter out, he does not give even a thought to his wife and the suffering it would cause her. She also realizes that falling in love with a married man is of no consequences; it is a journey to a dead end. She withdraws herself from him. The infatuation dies-down. When Amla observes the sketches, she is shocked to see those sketches because there is complete dissection of her body in the painting which suggests to her the loss of the wholeness of her being. This is her evolving feminine self, her knowing to herself. She faces disillusion at the end. She discovers a symbol of disintegration in it. For Dharma, Amla is not a living being, but merely a subject for painting:

He stared at her, but Amla knew instinctively it was not her face he was studying, but the collective face of society, the weak, amorphous irresponsible face he hated so much" 'Poorgirl, he said softly, at last, 'Mrinallni-Shonallni.

That is her fate then. To be dismissed as dead while she still lives (223).

But later on Dharma changes and in his presence, she becomes another, Amla, flowering Amla psychologically. Amla is a brilliant portrait of a rebellious young woman. The novelist marks Amla's feeling:

She felt herself being torn, torn with excruciating slowness and without anesthesia, and without anesthesia, from the Amla of a day, an afternoon ago. Miraculously, there was no blood, only the broken nerves hanging there, exposed to the claming air, like cut telegraph wires glinting in moonlight (184).
Amla moves with socio-economic cultural patterns of the society and appears a little emancipated compared to her sister Monisha. She represents the educated, enlightened womanhood of Indian cities today. She is determined to enjoy the city, her new job and her independence. The insight of the glorious moments of creativity and the enthusiasm of Amla is presented by Anita Desai. Amla is entirely different from her brother, Nirode and sister Monisha. She has possessed the dimensional character in the novel. Anita Desai explains it in following manner:

Despite all the stimulation of new experiences, new occupations, new acquaintances and the mild sweet winter air this sense of hollowness and futility persisted. Daily it pursued her to the office, hid quietly under the black mouthpiece of her telephone, shook ever so slightly the --- of her pencil as she traced the severe lines of a well draped sari, then engulfed her in the evenings when she attended parties at which she still knew no one well and at night when she tried to compose her unsteady thoughts for sleep (157).

Amla has basically a positive attitude toward life. She has an urge to live life in the true sense of the word. Hence, unlike Monisha and Nirode, she does not take the other road – the road of self – destruction. She prefers to avoid morbid and nihilistic tendencies and shows maturity of vision that enables her to achieve authenticity of existence. The decision to end life and to continue life amidst absurdities shows her rebellion against the metaphysical hostility. This rebellion brings her to a state of wisdom of life, of illumination amidst darkness, of clarity of vision in the context of existential dilemma. It clearly shows that Amla is a growth oriented character. In the end of the novel, it finds that Amla sets "the calm picture" on fire and finally breaks up her relation with Dharma. She also refuses to visit the exhibition arranged by him and leaves him forever. She also realizes that Dharma is more interested in her physiology and her existence for him is not more than a fascinating
landscape. She realizes that she exists in the real world of the city only as "an observer' that she could never truly inhabit it. Dharma's own remarks, "our relationship is not all so straight forward and pat, married relationships never are" (229) also shakes her well out of her slumber. It means, Amla gets existential awakening that she has failed to achieve a wholeness of being through love and art. She comes out of the egotistical and self indulgent tendencies and tries to relate herself with the outside world and its reality. So she does not escape from the hardships of life. Her visit to the race-course in the company of Jit, symbolizes her self-awakening. She comes to know the truth of human existence and accepts the fact that it is nothing but an absurd race that every human being has to run. Among all Anita Desai's women characters, Amla is the only one who has achieved a wholesome and balanced personality. She possesses both the training and the temperament of one.

Another very dominant portrait in the novel is that of Mother. The last section of the novel is entitled as, 'Mother'. There are frequent references in the novel to Nirode's mother, but she remains a mysterious figure till the end when she emerges, in Nirode's worlds, as the symbol of Mother Goddess, Kali, embodying creation as well as destruction within her. The mother of trio, an escapist soul, is a shadowy figure. She has correctly defined by their father as, "butterfly that sat vibrating on a hugs flower." She is the most beautiful woman. She is a very beautiful mystery who remains an enigma to the children. One has a frivolous nature. In the final chapter of the novel, there is the tremendous control of mother over Nirode's psyche during his neurotic convulsions. Mother, in the novel doesn't give motherly treatment to her children. She is a disapproving, inconsistent self-centered mother. She could never connect in terms of nurturing and mothering with her children. She can partially be called the villain of the novel. Nirode labeled his mother as she cannibal. Directly or indirectly, she is responsible for the disintegration of the Ray family. Her libidinous inclinations and extra-marital
relations at the expense of her drunkard husband sow the seeds of destruction and disintegration of the family.

The root-cause of Nirode's psychic imbalance, tragedy lies in his love hate relationship with his mother. After his father's death, Nirode, who had been so close to his mother, is embittered and estranged from her. But in the later years, he turns against her. The reason behind it is his mother's relationship with major Chadha. He resents the very mention of his mother's name and barely reads her letters. He reads his mother's letters grudgingly. As Nirode leads a miserable existence, his mother is busy at Kalimpong sitting on the old Tibetan rug and playing Ludo and Monopoly, snap and Maha Jong with Major Chadha. Nirode refuses to accept his mother's money even when he was a noble aim of starting an arty book-shop. Even he spurns her every offer. When Monisha tells him that she wants to open a bank account in his name, Nirode rejects it. His remarks are very suggestive. He says:

Tell her to go shove it up that old major of hers, all her stinking cheques. Tell her I want no share of it, no share of banks or insurance and all the rest of her bleeding equipment. Tell her she'll never get me to sign my name or fill a form. I'll not put my name to anything again, to be gloated over by her or smirked at by those Theatre Group goats. I've done with singing my name. Tell her that, I'm nameless. Tell her that (133).

Mother has a strong desire to have sex with Major Chadha. The content of letter symbolizes her suppressed feelings of sex. He writes:

I took out on one vast waterfall, I was so crazy as to persuade Major Chadha to play a game of Monopoly with me last night (60).

It fills great resentment in Nirode. So he does not want to have a family name, honour and life. He is not ready to accept the pots of money his mother wants to give him.
In the end of the novel the mother arrives from Kalimpong after Monisha has committed suicide. But Nirode is apprehensive of meeting her. He watches her. She still looks beautiful. Her beauty compelles him to embrace her. But she draws away. She simply asks Nirode whether Monisha has been cremated. The mother's image is analogous to Indian traditional representation of Kali. Nirode Says:

She is Kali, the goddess and the demon are one ... Kali is the mother of Bengal, she is the mother of us, she must also deal with our deaths... she is not merely good, she is not merely evil – she is good and 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. don't you see... in her face, in her beauty, Amla, don't you see, the amalgamation of death and life? Isn't it perfect and inevitable the she should pour blood into our veins when we are born and drain it from us when we die? (252 -253).

The mother symbolizes the duality of human existence. It is at the same time a fusion of consciousness and unconsciousness, manifest and unmanifest, knowledge and ignorance, attachment and detachment, reality and illusion. She is seen as an emasculating force.

Among other women, Aunt Lila is more optimistic in outlook. Her vocation and busy life speak of solidarity that is miserably lacking in Monisha or Amla. She propagates physical freedom, women emancipation from bondage to men in every form. The idea of independence of women and their freedom from men is heralded by aunt Lila. She thinks that women can be themselves only when they discover their own spirits. She expresses her sentiments:
Women place themselves in bondage to men, whether in marriage or out. All their joy and ambition is channeled that very while they go parched themselves (221).

Aunt Lila's hatred for self-denunciation and philosophical observations make it obscure to understand Monisha, Nirode and at times Amla. Her self-satisfaction, as per her contribution of freedom as well as her immediate wants and whims have led her to opine against the timidity of the younger generation in petty affairs. Aunt Lila has minute observations. She thinks that Monisha is married into a family which is completely unsuitable to her tastes and inclinations. She also thinks of Amla as absolutely free and in the center of such an exciting world.

The feministic approach can be applicable to the novel. Anita Desai's women characters are no more wooden creatures, subject to suppression and male domination only. The transformative power of Anida Desai's novels lies in her taking up the task of revealing the process of self-awareness at work in feminine psyche. Monisha, in the novel, silently suffers the strain of life and commits suicide. She longs to be free of all kinds of social and familiar involvement because she does not have any privacy. She loves privacy and loneliness. Like her brother Nirode Monisha is destitute the vital element of love. She has no proper relationship with her mother. She is equally alienated from her mother and husband and commits suicide. But Monisha's suicide is only an attempt to rebel against the meaningless existence and death like isolation.

*Bye-Bye Blackbird (1971)* is the third novel by Anita Desai. She portrays the alienation and anguish of uprooted individuals. The novel is based on the problem of racial discrimination of Indian immigrants who are marginalized in an alien culture. Anita Desai depicts the problem of adjustment and cultural identify through the characters like Dev, Adit and his English wife, Sarah. The novel is in three parts: Arival, (The visitor), Discovery and
Recognition, and Departure. Sarah is the chief female character in the novel. For the theme of the novel, Sarah forms the central character. Jasbir Jain observes:

The novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* is not about Dev and Adit as much as it is about Sarah who has withdrawn from the world of her childhood. She does not want to look back and in this she is different from Maya and Sita (39).

Anita Desai presents Sarah as a better realized character. She portrays her as a woman, and reveals her dilemma and split personality which are the result of her marriage with Adit. The pathos of a culturally alienated girl is most movingly rendered in Sarah. She marries Adit in the hope of filling the emptiness of her life with the exotic but romantic world of her husband. But she is deceived in her hopes, as Adit stays in England living the unreal life of an immigrant.

Sarah is romantically in love with India. She must have read and heard stories about India and Indian life. She is introduced to Indian life first through philately love of stamps, supplying varied pictures of the rich Indian life. She is disgusted with the English people's love of privacy and reserve. In her marriage with Adit, she has consummated her love of India. She develops a tolerant attitude towards the British fellow citizen's humiliations to her. She makes a search for identity and reconciles herself to her lot of wife of an Indian with whom she is in love.

Sarah is the only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Roscommon, a middle class couple at Hampshire, a beautiful countryside. She is highly sensitive. She is greatly shaped by the countryside innocence and beauty. Sarah for the very first time meets Adit on bus and is enchanted by his Indian dress and beauty. She falls the victim of love at first sight-pure and love like that of Miranda and Ferdinand, Othello and Desdemona. We come know through a few flash backs how the marriage between Sarah and Adit is developed. Christine Langford introduces Adit to the English female sex and even to Sarah herself. Christine, who has
started a tourist agency of her own, and discovers him, a clerk in a little tourist agency to which she has gone in search of pamphlets on Greece or, perhaps, Spain and invites him to lend a touch of colour to one of her cocktail parties. Sarah, a school friend, was invited too and her shyness and rectitude brought out the protective in Adit whereas all the other guests and the hostess, has only made him feel uncertain, possibly even humiliated. Humiliation and uncertainty are not sensations in which Adit feels at home, and so he chooses Sarah for company. To Sarah, Adit seems rich to her..., seems to have so much to give her, so many relations and attachments, pictures and stories, legends, promises and warnings. In contrast to Adit's her world is highly regimented and drab. Adit tells Sarah:

     You are like a 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 prettier (74).

Except these tender words, the novel hardly presents any scene of love or intimacy to indicate that they have some other initial fascination for each other. They are seen settling down to a dull, drab routine of cooking, washing dishes and keeping house. The large part of the novel is devoted to the depiction of social isolation of Adit and Sarah. In the beginning, Adit appreciates England because it has given him social and economic freedom. He has married Sarah and adopted British Citizenship He develops a passionate attachment for England. He regards England as a land of infinite opportunities and he thinks of the poverty and misery of his own countrymen. He praises English people and their habits. Despite all his love and regard for England and self-hatred, England does not accept him. He is, like others, abused, insulted and humiliated all the time. England, simply, offers him simple clerical job in a tiny travel agency without any future prospect. Hence, he feels homesick. He starts disliking England. Standing in the middle of the busy and crowded Oxford Street, Adit eagerly wishes to see a bullock cart or a "monkey wallah". He wishes to see, anything different in colour,
tempo, sound, flavor, anything individual and eccentric unruly and unplanned, anything Indian at all(187). Sarah, Adit's wife, by marrying an Indian, lives the life of a cultural exile. She feels displaced in England. Married to an Indian, she tries her best to adjust herself with her husband and his friends. She never thinks that she will be passing through a plight. She incurs the anger of the white society by marrying a brown Asian as she had broken the social code of England. So, she is always subject to taunts and comments of not only her colleagues but even of young pupils of the school where she works as a clerk. She always avoids any question regarding her husband and family life but peers take a perverse delight in asking such questions. Julìa who is a teacher in her school comes out with typical British superciliousness. Sarah dreads such comments:

She was still breathing hard at having so narrowly escaped having to answer personal question. It would have wrecked her for the whole day to have to discuss Adit with Julia, with Miss. Pimm, in this sane, chalk – dusted, work a day office. She was willing to listen for hours Miss Pimm's diagnosis of her aches and pains."... "But to display her letters from India, to discuss her Indian husband, would have forced her to parade like an imposter, to make claims to a life, an identity that she did not herself feel to be her own, although they would have been more than ready to believe her." "..."she had stammered out her replies, too unhappy even to accuse them of tactlessness or inquisitiveness and, for her pains, had heard Julia shift, as she left the room, "If she's ashamed of having an Indian husband, why did she go and marry him?( 38-39).

Even the young pupils of her school taunt her. As she darted through their throng, they pretended not to notice her at all, but once she came across the road, she heard their scream: "Hurry hurry, Mrs. Scurry! and "Where's the fire, pussy cat?" (36).
The inter-racial marriage of Sarah also affects her day-to-day life. When she goes for shopping she avoids going to the stores of Laurel have where she lives, for her day-to-day life. When she goes for shopping she avoids going to the stores of Laurel where she lives. For her, shopping would easily betray her link with India. So she prefers going to big department buyer, none knowing her Asian connection:

She went into the supermarket to wander amongst the stocked shelves in an absent-mindedly happy way for she loved the supermarket, only just remembering to snatch up a bottle of mango chutney and a Lyons blackberry pie in order not to arouse the accountant's suspicion. The supermarket was a soothing place to her. Here she could buy her Patna rice and her pickles without acquiring the distinct personality; these purchases would have marked her with, had she shopped for them in one of those pleasant little shops at the end of Laurel Lane". "... But inside the sparkling halls of the supermarket where walls of soap and cornflakes hid her from strangers’ eyes, she could be as eccentric, as individual, as she pleased without being noticed by even a mouse (40).

The incidents create inter-personal and intra-psychic conflicts in her, threatening disintegration of personality. She can resolve them. So she must escape them to save her self. Hence, she takes recourse to withdrawal over the years she has learnt the art of 'side stepping.' In her own social circle in the school, she finds it easier to let others talk of themselves rather than discuss her life. This is how she minimizes her conflicts. Sarah buys a chocolate for the girl but the moment the child queries about Indian postage stamps, she with holds her gift. Consciously she feels as if the child has let out her secret:

Out it tumbled, rattling, terrible- a hut, a crab, a grain of sand. There it lay her secret... to know India become Indian---To have anyone pry upon them, break
in upon the shadowed intimacy of her relationship with them, was violent, shaking, terrible (35-36).

Disharmony prevails in Sarah's domestic life and seems to threaten her marriage. Adit hates English cooking. She has not learnt to cook Bengali food to his satisfaction. Whereas Sarah does not relish Indian music, Adit loves it. She remains an alien in Adit's social circle not equipped to participate in their jokes, conversations and laughter. They have also different perceptions about keeping pets in their house. Adit can not tolerate the presence of cats in the kitchen. He thinks that if his mother were to see them she would die of heart attack. But Sarah has her own views about keeping pets. She thinks she could live in a house without pets some how. As also she reminds Adit about the sacred cows in India. These factors create marital dissonance. Shaken her married life being what it is, she begins to play roles to hard wink people, and even herself, she would display her letters from Indian and discuss her husband, knowing very well that she is parading like an impostor to make claims to a life, an identity that she does not herself feel to be her own. This acting out of roles tells upon her nerves and she feels so cut and slashed into living, bleeding pieces. By the time they move to live in a new house, Adit relives himself from Sarah's life also. Puzzled by her husband's bewilderment she begins to have a clear idea of her miserable life:

It was though she had chosen to be cast out of her home, her background, and would not be drawn back to it, not even by her husband... she listened to the stream rush and an awl cry and felt herself cut loose from her moorings and began drift round and round heavily and giddily, as though caught in a slow whirlpool of dark, deep water (147-148).

After marriage with Adit Sarah faces an identity crisis:

She had become nameless, she had shed her name as she had shed her ancestry and identity, and she sat there, staring, as though she watched them disappear.
Or could only someone who knew her background and her marriage, imagine this? Would a stranger has seen in her lost maiden in search of her name that she seemed, with a sudden silver falling of the light of glamour, to an unusually subdued thoughtful Adit? (33).

Sarah has lost her identity by marring an Indian. She sacrifices identity as a British woman. She sacrifices childhood, family and friend. Sarah alienates from herself. She doesn't desire to be labeled as an Indian as she has seen Indian immigrants in England, suffering from feelings of inferiority. Though Sarah has lost her parents, friends and the English world, but she has not been able to identify herself with the Indian world which she hopes her marriage would bring to her. In her anguish, she feels that she is neither English nor Indian like her husband Adit. She also feels that she is leading an affected, artificial life. On account of marrying Adit she has become a "Nowhere woman" and fails to realize as to which group she really belongs to. She herself feels a loss of identity:

Who was she? Mrs. Sen who had been married in a red and gold Benares brocade sari one burning bronzed day in September, or Mrs. Sen, the Head's Secretary...They were roles and when she was not playing them she was nobody. Her face was only a mask, her body only a costume Where was Sarah? ... 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 (36).

Social and cultural disparity hampers the married life of Sarah and Adit. So they have difficulty in adjusting to each other's concepts. The concept of cleanliness also causes problem in the adjustment to domestic life. Sarah takes no care to prepare food for her husband and to protect food from the cat sniffing at in and Adit's appetite is killed when he thinks of eating the unclean food.
Adit's Bengali music is also dissonance to Sarah's ears. Sarah can not join him and his Indian friends in their conversation, jokes and laughter, remaining a foreigner in their world. She has problems in wearing the Indian Sari and jewellery. They do not understand each other's religious rights. However, she makes efforts to prove herself a faithful wife. Sarah wants to be a real person whether English or Indian. She tries her best to remain a sincere wife seeing to it that her marital life is not destroyed. When after the 1965 Indo Pak war Adit is in the process of making a decision to leave England for good, he is very edgy and unstable and this is the time when he needs a cooperative understanding wife. And Sarah does well as the wife. She carefully handles her husband:

She could not tell what effect the smallest refusal or contradiction might have on him... Rather she would sacrifice anything, anything at all, in order to maintain, however superficially, a semblance of order and discipline in her house, in her relationship with him. His whole personality seemed to her to have cracked apart ... It she allowed this chaos to reflect upon their marriage, she knew its fragments would not remain jangling together but would scatter, drift and crumble (200).

Inspite of it, she feels miserable to observe that the members of her family are highly critical of her. She is very dutiful and is inwardly supported by the conviction of a priestess that if all the rites were performed, all the rules observed, life would be after all quite simple. She is anguished by a sense of emptiness and lack of fulfillment, despite the fact that she tries to be an ideal and faithful wife. Sarah is torn between the two worlds. She is constantly subjected to inner tortures and sufferings. She finds herself nowhere at home. She loves solitude. She feels alienated from herself and the society.

Sarah is not very happy because of racial prejudice of her people. But as a wife she is very sensibly takes care of things. Being alienated woman, Sarah understands her husband,
his family and country. Therefore, of all wives of Anita Desai, she is the best in understanding and supports her husband. Adit declares his decision of returning back to India and his son will be born in India. This declaration by Adit perturbs Sarah. She is caught in a tragic situation. She is highly sensitive. Now she has three challenges before her:

There was the baby. There was the Voyage. The uprooting she somehow consoles herself: I think when I go to India, I will not find it so strange after all. I am sure I shall feel quite at home very soon (201).

The idea of going back to India and leaving England triggers Sarah's mind she feels the painful process of leaving England. Here, her English self dies down. Her inner suffering shows the real dilemma of isolation. It has got real intensity. Sarah feels herself as nothing more than a chipped cup that was not worth the trouble packing up or giving away but was best left here, like the remains of a picnic, a holiday on a lonely bank or a deserted beach. She listened to the waves receding down this beach on which she had been left, listened to footsteps sinking down the road. At this moment her curiosity and her courage shrunk inside her into a single drop of rain, a flake of ice, and she could hardly believe that Adit would be able to lift her and to transport her to a land where she would regain warmth and personality. It is she to come to life there again. She is sure, it would be as a new, a different personality. Perhaps, this would make all easier for her, for Adit, for everyone. But, that afternoon, when she sits alone—Emma is up stair conducting a committee meeting, she feels at the pangs of saying goodbye to her past twenty four years:

It was English self that was receding and fading and dying, she knows, it was her English self to which she must say good-by. That was what hurt—not saying good bye to England, because England would remain as it was. ... English, she whispered, and then her instinctive reaction was to clutch at some thing and hold on to what was slipping through her fingers already (215).
Sarah is not prepared to deconstruct her Englishness. Hence, even though Adit assures her that if they don't like it, they would come back anytime she doesn't feel assured. At last, she agrees to accompany Adit.

Sarah, in the novel, is an existentialist character like Maya, Monisha and Sita. But she is not insane or abnormal. She is only over sensitive. Marriage with Adit has given her nothing but alienation and loneliness. The pathos of a culturally alienated girl are most movingly rendered in Sarah's life. She, as a matter of fact, is an English girl but acts with characteristic values of an Indian wife when she accepts her husband's choice. She, in the last section of the novel, faces crisis. She accepts her husband's argument to leave England with the characteristic submission of a traditional Indian wife:

She could not tell what effect the smallest refusal or contradiction might have on him- he might start beating his chest and complaining of being misunderstood, he might shout screaming accusations at her, he might shut himself up and weep ... anything was possible in his highly strung and dramatic condition she dreaded such a reaction. Rather she would sacrifice anything, anything at all, in order to maintain, however, superficially a semblance of order and discipline in her house, in her relationship with him.

(230-231).

She has to annihilate her individual identity and self because marriage leaves her no choice. In this respect, Sarah is very much like Sita, Nanda Kaul and, of course, Maya and Monisha who are all annihilated by marriage. While leaving England, Sarah does feel a few regrets but it does not develop into an emotional crisis.

Like an existentialist, Sarah suffers from the anguish of alienation of her self. Anita Desai has beautifully rendered the anxiety and anguish of a girls who becomes a victim of alienation due to intercultural factors.. It is the description of her conflict and anguish of her
loneliness arouse pathos and deserve human sympathy. The root cause of Sarah's existential dilemma has been the cultural gap between herself and Adit, between herself and others including her parents. This results in a breakdown of the ways of communication between them and due to this failure of communication she misinterprets the reality. Sarah's alienation is two fold at she fails to communicate with her husband symbolizing the Indian culture and her own people symbolizing the British culture. The social factors as well as personal factors are responsible for it so. She is overpowered by the sense of defeat, depression, shamefulfulness, and self-hatred and consequently is separated from her real self.

*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) is Anita Desai's fourth novel which is a psychological and sensitive study of a modern Indian woman whose loneliness, boredom and agony arise out of existential constitutional and sociological factors. It is the intense story of a sensitive young wife torn between the desire to abandon the boredom and hypocrisy of her middle class and ostensibly comfortable existence, and the realization that the bonds that bind her to it cannot easily be broken. In short, it is a skilful dramatization of an unusual life situation of an anguished woman. It is a story of Sita who is the protagonist of the novel. She is a nervous, sensitive, introvert, subjective middle aged woman. Sita finds herself alienated from her husband and children because of her emotional and explosive reactions to many things that happen to her. She is badly disturbed by the violence and cruelty ground her. Sita, in the novel, is representative of the alienation of a woman, a wife, a mother a loneliness conditional by family and society. Marital incoherence clearly strikes in the novel. Sita's psychic plight too is similar to that of Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* and Monisha in *Voices in the City*. She is also oppressed and depressed with loveless wedlock with Raman.

The novel has three part structure pattern. Those are Monsoon 67", "Winter 47" and "Monsoon 67". These three parts illustrate the thematic pattern of the novel. The first part "Monsoon 67" presents disintegration in which Sita, heroine, is tossed about rootlessly on the
waves of a monsoon sea. The second section "Winter 47" stands for integration, and the third and the last section "Monsoon 67" is a continuation of the first section of the novel divided by a fixed hinge of the past and stand for reintegration.

Sit, a middle aged woman, is the mother of four children. She is the daughter of well known freedom fighter and social worker. After India's independence, her father wants to quite political life and to live in a lonely house on the island of Manori. The house is gifted to him by a Parsi millionaire, Dalwala, the richest and most recent of her father's admirers:

It is a small return for the great difference you have made in my life" he had said, slightly bowing as he stood beside the father who reclined on a straw mat." only a token of my respect" ...Lolling weakly on a while bolster, father had faintly smiled. "I always wanted" he confessed, "to find a village where I could put my social theories into practice. I have been theorizing for too many years. I should like to experiment now. Manori will be perfect (60).

The house namely, 'Jeevan Ashram', "The Home of the Soul" becomes the place where Sita's father wants to carry out certain personal experiments most probably religious ones. In a separate room, upstairs sitting on strew mat, he offers his prayers several times a day. The villagers and fisher folk respect and admire him for his miracles- "magic cures"- providing them sweet water of the well to drink, teaching them how to grow rich crop. But to Sita, her father remains a riddle. Not being able to communicate with him, she forms uncertain impression about him. So she doubts if he cures by magic and not by medicines and faith.

Sita has lived a strange and unusual life. She, living in her flat, feels bored as member of her family follows their own ways of life. Well-known freedom fighter whom many of his disciples consider "the second Gandhi". He is mostly in Jail. Sita has no mother to look after her. She is denied the regular life of a normal child. She does not get opportunities for schooling. She lives in the island sometimes alone and sometimes in the company of her
brother Jivan with clay and mud. Sita has never seen her mother. She is a mystery to Sita. Jivan tells her that she runs away Banaras, and that Rekha is her step sister. Her father’s personality grows more and more mysterious to her. Sita comes to think of her mother’s desertion of him:

Why had she left? She continued to wonder. why had she left three children ...Rekha, who it was true, may not have been her own but another woman's child, the child of another ghost in her father's life. Jivan the quick, clever, unscrupulous and irresistible boy, and Sita? why called the second Gandhi?

Why was she not at the island with them, participating in the experiment that all called unique, great and Gandhian? Did she not agree with them (86-87).

All the experiences regarding her father and mother make Sita loose her faith on life and develop in her mind uncertain and unrealistic attitude towards life.

Sita marries with Raman, the son of her father's friend Deedar. Raman is a factory owner. Like Gautama, Raman also keeps himself busy in his business. He is indifferent to his wife, Sita. He is opposite to his wife both in ideas and attitude. He represents the prose of life, while Sita the poetry of life. Hence, Sita is not happy with her matter of fact & indifferent husband, Raman. Raman and Sita do not play a role of an ideal husband wife relationship. There is a lack of harmony in their lives. Sita finds every existence threatened with boredom.

Raman fails to understand how or why she feels bored:

[...] she herself looking on it saw it stretched out so vast, so flat, so deep, that in fright scrambled about it, searching for a few of these moments that proclaimed her still alive, not quite drowned and dead( 50).

She spends almost all her time on the balcony, smoking, looking out at the sea. Sita is a sensitive woman. She desires love and affection in life. She expects a close communion with her husband, Raman, but all invain. Seeing a couple in the Hanging Garden, loving each
other, free from all the worldly conversation so intense, quite divine or insane and her heart
beings to weep and she murmurs distractedly,"Children only mean anxiety, concern
pessimism.Not happiness.What other women call happiness is just-just sentimentality."
(147). The way ladies behaved in the house of Raman, the violence she witnessed there,
makes her utterly helpless, desperate and disappointed in life. In the meantime, Situ is blessed
with four children. Sita is suffocated in the unpleasant atmosphere of the family. Hence,
when pregnant for the fifth time, Sita decides not to give birth to the fifth child in a world of
violence and hatred – the world where there are crows attacking a helpless eagle, where there
are ayahs fighting in the streaks, where people lived for nothing but 'appetite and sex'. Sita
feels suffocation where people live like animals. Sita's intention of keeping her baby unborn
appears to be foolish but through this foolishness of her behaviour, she has succeeded in
maintaining her individuality. In such condition, only one escapes into the past, to the island,
the magic land. She knows that there are two periods of her life, each in direct contrast of
other. And life for her has no periods, no stretches. It simply swirls around muddling and
confusing, leading to no where. That is why she takes the benefit of Raman's query Where
Shall We Go Summer? Replying at once 'To Manori’ pilgrimage to that place of wonder and
miracles where she can keep her unborn baby safe and sound. Sita, with her two children
Karan and Menaka, reaches the island house. In Jeevan Ashram at Manori, nobody, neither
moses, the caretaker not the villagers who simply stared at her, has a liking for her but for the
loving memory of her father. Sita's return a Manori is like the withdrawal of Monisha and
Nirode, and act of rejection. She is unable to bear the violence and destruction around her the
quarrelling sessions of the servants and the fighting amongst the children. She has not been
able to adjust herself in her husband's family and has longed for the sensitive approach in
others. She is also unable to bear the violence in the world at large. Sita goes to Manori in
search of a miracle, of sane way of confining and preserving life without the need for it to be
exposed to constant danger. This returning to Manori becomes for Sita a trip of self discovery and recognition of reality. Sita's return to Manori is not under any illusion of her past life. After twenty years, the island life has become a symbol of a private refuge and is only a route of escape for her:

Knowing that accepting that, she knows it was because ordinary life, the everyday world had grown so insufferable to her that she could think of the magic island again as of release. If the sea was so dark so cruel, then it was better to swim back into the net. It reality was not to be born, then illusion was the only alternative (60).

Sita sees the face of reality in this world of illusion and realizes that in essence there can be no running away from reality.

Sita, in the novel, moves like a pendulum between her past and present memories. She spends her childhood on the island of Manori with her father who becomes a legend in his own life-time. After independence her first visit to Manori with her father is always remembered by her. Sita's married life witnesses full of conflicts and mental tension. When she returns to Manori with her children, the conflict is also seen between Sita and her uninvolved children. Both Menaka and Karan fail to adjust to the primitive life on Manori. They want to go back to Bombay to live the urban life. The sharp conflict between Sita and Menaka is also seen in the novel in which she discusses the science and opulence of art. Sita says:

Oh, science, Menaka! science can't be as satisfactory. It is all – all figures, statistics logic. Science is believing that two and two make four-pooh... Nothing, nothing. It is a mask, to shroud, nothing else. It leads you to a dead-end. There are no dead-ends, now, in art. That is something spontaneous, Menaka, and alive, and creative"...Menaka lost interest she had heard that
argument too often ... That's all nonsense" She muttered..." And art is nonsense?" (116-117)

Sita finds complete opposite atmosphere in contemporary city life. She also finds animality and cannibalism all around in the society. She experiences Raman's sarcastic comments and Menaka's indifferences to plants in crumbling a sheaf's of new buds on the small potted plant. Sita has been laboring to grow on the balcony. She also finds "Karan's violence in building a tower of blocks only for the pure, lustful joy of throwing it over with a great clatter". She also finds society as represented by the ayahs, the cook, and the nameless, faceless multitudes. This society is best viewed by Sita in the crows which are explained in the first section. "Monsoon 67":

Crows formed the shadow civilization in that city of flats and alleys. She watched them from the balcony, hopping clownishly about the rocks on which the sea broke, scrambling to catch a rotten fish or scraps of edible flotsam left by the waves to stink in the sun. They even sat on the ledges and balcony rails of the flats, waiting for lazy cooks to throw out a bucketful of kitchen garbage into the alley craps were caught by them in mid air, except for all the clownishness, tattered wings holding them aloft as they twisted and flapped to get the largest bits. There are always much black drama in this crow theatre murder infanticide, incest, theft and robbery, all were much practiced by these rough, raucous, rasping tatterdemalions (38).

For Sita, Manori becomes legend. In Manori, she recalls her childhood spent with her father who came to the island, developed it. There she witnesses her father's glamour and saintly aura. But now she suspects that there is an illicit relationship between her father and Phoolmaya. Moreover, her father's affection for her elder sister, Rekha is somewhat incestuous. Unfortunately, in her second visit to Manori the glamour, joy of the enchanted
island have been passed away- the youthful moses, the adhesive Miriam, gay fishermen, Deader "Baba" and his devotional chelas. This has happened with the passing away of her father. The drama of Manori has left the enchanted island to decay and Sita to the cruelties and tedium of Bombay's urban sophistication. In the core of her heart, she believes that the magic of the island will wipe out the evil spell and her unborn child will remain within her womb for ever. But in Manori she feels forlorn and neglected. She has begun to think of the meaninglessness of life.

Karan and Menaka fail to respond to the island. Menaka writes to her father Raman about her ensuing admission to the college. Accordingly, Raman comes to the island to take her back to Bombay. Menaka wants to become a doctor. Menaka and Karan quietly ask their father to take them back to Bombay. Sita feels that "they were being disloyal to her, disloyal to the island and its wild nature" (94) . Sita feels betrayed when she learns that Raman has come to Manori not to see her but to take Menaka. She feels that she is a woman unloved and rejected by everyone. She now realizes that the island now lacks all miracles or magical charms. Raman calls Menaka packing things quickly. Sita becomes ready for it:

 Pack up your things, Menaka" he calls to her, "we're going now, before its dark" Behind him, Sita souted, "Don't worry, Menaka, I will pack. I will pack all air things together (152)

However, by the end, revelation comes to Sita and she accepts the world of reality as she finds that Raman by nature is not aggressive but a perfectionist. He is meticulous and punctilious in fulfilling his obligations:

 Menaka's admission to medical college gained, wife led to hospital, new child safely brought fourth, the children reared, the factory seen to a salary earned, a salary spent (138-139).
Raman cannot tolerate lack of control shown by Sita. He is fair, just and dutiful. But he cannot understand Sita's rebelliousness. For him, it is difficult to comprehend the motives of Sita and her self-effacing drives. It injures her self-image. Her hopes of getting love are frustrated. She tells him once: "I thought I could live with you and travel alone – mentally, emotionally. But after that day, that wasn't enough. I had to stay whole, I had to" (148).

Sita's reconciliation with life and its existence shows the maturity of perception. It is the compromise which is made by Sita. Anita Desai, in her interview, observes that in order to survive in the world, one has to compromise with life:

Of course it one is alive, in this world, one cannot survive without compromise drawing the line means certain death, and in the end, Sita opts for life- with compromise- consoling herself with Lawrence's verse, with the thought that she is compelled to make this tragic choice because she is a part of the earth, of life, and can not more reject it than the slumberous egg can or the heifer or the grain (Atma Ram Interview with Desai, 21-23).

The compromise made by Sita is gained after a prolonged period of intra-psychic conflicts. It sows sign of her maturity and development. Her journey in the novel is from compliance to rebellion and then to withdrawal, again coming back to compliance. For Sita, the answer to life's problems does not lie in running away from it but in facing it bravely. The revelation helps her to integrate herself.

Sita's move from fragmentation to a cosmic awareness enhances her chance of self discovery. She has realized that marriage and all human relationship are farce. She talks about the Muslim woman who was deeply loved by a man in the Hanging Gardens. She deeply realizes the truth of her life: "they made me see my own life like a shadow, absolutely flat, uncoloured" (147). However, Sita comes to realize her mistakes. She herself becomes a prey to rejustification of her past deeds. Therefore, when Raman prepares to leave for the
mainland she mends her ways and follows the footprints of Raman that he has laid out for her:

She lowered her head and searched out his footprints so that she could place her feet in them, as a kind of game to make walking back easier and so her footprints mingled with his (150).

This passage reveals Sita's existential predicament of the values of society around her and her return to conformity. She realizes the difference between the necessity and the wish, between what a man wants and what he is compelled to do. The novel has happy and positive ending which harmonizes all hues of human life. This ending is highly encouraging and life enhancing. Sita, like Maya in Cry, the Peacock and Monisha in Voices in the City, does not come violent at the end. She finds the courage to face life, in the end, with all its ups and downs. Suresh Kohli speaking about the ending of the novel, rightly points out that as compared to the earlier works, there is one distinct change:

Sita neither dies in the end nor kills anyone nor does she become meld. She simply compromises with her destiny and learns the courage to face life boldly with all its ups and downs (Kohli, 10).

In the concluding part of the novel, Sita's character has been completely evolved. Sita who has been unable to come out of her egotistical self now gets an apocalyptic vision. Earlier she is unable to compromise with her husband, but now she can see things in a circular form, and ring, making the moments experience something permanent she finds that all her life is false, a Maya and her current experience is real. She gets self knowledge. As a result, she loves Raman, admires him, his ideas and his self. The reign of chaos is over, there is unity. She is in full agreement with the natural rhythm of life. She is ready for the birth of her child. In the woman, she sees the vision of herself in the nursing home, doctors, nurses, labour pain, and garments of the infant in her stream of consciousness with a mixed feeling of
pain and pleasure during childbirth. She becomes supreme commander of life, absorbing all the incongruities of her surrounding, her husband, and children. She goes out of hard shell of one individual identity, making herself a complete personality in duality. In her confusing world she sees a circle she has seen all the stages of her life and has yet to give birth to a child, attaining to a full circle of life. It is here we find Sita’s vision:

[...] She ... looked out of the window to see him (Karan) running round and round in circles on the terrace, as it warming up his motor for the journey. Giddy from kneeling and bending so long, she felt herself whirling round and round as well, she felt the long, straight, monotonous tract of her life whip it self round her in swift circles, perhaps a spiral, whirling around and around till its very lines dissolved and turned to a blur of silver, the blurred silver of the mirror like window panes. All was bright, all was blurred, all was in a whirl. Life had no periods, no stretches. It simply swirled around, muddling and confusing, leading now here (154-55).

This passage reveals, the moment of illumination in the life of Sita. As a result of it, all personalities melt in one. Her identity crisis is over. Sita has been changed.

Through the character of Sita, Desai offers a positive solution to the temperamentmal adjustment and alienation in the present day situations. It means compromise with the circumstances marks a significant change in her second phase in Anita Desai's outlook as she herself says, Had I written the book ten years ago I would have ended it with Sita's suicide"(97). Anita Desai has adopted a new mature attitude towards the hopelessness of an individual in the society.

Anita Desai stresses on the existential problems at womankind. Although she does not belong to any feminist movement, yet there is a touch of persuasive feminism in her writings. She successfully depicts the inner world of sensibility and the chaos inside the mind of
characters with a special stress on female psyche. Sita represents progressive phase of feminine self-perception. She desires to be respected and recognized as individual in her own right and not taken for granted. Sita's revolt is representative of an intelligent sensitive revolt against the male smugness and philistinism trampling all finer values in marital life. Sita is a rebellious housewife. Her rebellious attitude towards society and her bold refusal to accept its values crystallize in her decision not to have fifth body delivered in order that she may achieve the miracle of not giving birth. She comes from Bombay to Manori revolting against all norms and advice. She becomes militantly aggressive towards all- Raman, her children and later towards mosses. She wrests a kind of victory by rebelling against her bondage and over coming her weakness. In protecting her child from the callous world, Sita in fact guards her self image. She plays a role to guard herself from the crushing circumstances. She also rebels against the, "vegetable existence" lived by the women of Raman's family. Initially it is only a verbal attack, then she takes recourse to a more flagrant disregard for their way of life by taking to smoking. Shocking them thus, Sita enjoys a sense of superiority.

Anita Desai's fifth novel *Fire on the Mountain* was published in London in 1977. The novel is short listed for England's coveted Broker prize. This is the first of Desai's novels to be published in the United States. The novel placed her reputation as one of the best Indian English novelists. It has won the Royal society of Literature's Winifred Holt by Memories prize. The novel deals with a fascinating female character, Nanda Kaul and her female psyche. It is also focused on three female characters and their experiences in life that include two elderly ladies-Nanda Kaul, Ila Das and one small girl- Raka. In this novel, Anita Desai has examined the dangerous situation of women in wilderness by placing these three characters against Kasuli. The novel concerns with the existential angst experienced by the female protagonist Nanda Kaul, an old lady leading a life of isolation and introspection. It also projects the inner turmoil of a small girl, Rakh. She is haunted by a sense of futility. It
also presents the plight of a helpless woman, Ila Das who is in conflict with forces that are too powerful to be encountered, resulting in her tragic death. All these three female characters move or less move from a state of conflict to a state of impulses such as neurosis and death-wish which are self destructive in nature. They prove to be inadequate impulses to solve their existential problems.

The novel is divided in three parts. All these three parts of the novel are concerned with one of the three women characters – Nanda Kaul at Carignano, Raka comes to Carignano, Ila Das leaves Carignano. The first section 'Nanda Kaul Carignano' deals with Nanda Kaul, the main protagonists' lonely life in Kasauli. Part II "Raka comes to Carignano' deals with the experience of Raka who seems to enjoy the richness of life at Carignano. Section III "Ila Das leaves Carignano' deals with the barren life and the tragic death of Ila Das, a welfare officer.

The novel presents a study of Nanda Kaul and Raka who lead a like of social recluse: "If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, her great grandmother was a recluse by nature, by instinct" (52). Nanda Kaul is a wife of an ex-Vice Chancellor of Punjab University. She works hard for her husband, children, grand children, relatives and others and was quite sincere in doing her family duties. However she has bitter experiences of a marital life. Their wedding was veritably based on physical lust and circumstantial convenience for Mr. Kaul. 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. Nanda Kaul becomes a mother, grandmother and great grandmother of many unwanted and unloved children. Her life as a Vice-chancellor's wife though crowded and full of social activity was truly purposeless and unsatiating. There have been too many guests coming and going all the time. She ever passes her life to arrange the dinner table as a hard working hostess. Anita Desai presents the trauma of a housewife, Nanda Kaul:
The old house, the full house, of that period of her life when she was the Vice-Chancellor's wife and at the hub of a mall but intense busy world, had not pleased her. It's cording had stifled her [....] There had been too many guests coming and going, tongs and rickshaws piled up under the eucalyptus trees and the bougainvilleas, their drivers asleep on the seats with their feet hanging over the bars. The many rooms of the house had always been full, extra beds would have had to be made up, often in not very private corners of the hall of veranda, so that there was a shortage of privacy that vexed her. Too many trays of tea would have to be made and carried to her husband's study, to her mother –in-law's bedroom, to the veranda that was the gathering place for all, at all times of the day. Too many meals, too many dishes on the table, too much to wash up after. They had had so many children, they had gone to so many different schools and colleges at different times of the day, and had so many tutors- one for mathematics who was harsh and slapped the unruly boys, one for drawing who was lazy and smiled and did nothing, and others equality incompetent and irritating. Then three had been their friends, all of different ages and sizes and families (31-32).

Nanda Kaul's busy world can be explicated by the following passage also. Anita Desai depicts as:

She would go to the kitchen to the see the milk taken out of the ice-box , the layer of cream drawn off, the row of mugs on a tray hilled and carried out to the green table on the veranda around which the children already sat on their low cane stools the little girls still having their long hair plaited and their fresh cotton dresses buttoned, and the boys throwing themselves back wards and kicking the table legs and clamoring with hunger. then there was the bread to
be spread with butter, jam jars opened and dug into, knives, taken away from babies and boys, girls questioned about homework, servants summoned to mop up spilt milk and fetch tea, and life would swirl on again, in an eddy, a whirlpool of which she was the still, fixed eye in the centre(26).

Nanda Kaul, externally appears to be free from harshness but internally she burns with a fire of frustration. She feels lonely and neglected. Above all, Mr. Kaul carries on a life long illicit affair with Miss Davidson, the Mathematics mistress and the member of the teaching staff. He invites her for badminton parties, and compels her to stay at night and comes back secretly to his separate bedroom.But Nanda Kaul keeps the congealed smile on her face. Despite Nanda Kaul's sacrifices, sincere and hard working, life has not honoured her claims. In the past, she felt that if she was good and dutiful, others would treat her with love. But the realities of her life make her feel frustrated and estranged. Her husband's dishonesty with her, callous and ungrateful attitude of her children give her torturing blows. She realizes that she is not the queen of her home but just an unloved taken for granted woman, mother of her husband's children a social symbol of his respectability. These are the situations which have forced Nanda Kaul to desire for a quite, retired life in Carignano, a desolate and haunted house in Kasauli Viz:

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 (158).
This passage aptly presents Nanda Kaul's misery. She has withdrawn from life and family and we find her a solitary figure in Carignano, of Kasauli. Carignano is situated on the long narrow hilltop, mountain range in Kasauli. She is completely satisfied with its starkness and seclusion. The image of Carignano is explained as:

She turned around and gazed at her house instead, simple and white and shining on the bleached ridge. On the north side the wall was washed by the blue shadows of the low, dense apricot trees. On the east wall, the sun glared, scoured and sharp. It seemed so exactly right as a house for her, it satisfied her heart completely (5).

Nanda Kaul chooses the place for its barrenness. It is symbolic of the loneliness and barrenness of human life in general and Nanda Kaul in particular. It also suggests the desolate life of Nanda Kaul herself:

What pleased and satisfied her so, here at Carignano, was its barrenness. This was the chief virtue of all Kasauli, of course its starkness. It had rock, it had pines. It had light and air. In every direction there was a sweeping view – to the north, of the mountains, to the south, of the plains. Occasionally an eagle swam through this clear unobstructed mass of light and air (4).

Carignano has its own history and the postman is the historian, who has known the house before is, was Nanda Kaul's. The house is built in 1843 by Colonel MacDougal for his wife, Alice who could not bear the heat of Ambala Cantonment and hoped to save her children by taking them Kasauli. After the death of Colonel and his wife, the occupants of the house were Miss Appleby, Miss Lawrence, Miss Jane Strewsbury till the declaration of independence. After declaration of independence in 1947, Kasauli was not considered safe for maiden ladies. So they sent back to England. Then, Carignano is bought by Nanda Kaul who is the first Indian occupant of the favourite sojourn of the British ladies.
Nanda Kaul remembers her the days of childhood and youth life. She has passed her childhood and youth in all comforts and in high spirit, in Kashmir, on the banks of Dal Lake where they have a house of their own. They rowe about the Dal Lake in Shikaras. In summer they used to take a houseboat and have it punted to Nagin Lake which had orchards and saffron fields on its banks. They would fish in the lake, ride through the orchards. Her mother used to have sacks full of almonds, pistachios, chilgozas which they ate to their fill. They have almost a zoo in their house, containing a Himalayan bear, tiger-cats, dogs, monkeys and parrots.

Nanda Kaul has become altogether a different person after the death of her husband. She distrusts all attachment and affairs:

After the death of her husband she has been so glad when it was over. She had been glad to leave it all behind in the plains, like a great, heavy, difficult book that she had read through and was not required to read again [...] 'discharge me' she groaned; I have discharged all my duties. Discharge (32-33).

Nanda Kaul has been completely changed in Kasauli. She comes to Kasauli for passing her retirement. She has cut herself from the affairs of life, even in the lives of her children and grand children whom she had reared with care and affection. One who has mothered so many children, looking after children and grand- children, supervising a host a servants, attending to the guests, has come to live Kasauli where nobody came to visit her, and she has none to care for or to care for her. Her arrival at Carignano is a turning point in her life. After the death of her husband, her children assemble to vacate the Vice-chancellor's residence. They pack the goods in crates and distribut some of the goods among them selves. Then they come to Carignano with Nanda Kaul to settle her there but they took leave of her the same day to attend to their respective duties and business life. They don’t stay, not does Nanda Kaul ask them not to leave her to pass a solitary life all too suddenly. On the contrary, she takes this
life as fish takes out water. They all left Carignano. She enjoys being left alone at Kasauli. She has relief not from the overbuy schedule but also the cares and worries of the mundane life.

She has a remarkable change in her thinking also. She has no desire to make her dueling more pleasant. She accepts Carignano as she has found it she has not planted any new trees, nor has she felled any of the standing ones, she has renounced the world and accepted life as it has come to her after trials and tribulations. She does not want to add anything to what was left to her. She ignores all contact and relations. The news of the arrival of Raka, her great granddaughter conveys to her through a letter, unsettles her. The news of it is a recall to duty, a return to the world which she has renounced. She is greatly upset. She thinks that she is in perfect harmony with nature; but her heaven, she thinks, would be ruined. Even Ram Lal also has similar feelings. Yet she cannot deny the request of her daughter Asha to allow Raka to come after near-fatal attack of typhoid. Asha informs Nanda that Taras husband, Rakesh is posted at Geneva and she advises Tara to go with him to Geneva to live with her husband. She has to go to Mumbai to help Vina with her confinement. She wouldn't able to take Raka with her to Mumbai as the humidity and heat of Mumbai would affect her health adversely. So Asha writes to Nanda Kaul that she would send Raka to her for relieving her of boredom and loneliness. Second female character and Raka, the great granddaughter of Nanda Kaul is not a normal child by any standard. To Nanda Kaul she is an abnormal child in comparison to other children and grandchildren:

Amongst them, she appeared a freak by virtue of never making a demand. She appeared to have no needs. Like an insect burrowing through the sandy loam and pine needles of the hillsides, like her own great grandmother, Raka wanted only one thing to be left alone and pursue her own secret life amongst the rocks and pines of Kasauli (52).
Raka is a dynamic character whose character has been introduced by Deasi's a foil to Nanda Kaul. Nanda Kaul symbolizes a particular aspect of existentialism. Raka epitomizes another aspect of the existential predicament, the influence of her parents on her. Anita Desai makes Raka both young temperamentally and solitude loving. She was a beloved child of Tara and Rakesh. She has been presented in the novel in a dramatic way. That Raka is an unwelcome intruder into Nanda Kaul's life. It is suggested by an image. Nanda Kaul’s first impression about Raka reminds the old lady of an insect:

Raka slowed down, dragged her foot, and then came towards her great grandmother with something despairing in her attitude, saying nothing. She sucked at the loose, curly elastic of an old, broken straw hat that droop eel over her closely cropped head like a straw bag. She turned a pair of extravagantly large and somewhat bulging eyes about in a way that made the old lady feel more than ever her resemblance to an insect (43).

However, Nanda Kaul is shocked to see the pale and gaunt little girl and is moved to pity. But for her ”She is still an intruder, an outsider, a mosquito flown up from the plains to tease and worry”. As a result, no affection grows between them. It is something unnatural and unexpected from a great grandmother. At the beginning, Nanda Kaul is left to herself. Later on, her self-effacing nature desires to love Raka. Nanda Kaul moves between two contradictory forces: withdrawal and involvement, detachment. She is fully aware of Raka's total exclusions of her. The following passage illustrates the point:

But Raka ignored her. She ignored her so calmly, so totally that it made Nanda Kaul 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 (52).

Anita Desai calls Raka a natural recluse and this way compares her with Nanda Kaul:
If Nanda Kaul was a recluse of out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, her great granddaughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct. She had not arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice she was born to is, simply (48).

However it is logical that Raka is not born recluse. She becomes an introvert and likes to remain unseen and unveiled. It is because of the abnormal circumstances around her. She is the victim of parental perturbations:

Some where behind them, behind it all, was her father, home from a party, stumbling and crashing through the curtains of night his mouth opening to let out a flood of ratter stench, beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse – harsh, filthy abuse that make Raka cover under her bedclothes and wet the mattress in fright, feeling the stream of urine warm and weakening between her legs like a stream of blood, and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes and wept (78-79).

This passage reveals disharmonious relationship between her parents and hostile family atmosphere. These are the reasons of her abnormal behaviour. Raka has not received parental love and care. Her father has not time to pass some pleasant period with her. So she is deprived of her fetters love and care. Love has great significance in the wholesome growth of a child.

Raka is a victim of emotional deprivation. She is left quite insecure and isolated. The tortured childhood in her has blunted the spontaneous growth of her soul. It is therefore natural that Raka remains" totally unaware of her dependence" (79). If the world is so hostile, the easiest way is to withdraw from it. Instinctively, Raka learns to expect nothing from it. In return, she has given nothing to it. She has lost internationality. From psychological point of view, the impulses like wish, want, will and action come only after internationality has made
man's experiences meaningful. Raka is not able to get in touch with her impulses at the "wish" level. She is not able to find out the deeper roots of her own thrust into life. She does not tolerate anybody's intrusion into her private and alienated world.

Nanda Kaul, accepts Raka unwillingly in her household. When Raka arrives, she embraces Nanda Kaul with deep love, watching her great grandmother curiously. Both are unable to communicate with each other. She is estranged from her great grant mother, but she is alive to the movements around her. Nanda Kaul avoids meeting with Raka. Having a gift of disappearing suddenly and silently into the forest and hills, Raka likes to be absolutely alone. She desires to be left alone and pursue her own secret life. She watches the movements of squirrels, birds and langurs. She loves to be in the company of stones and trees. Raka is all for freedom and does not wish anyone to meddle with her. Nanda Kaul expresses surprise as well as shock about Raka's total solitariness:

Nanda Kaul wondered if she at all realised how solitary she was. She certainly never asked nor bothered to see if there was a letter for her, or news. Solitude never disturbed her (87).

Nanda Kaul desires to love Raka, but Raka avoids all tenderness spitefully. She carelessly crushes the newly sprung pink zepherantes under pebbles and gravels. Children of her age are often attracted towards fairy tales, flowers and butterflies, but Raka, on the contrary, relates to ugliness. It reveals that she is not a normal child. She possesses a strange imagination. She is attracted towards mysterious place and things. Caretaker of the burnt house thinks of Raka as "the crazy one from Carignano" (91). She never enjoys the company of the gray old ladies like Nanda Kaul and her peculiar jolly friend Ila Das. Their talks bore her to the extent of depression to possess Raka. Like a wild animal newly caged, she keeps prowling barefoot in her room, looking at the stone heaps. Nanda takes Raka to Monkey Raw as an explorer and discover. Nada Kaul always compares her own alienation with that of Raka. Mrs. Kaul finds
in Raka a perfect model of what she once aspired to be herself. The strangeness of Raka affects and attracts Nanda Kaul greatly. She comes out with flattering words:

Raka, you really are a great – grand child of mine,. aren't you? you are more like me than any of my children or grandchildren. You are exactly like me.

Raka (71).

Raka is a complete and perfect solitary figure and solitude never disturbs her. Her life is a close encounter with things that are wild and frightful be it the memories of her mother beaten to pulp by a drunkard father or the chilling cry of the jackals. She does not try to escape from her memories and experiences. Instead of it, she goes farther and deeper into them as if to fathom the bottom of such wild realities. She ventures deep down the ravine to the Monkey point – a place not frequented by others and from where the cries of the jackals are heard:

No one ever came here but Raka and the cuckoos that sang and sang invisibly.

These were not the dutiful domestic birds that called Nanda Kaul to attention at Carignano. They were the demented birds that raved and beckoned Raka on to a land where there was no sound, only silence, no light, only shade, and skeletons kept in beds of ash on which the footprints of jackals flowered in grey ( 99).

This passage reveals Raka's plight and significance. She is an unmistakable symbol of the individuals’ quest for meaning. The jackals are the symbols of the mystery of life and Raka's walk to the Monkey Point is symbolic of her search for something unknown, yet inevitable, and indispensable.

Raka, in Kasauli, is happy in her way. She has created a world of her own there. She takes delight in scrambling up the hills, watching the rocks arrested in midroll, visiting the charred house at the top of the hills, going down the ravine, survey from the hill-top the
landscape of the flow of Punjab's five rivers and Chandigarh's lake. She wonders if there is
too much beauty around. She is virtually shipwrecked and had swum to an uninhabited world
of beauty. The notable feature of Raka's behaviour is that she creates rapport with one but
Ram Lal because he is a specimen of men, unadulterated or undefiled by the worldiness.
Nanda Kaul does not evince joy in meeting her. But Ram Lal receives her in a natural and
instinctive way. He acquaints her with the local conditions, Pasteur Institute, rabbit, dogs and
jackals in the ravine, forest fire, and club life. It is the meeting of Kindred spirits.

At the beginning, Nanda Kaul avoids this experience of enslavement. She experiences
a conflict between submissive and alienated tendencies. But, throughout her life, she has tried
hard to feel wanted and loved. Consciously and unconsciously, her efforts have been to get a
positive response from the family members and others for her self-effacing devotion, but all
in vain. She realizes that her whole life has been lie. However, she tries to hold Raka's
interests. Now, she wishes desperately to love Raka. She realizes that if she is discarded, she
will be crushed by her self-reproach. It explicitly reveals her unconscious desires to be loved.
She tries to establish a better communication with Raka which was blocked totally. She acts
contrary to her detached old woman. Thus, Nanda Kaul gets involved in life once again. At
the beginning, she desires that no one should come to Carignano, later on, she wishes that no
one should go, especially Raka. She is always in a confused state of mind and struggling with
the situations to reach the final solution. Nanda Kaul is also caught in a confused state of
mind after Raka's arrival to the Carignano and finally her self-effacing nature longs to love
and care Raka.

The third woman in the novel is Ila Das, Nanda Kaul's childhood friend. She is a
handicapped spinster. Ila Das is the name of both misery and persecution combined. She is
born in a rich family with high connections such as the Nanda Kaul. She has three brothers
and a sister. It is a quirk of fate that the brothers are healthy and strong while the two sisters,
Ila Das and Rima, are deformed children. Ila Das is short in size and often becomes an object of ridicule due to her small size. In Carignano, Ram Lal offers her the lowest chair, yet her feet flew up in the air, when she throws herself backward while sitting on the chair. She has also a strange voice, "like the cackle of an agitated parrot". When she is at school, the teachers would not let her speak, even though she is eager to show that she has prepared the lesson better than other she dents. She is harassed by learned teachers. It is her figure and voice that make her the butt of the company, “street urchins run after her yellowing and throwing pebbles at her as if she were a strange animal”. It is summed up in a statement: "All her life mobs had taunted and derided her"(120).

Ila Das strives hard to survive. Her figure has made her life so difficult and her own brothers make hell of it. Her father dies earlier. The three brothers are sent to foreign universities to Heidelberg, Cambridge, and Harvard for higher education. There they do nothing. They squander money freely. They waste their allowance on horses and incur debts. Their father has to sell his own horses, his carriage, his house, his land to repay the debts. And when the father died, name of them came to the funeral. They turn ungrateful and cruel to their parents and sisters. They leave them penniless. The two sisters and their mother have to shift to the rented rooms. In these hard circumstances, the two sisters have to find jobs for themselves. Rima starts giving lessons in piano, going from door to door. Ila Das gets a job in Home Science Department with the help of Nanda Kaul's Vice-Chancellor husband. But the fate pursues them wherever they go. The young persons have lost interest in piano and gained in guitar and pop music. So, Rima is left without a job. And the new Vice-Chancellor undid what the former Vice-Chancellor, Nanda Kaul's husband, had done. Naturally Ila Das has to resign her job.

Rima goes to Calcutta. Ila continues her struggle against the fate. She is really a noble soul heroically struggling against the difficulties and problems of life. She is fully aware that
misery and suffering are the unavoidable things in human life. She believes. 'Isn't the world full of troubles wherever you look?' (132) However, she keeps on smiling and chattering incessantly. She asks and answers the question herself, "Well, we must do the best we can about it. That's it, isn't it?" (145).

On the advice of Nanda Kaul, she does a course in social service and gets government job of social welfare officer. She lives on a merge salary, yet she goes a part of it to Rima to pay for her boarding and lodging. At the same time she tries to add to her income, she has been writing to magazines and journals to give a column to Home science. By it she earns twenty or thirty rupees above her salary. However, she worried about other poor persons around and tried to help them as a welfare Officer. She herself involves in life of social activities and movements, but the world doesn't accept her. On the contrary, it treats her very cruelly and inhumanly.

So, being an educated welfare officer, she is pragmatic in her approach. She would advise people to go to the doctor but the priest exhorted them to stick to the age old treatments which worsened their condition, and often killed them. She has cited the case of Maya Devi's little son who cuts his foot on a rusty nail. He advises Maya Devi to take the child to the doctor for an anti-tetanus injection but the priest misguided her saying that injection is the work of the devil. Consequently, the child died. The villagers are the followers of the priest.

As a part of or social service she tries to stop child marriages. There is one Preet Singh. He is going to marry his minor daughter with a landowner because he owns a quarter of an acre of land and two goats. Ila Das tries to stop it. But the priest would do all that she did. Ila Das's sincere involvement in social activities brings only tragic death. Preet Singh, we see in the last pages of the novel, takes evil revenge on Ila Das. He brutally rapes and strangulates her :
Quickly he left the ends of the scarf, tore at her clothes, tore them off her, in long, screeching rips, till he came to her, to the dry, shriveled starved stick inside the wrappings, and raped her, pinned her down in the dust and the goat droppings and raped her. Crushed back, crushed down into the earth, she lay raped, broken, still and finished (156).

This tragic death is the gift of her social welfare activities. It helps to understand two different situations presented in the novel. Anita Desai reveals successfully insufficiency and meaning lessness in life by using two different patterns-non-involvement of Nanda Kaul and involvement of Ila Das. Ila Das dies because of her involvement with others. Nanda Kaul dies because of her estrangement from others. Involvement and non-involvement both suggest a tragic sense of unfulfilment. The telephonic news of Ila Das's death severely operates on Nanda Kaul's mind in several ways. She feels guilty for not inviting Ila Das to stay on for a night at Carignano. She introspects and realizes that her hospitalities and righteousness in inviting Ila Das would have saved her from her tragic death. But her neurotic desire to be left alone prevents her from doing so. She turns inward. She dislikes herself as a cause of Ila Das's murder. The telephonic information about the murder of Ila Das shocks Nanda Kaul. Even the receiver fell from her hands. She couldn't believe the news. She thinks it is nothing but a lie. She comes to feel that everything in the world is false and fake-without any reality or truth in them, she has lost faith in everything, including herself. The feelings of suffering that grow in Nanda Kaul's heart displays the wound of her self in the following words:

No, no, it is a lie! No, it can not be. It was a lie- Ila was not raped, not dead. It was all a lie, all she had lied to Raka, lied about everything. Her father had never been to Tibet – he had bought the little Buddha from a traveling pedlar. They had not had bears and leopards in their home, nothing but overfed dogs and bad-tempered parrots. Nor had her husband loved and cherished her and
kept her like a queen – he had only done enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a lifelong affair with Miss. David, the mathematics mistress whom he had not married because she was a Christian but whom he had loved, all his life loved. And her children the children were all alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them. She did not live here alone by choice she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing-- she had lied to Raka: And Ila had lied, too. Ila, too, had lied, had tried, No. she wanted to tell the man on the phone, No, she wanted to cry, but could not make a sound. Instead, it choked and swelled inside her throat (158).

The concluding lines of the novel reinforce this:

She twisted her head, then hung it down, down let it hang... Nanda Jaul on the stood with her head hanging, the black telephone hanging, the long wire dangling (158-159).

The story of Ila Das is used to disclose the painful present of Ila Das as well as the painful past of Nanda Kaul. Like Nanda Kaul and Raka, Ila Das had a painful past the entire story of which is related by Anita Desai:

Her mother lay rotting in bed with a broken hip hat would not mend, and her father was dead of a stroke. The family fortune, divided amongst three drunken, dissolute sons as in a story, and not a penny of it to either of the two clever, thrifty, hard working daughters, Ila and Rima, was than quickly becoming a thing of the past, no longer retrievable (135).

To sum up, the three female characters, Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das from the novel choose their own value system to guard themselves from reality. Raka refuses to relate herself to the world and gets pleasure in being ruined, she sings, "I'm shipwrecked and alone. She clung to the rock my boat, alone in my boat on the sea, she sang (68). Ila Das claims that she is
superior even in her loneliness. She says to Nanda Kaul: "I am always Ila Das's courage and assertion" but the hostile social and existential forces are so powerful and cruel that her courage and assertion prove insufficient to face these forces. Despite her involvement in doing some social work she is inhumanly raped and murdered by Preet Singh. The novel tells us that one must learn "to connect" (23) one self of live in order to make one's life meaningful. Nanda Kaul and Raka have failed to do so. In the absence of learning "to connect", the life becomes nothing but a long tale of woes and suffering. Moreover, Nada Kaul's own self effacing and submissive nature forces her to involve herself in doing family and social duties sacrificing her own interests and desires, but she is betrayed by all. Her vulnerable, unprotected, wounded self is psychologically shocked by the tragic news of Ila Das's pitiful and tragic death and finally she meets tragic death.
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