Anita Desai's primary concern as a novelist is with the sequestered individual living in an abandoned limbo of personal privation. Her fictional world postulates an engaging tussle between the alienated individual and the chaotic milieu. The alienated individual in her novels is delineated in such a way as to be struggling for socio-psychic emancipation from a physico-moral world. She is more concerned with the exploration of the psyche of her protagonists – that of “thought, emotion and sensation”\(^1\) experienced by her characters who strive towards arriving at a more authentic way of life than the one which is available to them.\(^2\) She has explicitly shown in her novels how youngmen are always ready to work against tradition and their own families, whereas the youngwomen of the new generation lead them to far greater tragedies and spiritual struggles and put them in the sufferance of unspeakable agonies.

The themes with which she seems to be increasingly concerned in her novels are the withdrawal, alienation, loneliness, isolation, and lack of communication on part of her female protagonists.
In *Cry, the Peacock*, Maya is alienated from Gautama. Maya is given in marriage to Gautama, her father's "protégé" (40) a man much older than herself, who is "no romantic" (24). In the four years of their married life, Maya has felt completely neglected in her husband's attachment and is deeply frustrated and hurt by the discovery that he is totally indifferent to her. Maya is constantly obsessed with the prediction by the albino astrologer of death either for her or her husband within four years of their marriage. As she enters the fateful year, her pet dog Toto dies. The brooding, sensitive Maya takes it as a premonition of the prophesied death, even though the prophecy had been discounted at once by her irate father; the horoscope destroyed, and the hushed up content almost forgotten. The dog's death initiates turbulent emotions in her mind. Maya lacks intellect and reason as much as Gautama lacks emotion and sensuousness, and therefore they cannot come close to each other by transcending their limited visions of life. Their line of communication is quite blocked and he fails to see the emotional value of her desire to go south to see kathakali or to see her grief on the death of Toto. Their alienation is also reflected in the loneliness of the bear, the
monkey and the caged bird. Perhaps their great difference in age works as a big gap in their lives, thus four years of marriage without children or vocation leads Maya towards insanity first and then to her killing of her husband followed by her own violent death.

Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? is alienated from her husband Raman because of incompatibility of temperaments and lack of communication. The past reminiscences have an hypnotic effect on her. The incompatibility of the down-to-earth life of Bombay and her repressed childhood wishes centering on her father play havoc with her sensivity and inspite of several years of struggle to adjust she is never quite successful in mastering her situation. During her fifth pregnancy, an unconscious urge leads her to the island where she seeks to live her childhood all over again. Her withdrawal to an idyllic island of Manori does not give her happiness as she equates ayas and cooks with animals concerned with food, sex and money. Sita's attachment to the island of Manori does not produce any favourable impact on the islanders who never like her presence amongst them. She realizes that the island has changed and that
she cannot be happy there. Frustrated and crushed by this disenchantment, she finds that the only course open to her is to return to Bombay with her husband and children. So, the novel ends with the departure of Sita from the island to accept a life which she always felt to be aimless and monotonous.

Bim in *Clear Light of Day* is alienated from her brother Raja because she, being sensitive, wants to live in a romanticized world of the past whereas Raja becomes pragmatic and realistic. Bim and Raja, close in age, have always had a very close emotional relationship. Raja and Bim want to do things, to be a hero and a heroine when they grow up, they want to leave their old house and go away into the big wide world. Tara, on the other hand, is content to be herself. Her ambition is to be a wife and a mother when she grows up. But Raja becomes a fat and complacent property-owner who wounds Bim through his unthinking callousness, and is too unthinking even to know what he has done. Tara becomes a wife and mother. Bim, on the other hand, stays at home and takes up a teaching job in a college, becomes eccentric. Tara's return to home triggers off memories of their childhood for both her and Bim. The betrayal of Bim gets
compounded when Raja writes to her only to permit her to live in
their house. Even as she keeps meeting her siblings from time to
time she experiences alienation. Even by experiencing a sense of
alienation Bim senses a kind of growth or sense of an extended
consciousness which makes her realize that she has in fact
becomes a part of the pattern - consisting of several things which
are precious to her, in fact inseparable attributes of her life. Thus
Bim manages to find solace in the song of Mulk's aged guru and
renunciates herself.

In *Fasting, Feasting*, Uma is alienated from the members of
her family. The family in which Uma is brought up, is highly
conservative, traditional, and bragging. Mama keeps ordering the
cook through Uma from her swing throne. Uma is deprived of
education when she was withdrawn by her parents from school
so that proper attention can be provided for baby Arun. Mama’s
incessant orders, papa’s 'scowls' and 'humps' Aruna’s jibes,
Arun’s evasive tendency shatters Uma’s psyche and quickens
disintegration. Uma’s marriage to repulsive Harish further
stigmatizes her as ill-fated, making her "an outcast from the
world of marriage.” After being rejected in the marriage market,
Uma feels disillusioned with life. When Dr. Dutt proposes Uma to employ as a housekeeper or matron Mama tactfully turns it down. The home is no longer a place of security for her. Once, growing impatient with a servant, she loses self-control: "'where has she gone?' Uma cries, and bangs the phone down. The furniture looms up around her, threateningly" (99). Also, Uma makes two attempts to drown in the river, to escape from "the dreary outer world to an inner world, tantalizing in its colour and romance. If only it could replace this, Uma thought hungrily" (40). Mama and papa need her every minute to fulfill their demands. Uma's personal dimension and social dimension of self-esteem repress her confidence and gradually negative evaluation and social rejection sets in, making her highly sensitive of her subjective discomfort. To compensate for all denials and unsuccess, she finally takes refuge in complete devotion to work and duty, treading gingerly through life.

The period of alienation turns out to be a period during which the female protagonists of Anita Desai namely, Sita, Bim, and Uma contemplate at length on their predicament and manage to arrive at solutions which sound both plausible and convenient,
given the situations in which they find themselves. Only in case of Maya who becomes insane and loses her balance in life. Anita Desai puts forth death as the final outcome. In case of Maya who had lost her hold on life—death itself sounds as a means of putting an end to her inexplicable problems of life. Thus the theme of alienation forms one constituent aspect of the novels of Anita Desai through which she manages to explore a not-so-much explored area of Indian women's writing. She brings to the fore certain novel aspects of life lived by a woman in a patriarchal society.
REFERENCES:

1. Interview with Atmaram, World Literature Written in English, 9, No.1, April 1977, p.102.