CHAPTER – I I

Alienation and isolation in Anita Desai’s *Cry The Peacock* and *Voices in the City*.

It is quite apparent that Anita Desai is one of the famous women Indo-Anglian novelists. She has a unique place in the mind of the readers because of her distinctive style and imagery. Her language is embellished with sensuous richness, a strong sensitiveness and a love for the sound of words. Anita Desai ‘s novels become particularly interesting in view of the fact that in all her novels that shift of emphasis is from the outer realities or social realism to the inner mind and the psychic tensions, with a marked predilection to experiment with the novel as an art form and with the point of view or perspectives.

George Watson rightly points out that “a novel can be drawn in either direction, towards a sense of things or a sense of mind” (*The Story Of Novel, 110*) . Anita Desai has added a new dimension to the achievement of Indian women writers in English fiction through her novels *Cry, The Peacock* and *Voices in The City*. The contribution of Anita Desai is significant on account of the greater accent given to “The
inner Climate” which is “more compelling than the outer weather” (Srinivasa Iyengar, 464).

In her first novel *Cry, The Peacock*, Anita Desai’s style is tinted with a curious compatibility with her theme, because the narrator happens to be a hypersensitive young become, tense and over wrought. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar says, “*Cry, The Peacock*, the inner climate, the climate of sensibility that lour or clears of rumbles like thunder or suddenly blazes forth like lightning is more cal geography or the visible action” (*The Banasthali Patricka*, 63). K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar also adds *Cry, The Peacock* is Maya’s story, the story of her married life with Gautama; and almost the entire story is “remembrance of things past by Maya herself” (TBP, 45). Some more studies on Anita Desai offer clues to her fictional art. Shyam Asnani comments on the “theme of alienation and in communication in marital life, and her use of pure memory and flux” (*Indian Literature*, 39) to depict reality. M.L.Malhotra finds that the main focus of Mrs. Desai’s fiction is “The creature’s loneliness, “the experience of self-withdrawal and the “inner confrontation” (*Recent Indo-Anglian Fiction*, 29-30).
THEME OF THE NOVEL

The main character of the novel *Cry, The Peacock*, Maya, a highly sensitive, imaginative, love-lorn woman, is married to a rich, pragmatic, executive Gautama, who although interested in Urdu poetry is far from being sentimental. He is sharp and quite accommodating level – headed and worldly-wise but on the contrary Maya has an aberrant mind, too sensitive to ignore the slightest injury to her feelings.

In *Cry, The Peacock*, Maya is depicted as a passionate lover longing for her husband’s absolute love. It is revealed in the novel that Maya has a possessive mentality. As an unmarried girl she respects her father and is showers love on him. After marriage, she wants to transfer her love and respect to her husband. But unfortunately she does not get the same degree of love and sympathy as she had expected. The main problem of Maya is that Gautama does not possess any of the qualities that is expected by her. This is established in her very first encounter with his reactions to the death of her pet dog Toto.

She thinks that she is denied even a chance to express her feelings openly. She castigates Gautama for his grossness, for his concern with the fundamentals and basics of life in terms of money she says, “It’s always money, or property – never a case of passion and revenge,
murder, and exciting things like that … not for love or life of basic things – Toto dying” *(Cry, 20).*

The incident teaches her a lesson that, her husband fails to understand her mind. He has no faith in the bogus ceremonies for “it has always seemed the ultimate absurdity appropriate only in that it brings a meaningless life to a similarly meaningless end” *(Cry, 14).* This has become the beginning of the end of tragedy of love in the novel-the temperamental and emotional self between the lovers. The death of a pet is thus symbolically for her the death of a wedded life with a man who is obsessed with the fact of life. This is the starting point of her alienation. As R.S. Sharma observes “her neurosis originates in the very idea of marriage which she has come to associate with death” *(Anita Desai: A Study, 26).* Anyone could feel Maya’s loneliness when she says “his coldness, and incessant talks of cups of tea and philosophy in order not to hear me talk and talking reveal myself. It is that my loneliness in the house” *(Cry, 9).*

Maya’s expectation that Gautama should console her is shattered when she finds that he absolutely lacks the elixir on consolation. As an average man of sense, he has a belief in the surrounding world and he is invariably guided by logic and reasoning. He aims at a philosophical
detachment in life visualized by the lines of the “Bhagwat Gita”. She says “he is fit to attain immortality who is serene and not affected by these sensations but is the same in pleasure and pain” (Cry, 108).

There is an inadequacy of response between Maya and Gautama which becomes the central point of the novel later. He enjoys his reading urdu poetry in the lawns of their house. Gautama quotes softly an urdu couplet and yet remains impervious and does not respond to the feeling and emotions imbibed in those lines. Maya can enter into “the rare comparison” and “tender understanding” of the lines, which bring her a moment of hope when she achieves her epiphany, her transcendence. Gautama accuses the urdu musicians as sentimentalism available only to the decadent. When Maya is in too agitated a state of mind a gentle voice drifts towards her from the musicians singing in the lawn, “Lord, thou hast dealt me so many sorrows / to bear them, couldst thou not also have lent me another heart” (Cry, 103).

Gautama lacks aesthetic sense, and power of understanding the feeling of Maya, Anita Desai trumpets the idea in an incident in the novel. On night Maya feels for the starts and pleads, “they are so bright to night”(Cry, 14). Gautama nonchalantly retorts well I hope bright
enough for me to spot a fly ruptured at the recitation of the Urdu couplet whereas Gautama has no romance. All Maya likes is the company of Gautama like the incomparable pair Antony and Cleopatra who spend their time in mirth and revelry. But to her deception, once Gautama offers a party to his friends without informing Maya. Maya enters the party as an “uninvited guest” she tells her husband, “All I Wanted was to be outside with you… near you… but you made me go away… He signed fumbles lit himself a cigarette “(Cry, 111).

Maya wishes that her love should be reciprocated at all levels. She expects her husband’s emotional caressing and wishes his to quench her thirst for love mind, the pores of her body and womanhood. But she received only chidings to which she responds, “hœ it suits you to quote those lines of drastic… you know nothing of me… and of how I can love .. you ‘ve never loved and you don’t love me…”(Cry, 112). These are the words of Maya to her insensitive husband. It is a great shock to her that Gautama reduces the true feelings of love to mere attachment. Comparing Gautama to Gautama Budha, Maya gives vent to her feelings thus, “he looked very much, the mediator beneath the “bo’ tree… too fastidious to admit such matters as love with its accompanying horror of
copulation… spiritual demands of possession and rights won and established” (Cry, 113). The claim for love, intimacy, and sympathy which turned out to be unfulfilled desires leads Maya to antagonism and positive hostility. Gautama’s temper is matter of fact, based on truth and balance, whereas that of Maya is a romantic concern with the ideal so that the inadequacy of their partnership in love leads indispensably to tragedy, Maya is egotistical, self-indulgent, pursuing, fancies and fanciful feelings.

She lives as a ‘toy-princes’ in an imaginary world. Gautama accuses her. She leads her life with mental agony. When she solves one problem, she is confronted with a new problem. She is not rid of the problem but tortured by a series of problem. The theme of husband – wife estrangement is not developed in a slow, incremental manner. It does not acquire sociological or even philosophical connotations. The final disaster hinges on a prophecy uttered by an astrologer many years ago. As a girl she has approached an astrologer with albino eyes who predicts an unnatural death either to her or to her husband after four years of their marriage. She says, “and four years, it was now, has been married four years… I know the time has come. It was now o be either Gautama or I” (The Banasthali Patrika, 65).
This long forgotten, but now remembered prophecy acts upon Maya with the same force, of the inevitability as the prophecy of the witches upon Macbeth. The second factor determining the cause of Maya’s tragedy is the myth pining round the peacock’s cry. The central image of the peacock reveals the mystery of life and death and knows them to be one. The author says “peacock are wise. The eyes upon their tails have seen the truth of life and death and know them to be one.

Living, they are aware of death. Dying, they are in love with life” (95-96). K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar points out the same as, “the peacock are said to fight before they mate; living they are aware of death, dying they are in love with life” (The Banasthali Patrika, 67). There is a remarkable use of the bird-image in almost all the novels of Desai signifying the fettered condition of the human beings. Some titles of the novels such as Cry, The Peacock, Bye-Bye Black Bird, and In Custody are indicative of the enclosed, entrapped life of the humans as against the bird’s lives.

The title of the novel Cry, The Peacock is highly symbolic. The repeated use of the word ‘peacock’ becomes a symbol of the neurotic protagonist Maya herself. When the peacock cries, “Lover, lover. Mio,
Mio-I die, I die, I Die” (95), it is Maya’s own obsession with wish for death.

Ramachandra Rao feels that it “symbolically suggests the heroine’s love of life and obsession with death which lead has to the final crack up” (Novels Of Anita Desai, 9). The question is how, in the extreme terrors of its existence, the birds can sing so happily and why is there no hint of fear in the song of the birds whereas the human being’s quest for individuality and meaningfulness in their existence causes despair. Maya’s heated imagination jumbles prophecy and myth into a nightmarish certainly, she mourns as,

God now I was caught in the net of the inescapable, and where lay possibility of mercy of release? This net was no hallucination, no ….. 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, again. Any more-only death and waiting. (97-98).

Deep in the hinterland of her consciousness, Maya decides that, even for the fulfillment of the astrologer’s prophecy, her own death is not necessary it might be Gautama’s for that manner – “I came upon that
panicky though for the first time” (*The Banasthali Patrika*, 67). There is really no escape for her now. One day there is a dust storm, followed by a few drops of rain; but Gautama is quite oblivious to everything. They have never been so far apart as they are this evening. They go up to the roof, each orbiting a different world.

The pale moon has risen and Maya is fascinated and bewitched; they are at the low parapet’s edge and when inadvertently Gautama moves in front of her, there by hiding the moon from view. Maya waxes into sudden frenzy and pushes him over the parapet to “pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom” (*The Banasthali Patrika*, 74).

Days were rolled, Gautama’s mother and sister take her to her father’s house at Lucknow, and it is tacitly understood that she will have to be put in an asylum. But in the course of the night the two sane women hear a cry of horror, and they rush upstairs; the heavy white figure of the elder woman goes towards,”… the bright frantic one of the balcony, screaming, they meet for an instant there was silence, and then both disappeared into the dark quite” (*Cry*, 218). *Cry, The Peacock* is typically a ‘feminine’ novel, a novel of sensibility rather than action. It has the quality of an orchard and of a flute about it. Its concern is almost
wholly with the terrors of existence, and it achieves its efforts through a series of exploding and multiplying metaphors.

Through this novel *Cry, The Peacock*, Anita Desai proves herself as an existential humanist who is interested in searching for the individualistic and authentic man. An authentic man in rather self critical. True to the saying that a narrative of dramatic work of art would be inauthentic if it did not portray the inner life of man, Anita Desai ruminated over the emotional life of her characters.

Despite its power and poetic appeal the novel was deficient in the sense of history and the sense of place. Anita Desai is not a novelist of social comedy and manners or even a novelist of ideas. Her fate is the poetic novel of sensibility. Hence *Cry, The Peacock* is a typical Indian novel whose basic concern is the basic mysteries of love, death and life connected with the symbol of the peacock’s Cry – ‘life in-death and death-in-life’. It is this treatment of the theme, which justifies the title of this novel.

**NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE**

Anita Desai provides an interesting study into the female psyche. Among the later women novelists, she occupies an important place since she shows a preoccupation with the form of the novel. There is a shift of
emphasis in her novels from outer realities to the inner and hence she has been compared with psychological novelties in the tradition of Virginia woolf. But her first novel, *Cry, The Peacock* apart from its similarities to the western psychological novels, has an individuality which transcends the framework of the western counterparts. The form of this novel as well as the narrative is unique experiments in the art of fiction writing.

Her first novel *Cry, The Peacock*, very well illustrates Desai’s ability to closely interweave form with content. The novel is divided into three unequal sections. The first section describes tensions and conflicts between two characters of opposed temperaments. The last section presents an ironic view of the world of common sense, a world of common sense, a world in which the heroine has no place.

The large middle section which is rendered in the first person presents the tragedy of the control character, but interestingly enough; the story is presented from her own point of view. The first section runs less than four pages long and a casual reader may feel that this is not very relevant. But a close analysis reveals the careful artistry of Anita Desai and her skill in building up a mood. The novel begins with a description of ‘the body… rots in the sun’ (5). The writer builds up the atmosphere and the tension through a carefully detailed description of
things, both big and small, which appear to be so important to one character and of no consequence to the other. Anita Desai describes the April heat, the overpowering smell of the reeking dead flesh, the eyes of the dead dog “open and staring still’ (Cry, 5), the crows sitting in a patient circle round the dead body ready to “eat anything – entrails, eyes, anything” (Cry, 5), the humming of

The flies in the summer heat amidst the lime trees driving away the gentle bees and the unthinking butterflies. Gautama is coldly rational and unemotional and his terse and brief reaction to the death of the pet dog reveals his inability to understand his wife. Maya’s highly emotional reaction to the death of the dog, Gautama says coldly and callously “It is all over, come and drink your tea, and stop crying. You mustn’t cry” (Cry, 9).

Maya’s speech and her thoughts, expressed through a profusion of adjectives, symbolize her state of mind. Maya sees “the evil glint of a harmless blue-bottle” (Cry, 6); the drive lay shriveling again like molten lead in a groove cut into the earth, the sun is “a livid orange cut into the earth” (Cry, 6), and the very air is “polluted”. Words like “hysterical”, “sobbing”, “polluted”, and “purulent” suggest a neurotic and fragile sensibility responding emotionally, almost hysterically, to the death of
the dog. The brief opening section thus succeeds in presenting two characters of opposed attitudes and contracting temperaments and suggests the possibility of this opposition leading to the ultimate destruction of the marriage.

The long middle section is in the form of a first person narrative with Maya, the heroine, narrating her own story. This method implies an acceptance on the part of the writer of certain self imposed limitations and restrictions. The third-person rendering although old fashioned and now out-dated, offers some advantages to the writer. The omniscient author can frequently interrupt the narrative, interpret the events, comment on the characters, and make clear to the reader the attitude he should adopt towards events and characters.

When Maya looks at the sky at night, the dark spaces between the stars frighten her, “death lurked in those spaces, the darkness spoke of distance, separation, loneliness” (*Cry*, 24). Maya’s imagination is ever active, creating the desired and apprehending the threatening. She tries to tell her prosaic husband something about the palm-fringed villages of Kerala and the Kathakali dance. She says “They have ballets in their villages. They say they go on for days and days! And the dancers all are men, and they wear such fantastic masks. And the drums”(*Cry*, 49). But
far from appreciating her desire, Gautama is only amused by her strange desires.

The gulf that separated the two is very well communicated in a significant episode in the novel when the impulsive and incurably romantic Maya decides that they should have their dinner in the dining room with the lights switched off. Gautama who was no romantic grumbles and says “Well, I hope bright enough for me to spot a fly if it falls into my dinner” (Cry, 83). The episode end with Maya’s poetic comment, “the stars were a failure” (Cry, 27).

The last section of the novel, narrated in the third person, is an ironic comment on the world of sane and rational people, Gautama’s mother and daughter have always “dreaded passion as wise men dread their flesh” (Cry, 54) and they do not really understand why Maya killed her husband. With devastating irony, desai’s describes the mother and the daughter who had always skirted “the unimaginable realm of horror” (Cry, 73).

*Cry, The Peacock*, thus is something of a technical triumph. Anita Desai’s ability to use the English language is a uniquely individual fashion is amply demonstrated by this novel. Her careful artistry is illustrated be her intelligent mixing of the first person narrative with
third person rendering of the story for the purpose of contract. Although desai’s sympathizes from her character so that the reader is able to see the character in all its complexity and richness.

**VOICES IN THE CITY**

- **THEME OF ‘MIXTURE OF ALIENATED MENTALITIES’**

  Anita Desai’s novels stand supreme to the perceivers who could trace out ineffable blend of the American, the French and the Russian streams in exact propositions. Polarities, discord, divergence of life and tragic condition of the individuals form the foundation over which the edifice of her theme is built. Her novels are self suggestive of her acute critical perception and vivid portrayal of the blatant rebellion, estrangement and lifelessness of her characters.

  K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar says, in Anita Desai’s two novels,

  … the inner climate, the climate of sensibility that lours or clears or rumbles like thunder or suddenly blazes forth like lightning is more compelling than the outer, the physical geography or the visible action. Her forte, in other words, is the Exploration of sensibility, the particular kind of modern Indian sensibility that is ill at ease among the
K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar aptly says, “her intensity – whether she is sane, hysterical or insane – fills the whole book and gives it form as well as life” (IWE, 462). Anita Desai gives a clear picture of Calcutta city, where this story moves, Calcutta

... that area of smoke and darkness, of noise and squalor, of disease and death. It is this devil city; Janus faced, “one rapacious, one weary”; corrupt, commercial Calcutta, a city of crowds, now passive and depressed, now sullen and angry with “an anger that broods and festers like a pus-filled boil; Calcutta, city of kali, “goddess of death” (IWE, 471).

THEME OF THE NOVEL

*Voices in the City* apparently exposes the stimulus, hunger of rather the estrangement of three deprived beings, Nirode, Monisha and Amla. The story spins round Nirode, a typical Bengali youth who is deemed well in solitude. He is being kept far off from his beloved mother residing at Kalimpong. He is put up into service as a clerk in a...
magazine office. The very thought of his mother makes his stoicism stirred up and he is totally upset rather infuriated to the extreme.

This is quite unnatural but factual in his life for, he ponders over the possibility of his mother’s illicit intimacy with major Chadha, their neighbour and hence he has developed a Hamlet-like derision towards her. He simply ignores her letters. Even at times of financial crisis when he is rendered jobless, he is reluctant to seek his mother’s help. He even refuses the money sent by her out of sheer derision as his sense of estrangement from his mother suppresses his affection for her.

Father Being irresponsible and mother’s indulgence in illegitimate affairs make brother and sister deprived being or rather pity-crazed orphans. A tinge of bitterness against everything turns them into cynics. With mother being kept far away, they feel themselves detached emotionally, physically and spiritually, eventually losing their mental caliber and physical prowess. Nirode is destined to be estranged from his mother right from childhood. But after Monisha’s death, there is an abrupt change in his attitude. He eagerly awaits his mother in conformity with the intention of freeing himself from hatred and anger, even ready to offer love and sympathy, but his dream is marred by his mother’s
distant unapproachable looks, self-controlled poise and silent rejection of sympathy.

Eventually his sense of estrangement is witnessed to a great extent. Apart from rejection of his mother’s love Nirode looks down upon his pat, his up-bringing the wealth of his family and all the reminiscences of his early life which might tie him to some kind of semblance of life. He rejects intimacy. He feels isolated and he cherishes this isolation in course. Ultimately he is self-possessed. He keeps himself aloof from the outside world. Life is a tragedy to those who think, but Nirode could only feel the other way. He could hardly think as his stoicism is stirred by separation. He realizes the futility of life as that of the journey of Sisyphus. Life has become void and he has no hold it.

This acute pessimism is revealed by his words. Nirode says “Better to leap out of the window and end at all instead of smearing this endless sticky glue of senselessness over the world. Better not to live”” (Voices, 18). Nirode’s estrangement keeps him away not only from his mother, but also from his job and surroundings. He hardly does his job with involvement, disgusted with his mundane job as clerk in a newspaper.
Nirode tries to elevate his professional career by becoming an editor. He proposed to start a news magazine entitled ‘Voice’ but unfortunately the very first issue of his magazine proves to be the last one due to lack of money. This drenches him into inexplicable distress ion and he is haunted by the idea of suicide. A succession of failures and disappoints add to his alienation. He is tortured by a series of failures. He says that failures, sufferings and disillusionment estrange him from life.

He goes from failure to failure. He says whether it is happiness or suffering, he wants to be done with them, see beyond them to the very end because he feels nothing exists in this void in which all things appeared equally insignificant, equally worthless. As a result he turns out to be – to say in his own words, ‘an out awed hermit’. Like a hermit, Nirode wants to be free from all bondages – Family, tradition, title and heritage. He becomes self- pitying and self – possessed. A mentally handicapped Nirode cannot use his talent and become a part of an establishment nor can he become a true revolutionary.

In the novel, *Voices in the City*, the chief protagonist Nirode searches for freedom. He is a rebel and rejects the world of security but out of desire to preserve his sanity. S.P.Swain says,
*Cry, The Peacock* Maya wanted to posses Gautama. Illusion wanted to capture reality. But here, a man wants to posses a beast, Calcutta. If Maya’s tragedy emanated from her father fixation, Nirode’s tragedy lay in his love hate affinity with the mother. Despite his typical Bengali traits of loquaciousness, sharp emotion, natural anarchism, temperamental imbalance and inconsistencies, he leads a philosophically detached life.(65).

Nirode finally admits that all his endeavors were futile. Suddenly he wakes up to the cosmic ideas of life and death. Nirode seems to be secluded ever in his ideas and views of life. His quest for life’s deeper meaning exposes the fact that one has to work for something higher than happiness and agony to arrive at a state of equanimity which is above pleasure and pain, above the passions and nihilism. This shows his state of estrangement, that is ideal detachment from all sorts of involvements. Futility and meaninglessness of life are realized by Nirode and Monisha and they considered life meaningless because they do not have any attachment and they are estranged from everything.

The prime objectives of Anita Desai are her preoccupation with an everlasting quest for meaning and value freedom and truth that can sustain man in this seemingly meaningless world. In the words of Madhusudan Prasad,
One’s preoccupation can only be a perpetual search for meaning for value, for-dare. I say it truth. I think of the world as an ice-bar the one tenth visible above the surface of water is what we call reality but the nine tenths that are submerged make the truth and that is what one is trying to explore (Anita Desai: A Novelist, 2).

Nirode dwells upon his inability to find anything worthwhile in life and hence he withdraws from it. At the same time, he can afford to give it a particular shape. Monisha’s wardrobe filled with books seems to be a freakish oddity to her sister-in-law who chats about their saris. Monisha feels herself to be a dangerous infidel who dreads this type of chattering. She keeps silent and they all distrust silence. This self-denial of love and care leads her to total alienation from others as a result of which she attains the qualities of her brother. As a westernized sophisticated individual with an intellectual bent of mind, she recoils from the way of living which nullifies her inclinations and values.

Monisha is contemptuous of the mean lives the traditional Bengali women are condemned to suffer within the confines of their apathetic and indifferent walls. Like Nirode, Monisha too is alienated from her mother. In spite of her uncongenial situation with her in-laws, she is not
prepared to go back to her mother who stands aloof, ‘… is this what is then my life? Only a condrum that I shall brood over forever with passion and never to arrive at a solution? Only a condrum is then, then life?’ (124-125).

All she could find is only a morbid introversion as she is denied the privacy. Gita’s message of detachment is apparent in her denial of all relations. Monish lives but with non-existence, as she could hardly respond to the powerful music of the street singer. Confining behind the barred windows, Monisha retreads from the maternal concern. Amla perceived her stillness and death like submission. She seems to be a lifeless statue. Monisha says, I am different from then all. They put me away in a steel container thick glass cubicle and I have lived in all my life, without a touch of love or hate or warmth on me. I am locked apart from all of them, they cannot touch me” (Voices, 217)

To be another feather to the flock, Anita Desai uses the diary method to lend intimacy to the delineation by portraying Monisha as a sensitive intelligent girl wrapped in to the coils of a typical joint family in a large house but with iron bars. Not being able to find anything worthwhile in life, Nirode withdraws from it but after giving a shape to
it. He hates contact with human being, becomes allergic to love, detests marriage and disapproves his mother’s relationship with major Chadha and even results her claims on him.

The quest for detachment makes Nirode wither away all his relationships and contacts. He is drenched into seclusion which is a self-imposed fortune. All the same, his instinct tells him that he is the sole victim of solitude. Even in bars he realizes his solitude and feels entirely indifferent to the nocturnal pleasures, amidst smoke smell and of cheap scents. This self-detachment and derision turns Nirode a walking corpse.

Anita Desai’s deep suitable themes are not only suggestive of her insight but also add depth to her works. Her delineation of characters aims at pursing the ideal detachment of the principles of not getting involved. Nirode is frustrated and lethargic due to his detachment from his mother, relatives and life and thereby he becomes incapable of achieving anything. Monisha and Nirode sail in the same boat. She too stands aloof from all relationship in life. She is married into family comparing males holding government posts and women who are domestically trained.
All these domestic affairs-like cutting vegetables, serving food, and listening to the recipe of dishes details by her mother-in-law are all monotonous. She discards recognition and loses her identity in the family. Monisha feels suffocated and longs to escape from the city of Calcutta into the fresh hills, the air of Kalimpong. Besides, she is appalled at the type of lives, the subservient Bengali women lead, a mundane life of cooking, washing and rearing children.

She wants something more from life than just this, something more challenging, more intense than the mundane activities of cutting vegetables and washing clothes. But she knows that she cannot get away from it she has to stay and bear it. She detaches herself from the outside world and lives in the world of her mind. Unlike Nirode, who cannot totally leave the world he hates, Monisha manages to disassociate herself from it to a large extent. Anchorless and adrift, she feels a weight upon her heart and soul, a feeling of suffocation. She too like Nirode has no doctrine, no faith to clutch at. Monisha is a lover of books, she reads the writings of Kafka and Dostoyevsky, but her husband’s family in apathetic to this and she is drenched in domestic routine works. She too like Nirode has high intellect. The dance and fertility in the music conference drives her into a state a delirious daze. But the sitar player takes her into a separate realm of experience and communication.
She thinks, “I wander in this labyrinth at will and blessedly we never touch merely remain in mystic communication with each other. I am willing to follow till I die”(216). Monisha takes part in the ecstasy by the musician and her higher sensibility finds its pitch. Monisha realizes a total loss of her own being and like the lost princess of fairy tales; she is doomed to destruction – no privacy, no communion, no change of mutual understanding, yoked as she is to a pathetically wooden and conventional husband like jiban. As Lal Udai Bhan Pandey observes as, “…her central theme is the existential predicament of an individual which is projected through incompatible couples acutely sensitive wives, and dismal, callous, inconsiderate, ill-chosen husbands”( The Quest, 18-19).

Monisha’s married life is an utter failure, despite its calmness it is like a jerry built house with a deceptively attractive façade. Even her relations with her husband seem to be futile lacking in love and joy. But by no means is her love for her husband manifested. In other words, her finer feelings towards her spouse remains undeveloped she becomes rather insurmountable due to the gulf that stretches between her ideals and the reality. Though she decides to commit suicide, she commits self-immolation, the only alternative for a dejected person who is alienated from life due to lack of faith. Unlike other women, Monisha
feels her inability to keep pace with her husband and be obedient to him.
She does not like to be confined within four walls like a caged-bird.

Her sheer desperation drives her to suicide and meeting death half-
way is part of her rebellion, her defiance. But Monisha being a weak
psychic rebel has no power to subdue her alienation and the only way
apparent to her was the violent act of suicide. Amla is another character
who adds one more feather to the flock. She too is frenzied and shares
the alienation invariably. After training she comes to Calcutta as a
commercial artist. Despite her attitude towards youthful excitement, she
too falls a victim to the alienation of Nirode and Monisha. She remarks
pitiably it. Amla ‘s futile attempt to lead a cheerful life, her inner
existentialist frustration and disillusionment, all carry her to a level on
par with Monisha and Nirode.

Heinemann says, “The problems of existentialism are in a
narrower sense expressive of the present crisis of mind and in a broader
sense of the enduring human conditions” *(Existentialism, 178)*. Amla is
not susceptible to hollowness and futility in life. But quite miserably the
frustrating experiences make her regret her arrival to Calcutta. Amla is
entirely different from Nirode and Monisha. In the beginning she is
wonder-struck at their silence and withdrawal. But gradually she too
finds a sense of futility sapping her interest and vitality and her sense of usefulness. The author says “Lassitude overcome her like a fever, weighing against her temples, making her rest her elbows on the table and her head droop over unfinished work” (Voices, 260).

Already alienated from her mother her relationship with Aunt Lila too becomes tense. To add to this, her attraction towards the aimless way and detached Nirode’s life makes her fall in love with Dharma, an artist and a friend to Nirode. Amla suffers from unrequited love. In course of time she becomes a non-entity to the absurdity of existence. Amla’s relationship with Dharma proves to be an utter failure and she gets only a shattering experience, out of immense love for him. She even degrades herself to be a model for him. His interest in her is impersonal and self-centered. He has no response for her yearning for communion and she ends up in sheer despair. As a woman seeking independence, Amla gets into a job and mixes with society. At the end she seems to be exploited by professor Bose. Thus Amla fails to achieve her (higher) lofty aims of life and the city life disfigures her and she seems to be atleast ten years older than she is.
Thus Nirode, Amla and Monisha, the main characters in the novel become victims of a sense of alienation. Being alienated from mother, Nirode loses involvement in his work, fails as an editor of ‘voice’ and ultimately loses faith in life and all that life can afford one with. Monisha is depressed by her marriage, apart from being alienated from her mother gets the same from her husband and in-laws and finally embraces death. Amla another pity-crazed being suffers not only from estrangement but also from unfulfilled love and finds her doom.

All the three withdraw themselves from life but in different ways. Nirode and Amla, amidst their alienation and retreat could afford life a shape. But Monisha fails in doing so. All the three are basically introverts with exceptionally sharp sensitivity. The lack of love is instrumental in alienating them from their surroundings. They see and feel like others but their degree of intensity is greater on their mental planes. To their pessimistic eye, only the clearness, sordidness and brutality of the world are visible.

They aspire to get rid of the shackles of their servitude under human wretched conditions, virtually drenched in gross in materialism and to be away from the spirit of life. They struggle against inhuman conditions perpetually and at last get alienated in the process.
NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

In *Voices in the City*, Anita Desai adopts a slightly different technique. She employs the more conventional third person mode of narrating the story of the three voices in the city. However, the characteristic qualities of her art once again are displayed in this novel. The novel presents the bewildering variety of sights and sounds of the city of Calcutta. In the opening pages of the novel, Anita Desai describes the chaos and the confusion on the railway platform. The red-shirted coolies, the tea vendors and the station master in grimy white, sweating and overworked, the army of passengers with wobbling bundles of luggage in search of the right carriage—all create the picture of the environment in which the three protagonists struggle for existence.

Amla sees the city in terms of images of wetness and softness. Even the birds are contaminated by the touch of the city. They are a “vision of disaster, symbolized by the stirring birds who were not afraid, who waited” (*Voices*, 117). Anita Desai once again neatly divides her major and minor characters into two groups, the major characters representing elite of defence and suffering and the minor characters standing for the dull and pandemic individuals who live stupid and senseless lives. But these apparently harmless individuals constitute a
threat to the protagonists of Desai. Jit Nair is one of the damned, “there was no despair on that face, no agony of doubt and will, but merely an uncontrollable vacuum, a blank” (Voices, 107). His wife is merely “a voluptuous porpoise of ebony flesh encased in green silk” (Voices, 37).

Nirode feels that the letter from his mother is like a “warm, enveloping succubus, in the shape of a bright winged butterfly” (Voices, 37). The most effective passages in the novel are those in which Desai mercilessly satirizes the minor characters like sonny’s papa, “a vulgar, bumptious old thing, with raw red skin, bulging moist eyes and many pains of tickling, herring feet” (Voices, 79). But in her eagerness to satirize her minor characters, she ignores another important aspect—the tragedy of conformity. But in spite of these shortcomings, the novel is of considerable importance. If the voices in the city are not properly heard, the city is very vividly created. The white horses, the mother, and the city become symbols— the horses symbolizing the possibility of escape from the pressures of conformity, and the mother and the city symbolizing destruction.
COMPREHENSIVE LOOK ON ESTRANGED PROTAGONISTS

*Cry, The Peacock* is an externalization of the interior of Mays’s cocoon. *Voices in the city* is the reflection of the rattling reverberation of her sensitive characters under the tyrannizing force of the city Calcutta. She focuses on the inner life of the individual, myriads of inner impressions, passing fancies, and flickering of thought. She exhibits the existentialist humanistic view through her characters. She endeavors to research into the human problems.

The protagonist finds himself alienated and experiences a sense of loneliness as he/she is unable to communicate with people around. They drift away and create their world where they spin their dreams which are never fulfilled. The themes are dealt differently in each of her novels where the characters ultimately try to find an answer to their problems. In all her writing she uniformly exhibits the theme of alienation and love of humanity. She also deals with humanistic themes.

She ponders over the human relationship, the estrangement of her protagonists, loneliness and lack of communication. Besides, she shows a great regard for faith in human life and individuality and her artistic
and creative appeal to human heart that would hardly escape the eyes of curious reader.

Anita Desai has been often accused of having a rather thin storyline and a weak plot. However, one finds in her novels a well-constructed structure where everything falls into place and the narrative becomes explicit. In all her novels she makes use of the stream of consciousness technique, where there is always an amalgamation of past and present. There is a gradual growth to the climax and a denouncement comes after, but not with a shock.

The novels *Cry, The Peacock*, and *Voices in the city* make an attempt to depict those inner recesses faithfully. If in *Cry, The Peacock* the action is presented in the first person, the *Voices in the city* is mostly a third person rendering of three voices – the voices of Nirode, Amla and Monisha. Here the direct method of explaining the action necessarily scarifies the challenging possibilities of the first person rendering.

Anita Desai’s protagonists who are mainly victims of estrangement are taken up for discussion. One may find in *Cry, The Peacock* a complete temperamental incompatibility between Maya and her husband, Gautama.
To say that *Cry, The Peacock* is just a psychological novel is a serious understatement. There is a metaphysical structure to the novel discussing the mysteries of death, life and love which alone contributes to the essential Indianness about the novel.

To add valid support to this view, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar aptly says, “*Cry, The Peacock* is the story of marital discard imbued with a strong streak of neurotic fantasy on the part of the woman and a corresponding phlegmatic and solid attitude on the part of the husband” (IWE, 121). Gautama cannot even distinguish between the odour of the limes and the petunias. Because of the lack of artistic temperament, he is reluctant to allow her to go south to see the Kathakali dance. Gautama has neither the time nor the capability of showing tenderness towards her at a time when she most needs it. Maya’s unfulfilled love causes her neurosis. The Indian belief in horoscope and astrology is cleverly handled by the novelist to deepen the conflict. She is perpetually worried about the prediction of the albino astrologer. Her obsession with death, coupled with her insanity leads her to think that it was now to be either Gautama or I (194).
Haunted by the fear of death and prophecy of the albino astrologer the novel steadily traces the widening gap between the husband and wife up to the ultimate decision that Maya takes to murder her husband. Finally, She opts for Gautama, who when killed, will not miss life, as he is admittedly ‘detached’ and indifferent to life. As she is in love with life she decides to murder him.

Maya says, “It had to be one of us, you see, and it was so clear that it was I who was meant to live. You see, to Gautama it didn’t really matter. He didn’t care, and I did” (215-216). Maya looks about for a saviour to whom she might cling, one who will help her face the reality of her fate. Everyone fails her. Her father is no longer the anchor as he used to be. Gautama, momentarily a rock, is too engrossed in his own world.

Arjuna escapes this responsibility by having run away from home when she was younger; her friends offer no refuge, either-not Leila with all her wisdom gained from Persian Literature not “The Silly, Plump Pom” who can only think of what she will wear next. Hence Maya says “There was not one of my friends who could at as an anchor anymore and to whomsoever I turned for reassurance, net rayed me now” (64).
She is badly in need of a saviour. She feels that she will never sleep again. She is sure that only death is waiting for her. The closeness that Maya seeks in their relationship is never attained. Finally she indulges in a savage attempt by pushing him down from the terrace and he dies pitiably. Meena Bliappa convincingly assess this novel as,

Its success limited thought it is in Working out the configuration of the Inner world helps to establish the subjective Reality of being as the most crucial part of living. The ardent introspection of Maya marks a valuable Introversion in Indian fiction. It points to a line of significant. Development exploration not of the “Social” man, but “the lone individual”(Anita Desai : A study on her fiction, 18).

THEME ESTRANGEMENT AND ISOLATION

Anita Desai, like D.H. Lawrence, is exceptionally effective in portraying graphical and poetically scenes of physical and animal violence. So Maya hurls down her husband into death in a moment of unbearable agony. She has proved that the albino astrologer right and has become the instrument of her own crazy destiny. The wheel of irrationality has come full circle. *Voices in the city* is a novel sent in the city of joy and Death – Calcutta. It is the story of the disintegration of a
family of a brother and two sisters and their mother caught in the Cross –
currents of changing social values.

K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar aptly says, “Voices in the city although its
canvas is larger, the detail fuller and the diction Richer, is nevertheless,
satisfying than Cry, The Peacock because it is not contained by a single
sensibility like Maya’s in the earlier novel” (TBP,6). The Gautama-Maya
episode is further re-enacted in Voices in the City in Monisha-Jiban
marriage. This time the scene of action is shifted from Delhi to Calcutta
to suit the general atmosphere. If it was a type of father fixation and the
predications of albino astrologer which are responsible for Maya’s
tragedy. We see in Nirode a mother-fixation. Monisha unlike Maya
comes to live with her insensitive obtuse in-laws, whereas Maya’s life is
an abundance of feeling.

Anita Desai’s second novel, Voices in the city, deals with the
problem of alienation from a different perspective. Here estrangement is
not between husband and wife but between the artist and his art, the
individual and the city, the son and the mother. In Voices in the city,
Nirode the chief protagonist is a complex character, with introverted
temperament. He is not ready to sacrifice his ideals. Nirode is obsessed
with his mother’s relations with Major Chadha. His mother’s sensual
relations nauseate him. The situation can be compared to the one in Shakespeare’s ‘Hamlet’. As Maya wanted to eliminate the father in the unconscious, Nirode wants to remove his mother.

When he receives another letter from her, he thinks of tearing and throw it away because in it she refers again her company with major Chadha. Madhu Sudan Prasad feels that “Desai delves deep into human psyche and tries to explore very adroitly the dim domains of the conscious and the subconscious of the major characters in this novel” (Anita Desai: The Novelist, 22). Nirode loathed the inner world that could offer him no crusade, no pilgrimage. Nirode’s affinity with David is one of the most telling relationships in the novel. Nirode and David as symbols of two attitudes of life. Two aspects of human relationship and human personality. According to Amla, she and Nirode are like their mother sharing with her, “…A secret inner coldness and impulsiveness. Monisha, however, is like their Father with his silence and a touch of his malice-Oh bleached, refined purified to just a pale shade of it, harmless to anyone but herself” (209). Professor Madhusudan Prasad aptly says “She is compelled to feel helplessly like one trapped in the house of her in-laws, as she finds herself exposed all the time to their scrutiny” (Swain, 31).
Anita Desai has focused in sharp vivid words the plight of the self-encased, entrapped, and locked apart, enclosed in a steel container. Helpless and handicapped, the individual craves for the freedom of a bird flying high into the heaven. The bird image sharply brings into focus the caged conditions of the individual in general and woman in particular. In order to throw clues to the action of the story, the novelist employs various devices such as flashes, asides and painting landscape.

Anita Desai’s technique is her natural outcome of her preoccupation with the individual’s psychology combined with her vivid awareness of the external world. The reference to barred windows, enclosed rooms, locked container describes in sharp dark colours the dismissal environment in which the human beings live. There is no escape in Desai’s world. There is no escape from lack of solitude. It is a life of eternal suffering, a life hedged in by an enclosed space which permits no options. Desai is not a feminist, but since she is a woman, she has competently probed into the interior self of Monisha far better than that of Nirode.
As there is no escape from her agonized state, she understands the futility of her hollow existence and ultimately commits suicide. Amla comes to Calcutta to work as a commercial artist with her profound repertoire of ideas, but she fails. The awful splendor of the conglomerate sights and sounds in the city thrills her heart but despite all the stimulation of new experiences, new occupations and new acquaintances, the sense of hollowness and futility persists.

It ruins her social poise and disturbs the smooth tenor of her life in the city. Amla’s attachment to Dharma is emotional. The entire course of their amorous affinity has been depicted through the changing techniques in Dharma’s inhuman treatment of his daughter. She is unable to give vent to the still twilight of her frustration.

Amala is unable to reciprocate through love, in the hours she spends in Dharma’s studio. She becomes another Amla, with the fragrance of love. This is the place where she could articulate her pent-up feelings, and reckons her real self. Monisha’s life has been a total waste. She is teased by her obtuse in-laws for her barrenness. She is considered to be thief for helping her brother with the family money. She is suddenly conscious of having lost all rights to exist. Her suicide is an attempt to rebel against this death-like isolation. Her meaningless
life acquires some meaning by her call to death. By her husband’s inability to fulfill her needs, by the general indifference of her father – in law’s family to her weal and woe. Monisha is another version of Maya. Like Maya, she too is estranged from her husband, but her estrangement is constitutional and temperamental rather then socio-psychic.

In *Voices in the City*, Anita Desai is not concerned with the physical problems of Calcutta but as the city affects other characters psychologically, particularly Nirode and Monisha who are very sensitive. Nirode suffers from oedipal fixation and has a love–hate relationship with his mother. As sensitive as Maya, he continues to be haunted by the fact that his mother loved major Chadha and tells Amla “Ask her about the love that made he swallow father whole, like a cobra swallows a fat, petrified rat, then spews him cut in one flabby yellow mess” (190).

**PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF PROTAGONISTS**

All the three protagonists of *Voices in the city* Monish, Amla and Nirode struggle for autonomy and individuality and though their quest is similar and they are bonded by blood, for each the struggle is intense lonely and very private. The circumstances that trap Monisha clearly derive their roles assigned to women in traditional Indian House hold.
The themes of Alienation and isolation are the dominant themes in Anita Desai’s novels, *Cry, The Peacock, Voices in the City*. These two novels have links with each other. The titles are very suggestive. *Cry, The Peacock* is an anguished cry of a pathologically sensitive woman, but the intensity of the cry makes one restless and it creates ripples of unrest—it in a sense haunting. *Voices in the City* records how the voice of protest, voice of agony, voice of suffering and creation get drowned reducing persons to mere phantoms by the ‘Janus Faces’ city and there remains a cry in the wilderness. Monisha’s hypersensitivity and her refusal to share herself with other are born out of her fear of violation of that inner self.

Anita Desai is obviously stirring to universalize the predicament of the sensitive feminine temperament into a kind of existential anxiety. She has been able to portray the sense of alienation of the characters who are claustrophobically shut out. The characters live in an incomplete, fragmentary and undifferentiated reality. They wobble between choices and opinions. Their quest for a unified sensibility and unity of being culminates in their search for identity in the jumbling and rumbling milieu of the city. Anita Desai’s characters are continuously engaged in
trying to find out their hidden selves. They attempt to find out where they stand in relation to others, through self analysis. There is also self-awareness in characters like Nirode, Monisha and Maya. Some of the characters insist on holding on to their privacy, not surrendering the innermost being to the roles they are called upon to play.