5 Anita Desai’s Approach to the Problems Faced by her Characters

5.1 Introduction

Women novelists of India are marching ahead in their endeavor and attaining significant honor at the international levels. Their work, no more now, is measured as something disparaging, overdramatic or sub-standard. The clear reason of their achievement as novelist lies in the fact that they are born story-tellers and they are gifted with the perception of digging profoundly into the mechanism of human mind and heart with compassion, understanding and consideration. There is also the general factor of clash of ethics and conflict between different ways of life, which, these women novelists have expertise in. Anita Desai falls in one of those categories of gifted storytellers. She has proved her mettle as a novelist penetrating through the inner consciousness of her protagonists and blending lyric and poetry in them to produce classic fictions in the literary world. Anita Desai uses tools to probe into the psyche of her characters to examine their possibility of becoming complete. An artist like her has an aesthetic perception who can transcend the core sensibilities of humans and comprehend the world through its each molecule.

5.2 Individual Protests And Psyche Of Female Protagonists

Anita Desai strikes the psyche of women so aptly that all the major women characters in her novels, whether they are Maya, Nanda Kaul, Sita, Monisha or Raka, all are on the edge of alienating themselves from the clutches of their men. These five major women characters are searching place for themselves in the male-governed society. Principles, ethics and values are suffocating them and so all of them are striding ahead in a vague mode in the midst of impending western influences and constant urbanization.
A major preoccupation in recent Indian women’s writing has been a delineation of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationships. In a culture where individualism and protest have often remained alien ideas and marital bliss and the women’s role at home is a central focus, it is interesting to see the emergence of not just an essential Indian sensibility but an expression of cultural displacement. Manju Kapur has joined the growing number of women writers from India on whom the image of the suffering but stoic woman eventually breaking traditional boundaries has had a significant impact. ¹

Even Anita Desai has joined the choir with Manju Kapur. Some critics proclaim that Desai as a novelist has the least concern for revealing the social and economic problems in her novels. She devotes her entire creative energy to the psychological states of human mind. In fact, she digs deep into the deepest section of human mind from where the novel ideas of human intellect pour in. She creates certain complex problems in her characters and gives them a free option for their solution. Sometimes they feel secluded and separated amidst their self-generated problems.

Prof. Harish Raizada calls the solitude of characters as innate mistakes which make them catastrophic. He writes that:

Their attempts to seek refuge in their loneliness worsen their situation still more for their solitary musings and to their morbidity and quicken the process of their disintegration. Desai's novels, like those of Franz Kafka, are thus, about human fate, human bewilderment and human suffering.²

This suffering breeds in multiplication, as her characters realize that their attempts becomes more and more vague and indefinable as they fight to attain their indistinct objectives.
At times she, like Hardy, employs the non-living forces of the society with all living powers in her prototype. She thus shows her supremacy over her generation by striking a balance between linguistic and literary perception in her novels.

Gradual social change of India is revealed in *The Village By The Sea*, of Anita Desai. She mostly deals with different kinds of disputes like victory and defeat, joy and anguish, love and hate, gain and loss, prosperity and paucity, honour and dishonour, rural and urban life.

Anita Desai in *The Village By The Sea* examines the neurosis of her protagonists and lets out their hidden desires similar to the philosophy of a psychologist. The main protagonist Hari, in his teenage struggles hard to satisfy his secret thirst for existence. Desai focuses fully to the steady growth of Hari. Hari is equipped with an extraordinary potency to confront with life. He endures the spasm of cravings and scarcity being in a poor family:

*He seldom thought about them or their lives, because they lived so close in that small hut, sharing the same kind of life. It was the hard life that occupied him. ... Lila, Bela and Kamal - his three sisters, one older and two younger than him.*

Hari has three sisters, and he is worried about their marriages. A constant question for the evil of dowry stirs him and he thinks *how could he ever meet them.*

Therefore, he decides that he must have a job if he was to find his sisters a way out of this dark, gloomy house and the *illness and drunkenness and helplessness that surround them like the shadow of the night.*

The regular tension about getting his sister married, to endure the drunkard father, to withstand the condition of his ailing mother and the wretched state of his family: all these coerce him to look for a job in his young age.
Anita Desai analyses the motive-led impulses of her characters and watches them keenly. Hari realizes the impending *shadow of night* for the wretched survival of his family. Anita Desai observes their inner longing for a fresh life. Hari comes to Mumbai for an independent life, away from paucity and miseries of financial tightness. Finally he manages to get the job of a waiter in *Shri Krishna Eating House*. He starts his search for self. He ultimately finds a place to gasp in the milling crowd of Mumbai. He suffers mental anguish but demonstrates an instance of resilience and patience. He could barely breathe the fresh air and scarcely drink the clear water:

He inhales the air at night living in a slum, which has *been used up by the millions of gasping city dwellers.*

The novelist unleashes to the readers about his inner feelings by encroaching into the untapped regions of Hari's psyche, and he saw the school children pouring by with their shoulders.

They all wore the same clothes—grey shorts or skirts and light blue shirts or blouses faded and mended... watching them. Hari thought of his sisters... in their indigo blue skirts, skipping and running down the village road to school by the hill, and wondered when he would see them again.

Hari becomes homesick, when he sees the school children in Mumbai, he misses his sisters. He sways between the two poles of existence: one which stimulates him to ceaselessly search for self and the other which is pushing him towards a happy and untroubled life. He urges strongly to meet everyone again at Thul. The emotion of brotherly affection flows and he longs to be with them: *the same clothes*, reveal the nostalgia. Mr. Panwallah, a watch mender, shows his compassionate love for Hari in his despondent condition and he nourishes a new hope of economic liberty in the coming time: *door had opened into a new and strange house.*
Hari, like Nirode in *Voices In The City*, becomes an embodiment of failure and frustration in pursuing his ambitious project, and it is through him that the novelist's insight into human frailty can be sensed.

Anita Desai, with her insight, can witness how her protagonists are in pathos and existentialist problem. Her protagonists dangle between the time past and time present. The psychological procedure of time is understood through the past reflections of the protagonist. Characters of Desai display a strange sense of disconnect existence. At times, they emerge, surrendering before the forces of life. They pull themselves out to an isolated world made up of their own pensive thoughts and memories. Thus, beaten and disappointed, they associate their past with the failures of the present. They become loner with their uncertainties, when they are not able to conform to their emotional incentives. We can assess the same predicament in her *Baumgartner's Bombay*.

As observed by Suprya Shukla:

*In psychology, psyche stands for the mind functioning as the centre of thought, emotion and behaviour and consciously or unconsciously adjusting or mediating the body's responses to the social and physical environment.*

In this context, I wish to make comparative study between Anita Desai’s psyche handling through the mirror imagery and Bharati Mukherjee’s method of bringing forth the agony and dissatisfaction of women by the use of sadomasochism.

In Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*, Dimple, undergoes phobic syndromes. She indulges in sadomasochistic acts, so as to mask her own sense of weaknesses and failure. The pervertive act of masochism is a sign of depression in psychology.
Dimple's attitude and intention to implement masochistic suffering is to have a respite from the pain of displeasure in her married life. She was sure that marriage would free her from all problems and it will be a new beginning of her real life. She longed so intensely for it that the years of waiting made her nervous-prone to colds, coughs and headaches.  

She persistently expected her future husband to be the representative of the desirable qualities of the profit-making world:

She borrowed a forehead from an aspiring ad, the lips, eyes and chin from a body-builder and shoulders ad, the stomach and legs from a trousers ad, and put the ideal man by himself in a restaurant on Park Street or by the side of a pool at a five-star hotel.  

In *Cry The Peacock*, Maya wants her wholeness both as a woman and as a wife. Gautama repeatedly tries to prove to her that thoughts are remote perceptions of the futile life. According to him, dreams are the bi-product of intense imagination. Maya, at her failure to accomplish her dreams, feels alienated, lonely and deserted. When Gautama’s mother leaves, the narration about Maya, as given by the novelist is:

*She did not have time for caresses, very little of it, and nor did they (her children). And yet I yearned for her to hold me to her bosom. I could not remember my own mother at all. My throat began to swell with unbearable self-pity. I would cry, I knew it, in a while, and dreaded it, in their sane presence ‘Please’, I whispered.*

The girl, who has missed her mother’s love and caresses, marries an aged man who turns out to be her father's friend. She had received paramount love from her father but she craves to compensate her incomplete love through her husband. Gautama fails to satisfy her sexual urge.
Gautama, the rational being, fails to differentiate reality from make-believe. A distress remains deep-rooted in her sub-conscious mind, steering her psychological disorder. The prophecy of an astrologer about her future was one more outrageous incident for her. The astrologer's prophesies that one of them would die after four years of their marriage devours her unconscious mind. The inner psyche of Maya which is in trauma, never resolves with the conscious level of her mind. She is love-obsessed and her heart yearns, agonizingly, expanding and swelling with the vastness of a single moment of absolute happiness, and her body followed its long, sweet curve, arching with the searing, annihilating torture of it. 

She is never satisfied by her father-figure husband. A deep-seeded anxiety is born within her due to this. The continuous angst and lonely disposition develops in her the idea of separation. An ill-omen is forecast by her even at the death of her dog with a persistent sense of some disaster. The illusion and disappointment led by her isolation and loneliness make her a patient of neurosis. She finds the entire life as useless and meaningless as negativity creeps into her. Like George Eliot, Anita Desai packs her stories with psychosomatic norms. She also chooses to use the pattern in place of the plot. She, therefore, shuns everything that is non-natural and needless in the extension of her story. Nayantara Sahgal too, raises her voice through her female protagonists about their abuse and male cynicism towards women's individuality though she may not be claimed as a militant feminist. She stresses social impartiality for women, her focal point being on liberty. The pretence of fake customs and misery from loss of identity is the challenge of Sahgal's fictions. They intimidate the strong hold of men and reiterate their faith in their worth. The fight that begins quite placidly with Maya, keeps moving and accumulating impetus through Rashmi, Saroj, Simrit, Devi and Sonali in sehqual’s novels.

In Custody (1984), unfurls the story of a susceptible character known as Deven Sharma, who is inspired to produce a work of his life. Regrettably, beaten by his own vulnerability, Deven loses his sense of balance.
Deven, who has a penchant for Urdu literature, is a short-term lecturer in Hindi in a private college in Mirpore, a Delhi suburb. He makes a new friend - Murad, editor of an Urdu magazine, who asks Deven to take an interview of Nur Shahjehanbadi, an Urdu poet, for his oncoming issue. He writes:

*Deven's hand fluttered on to his knees as he melted at the suggestion and felt a glow creep through him at the thought of writing something in the language which had been his first language. The glow was also caused by pride ... at being asked to contribute a piece by the editor of what he took to be a leading Urdu journal.*

The remaining part of the story buds between winner and failure of Deven. It narrates all about his passion and timidity and lastly he meets his devastation. Though he is clasped by some invisible forces, which forbid him to fulfill his dream. At last, he finds himself at a fork in his road of success, fully confused, which road to catch. The story winds up when Deven accumulates some strength in his inner self and makes up his mind to boldly encounter the life.

In the novel, one can see that Deven replaces judgment from within and without. There is the pang of frustration and failure, defeat and disappointment and the tussle between conscious and unconscious mind within him. The hostility in his situation and the precipitant inner conflicts do not allow him to have mental poise. Readers of Anita Desai can see the unending perplexity and concern of Deven which throws him into the filth of helplessness and shatters all his hopes. The novel is an exemplary work of Ms. Desai, which exhibits an intricate design of complexities, dormant in human mind.

*In Baumgartner's Bombay*, Anita Desai portrays human deceptions, human relationships, constricted walls built by prejudiced societies and discovery of the buried intention of human mind.
Anita Desai dives at the bottom of the unconscious mind of her main protagonist-Hugo and loads in his inner soul the thoughts for perpetuation and self discovery. Anita Desai dissects the inner regions of consciousness and infiltrates into psyche of human mind as she does in her other novels. Exterior actions do not decide the outline of this novel. On the other hand, the inner predicament of Hugo’s mind intertwines the fine and complex fabric of the story. Hugo’s entire life hangs between if accepted or if accepting. Same as Maya- bereft of mother’s love, Hugo is devoid of father’s affections. He has an over caring mother beneath whom his personality is suppressed. The city of Kolkata overshadows him after he comes to Kolkata in connection with his business.

Again, the crisis of existential issue is revealed. When war breaks out, he is captivated and thrown into a confined camp. This enslaved life makes him nostalgic and compels him to think about some impending dangers that might fall on his mother in Germany. A deep connection between a mother and a son is exhibited in this novel. After the war gets over, Hugo returns to Mumbai. There, due to the feeling of seclusion and lonely, he becomes close to another European, girl, Lotte, a divorcee of Kanti Setia. Hugo does not make this relationship physical. He is bewildered to observe that all are in war with each other. Here women are engaged in an endless war with filth. 14

Another novel of Mrs. Desai, Fasting Feasting (1999), illustrates the supremacy of her originality. The amalgamation of the East and the West has been skillfully presented by her in this novel. This novel becomes a document of her extensive familiarity with different human relationships. The story also arouses few questions in about the philosophy of East and West. She has commented on various possibilities of revealing the self- willed reticence and crafted volubility. She sketches the rituals of the East and the new outlook of the West. Since her childhood, Anita Desai has known and experienced both, the East and the West. Therefore, it is evident that her formative years have boosted her in determining her artistic faculty as a novelist.
Moreover, the early readings of *Wuthering Heights*, the novels of James Joyce, D.H. Lawrance and Virginia Woolf, created deep imprints on her as a philosopher. Anita Desai, in this novel, expresses the gender bias widespread in our society. She has penetrated deeply into the psyche of a prey of gender discrimination. The novel is a thoughtful depiction of patriarchal society, ruled by its ambiguous ethics. It is a society in which daughters and sisters are married and their existence is instantly erased out by the family. It is that repulsive social system, where the birth of a son is rejoiced and considered to be bliss, while at the birth of a daughter, it becomes the time to mourn, as it is a funeral.

In *Fasting Feasting*, Uma, a naïve simple divorcée, becomes the prey of social spite due to the conservative and arrogant outlook of her parents. This rude demonstration of delight at the birth of son replicates distinctive outlook of a male member in a patriarchal society. The triumphant call of the father: *A boy... A boy! Arun.* This, without a doubt, points out that the daughters are unnecessary and are not wanted. He hopes for a male child, always. Moreover, Uma has to give a hand to her mother in raising Arun, after the birth of her brother. Her parents remove her from the school without caring for her future, when she fails. The cynical remarks of her mother disclose her approach about a girl child:

*What is the use of going back to school if you keep failing, Uma? ... You will be happier at home. You are a big girl now. We are trying to arrange a marriage for you... Till then, you can help me look after Arun. And learn to run the house.*  

Even Uma's father, a learned person, a barrister, never thinks to give education to his daughter. In the end, Uma gets married and right away after her marriage, she meets head-on reality and is slapped with the reality that her husband is already married and in order to recove the worse financial situation, he marries her. The dreadful reality of patriarchal order has been brought to the fore by such episode in the life of Uma, which is a living example of our prevalent society.
The Village By The Sea is a typical story of Thul, a small village in the north of Mumbai along the coast. The story of Lila and Hari, the brother and sister, is being depicted here. It shows us the compassion and love of its populace. Through the narrative, we come across a family, where Hari becomes the sole bread earner for his family, comprising of an ailing mother, putrefied by her strange illness and a drunkard father, along with two other small sisters, Lila and Bela. In the process they become witnesses of poverty, spread out all over India in recent times.

To search for a job, Hari arrives in Mumbai to better his and his family’s condition, when he confronts a new world. He gets a job in a restaurant, with the help of Jagu, who falls in the same category of paucity. Mr. Panwallah, a sympathetic man helps him by teaching the skill that can bring improvement in his and his family’s condition.

5.3 Anita Desai And Domestic Violence

Anita Desai’s novels, apart from portraying the human psyche, makes bare the domestic violence in the Indian cultural set up. A sense of security, warmth, and a place in which one can be at mental poise and peace is what may be the definition of the word – domestic.

But women are at unrest in the family, unsafe even in her own domestic surroundings. A woman plays the role of a daughter, mother, wife or sister, which bears no significance to a patriarchal form of society. The treatment that is metted out to women is needless to mention. Some give an explanation to the fact that women themselves are responsible for their plight, as they are weak, not only physically but mentally too. If a man is not giving a sense of security, equality and liberty, it is a woman, who has to extract it from the patriarchal society.
Anita Desai, thus, shows a path of resilience to all those suffering women. Hostility is not only a bodily torture; it can be an emotional, mental or psychological damage. Unfortunately, these wounds are more detrimental than the physical blow. With her novels, we can draw a parallel with Shashi Deshpande’s portraying her characters. Through the character of Saru, she has tried to ascertain a woman, as an individual entity, who severes the traditional obligations and upgrades her individuality, according to the altered societal condition of modern times. Shashi Deshpande's women are conscious about their cultural and social limitations especially in the male-governed society. They rise up against their men in search for autonomy and identity, but finally discover themselves up against well-established social apathy.

In Domestic atmosphere, women have allocated definite roles, and their rearing held in such domestic ambiance that they have to pursue such roles. Marriage is the basic means by which patriarchy is upheld. This marriage system is nowhere documented, but the societal law has levied husband's power and has forced boundaries on wife's actions.

Today, women have undergone transformation of going to the extent of living relationships where there is no burden of responsibilities and obligation on the part of both, though it is still a matter of debate as it violates ethics and morality to some. Wife beating is usually accepted as a standard occurrence. Beating their wives for improvement is practiced by most men. Women allow it as a part of their existence.

There is a little deviation, when we talk about the existing black women showcased in the writings of black women, which is an honest expression and submission of the black women's experiences in America. There is slight attempt to cover up the pain, and form the idyllic view. They expose, how black women integrate the negative and positive aspects of self and exterior reality into an individuality that facilitates them to face the dispute, in which they exist.
Not all black women are tough and enduring, yet they bear the power of confrontation to their emotional and physical cruelty. Anita Desai joins the band of these writers in the criticism of a combined tragedy to women often overlooked by the rest of the world. The mannerism is mild and placid, the characters do not make a hue and cry, but the tone remains imprinted in the reader’s mind. The bottom line of this mission is the quest for existence. There is fret and labor, there is pain and there is pleasure. Everything goes on smoothly, in the cycle of life.

Desai’s *Voices in the City*, has been divided into four parts: Nirode, Monisha, Amla and Mother. The repulsive things of Kolkata, on one hand, and the persistent authority of the mother is the narrative of the novel on the other. The novel brings forth, lavish rearing and domineering mother. Nirode comes to Kolkata and settles down. He gets used to this Mumbai life. He publishes a literary magazine but closes it for some financial constraint.

His elder sister comes to Kolkata after her marriage and leads a servile way of life within the strict restrictions of a conventional Hindu family and finally dies a terrible death. Amla, his younger sister too arrives here and gets caught up in the relationship with an artist. The disastrous end of her elder sister Monisha compels her, towards this catastrophe and hence she gives way to the practicality of life. There are two gruesome characters: one living and another non-living, with its natural form. The city of Kolkata dictates the whole configuration of the novel. The heavy glamour of light and sound of Kolkata make Nirode panicky. The uproar of crowd and the constant pollution of industries bring forth the stimulation to his sensibility.

The classic unfolding of this novel exhibits a never-ending play of human gloom in the *beastly blood thirsty* city of Kolkata. The city of Kolkata, with its natural shape proceeds like an evil spirit for Nirode as described below:
On all sides the city down, alight, aglow and stirring with its own marsh-bred, mother life that, like an ogre, kept one eye open through sleep and waking, Calcutta, Calcutta, Calcutta-like the rattle of the very pulse beat in its people's veined wrists. The streets where slaughtered sheep hung beside bright tinsel tassels to adorn oiled black braids, and syphilistic family came rolling down barrows. 16

Kolkata first separates the whole family of Nirode and again joins them. Nirode begins his literary journal settles down. Again, Kolkata city propels him to run a book-stall for his livelihood. After stopping the publication of Voice, Nirode, falls in a despondent condition:

I live in a room for which I pay a rent of fifteen rupees — because it is n't a room, only a corrugated iron shack someone created on his roof top to house his pigeons: they all died. 17

The interfering mother of Nirode makes the other part of the plot of this novel. The mother's negligence and indifferent behavior produces a gap in the family. From the very beginning, it is the mother who is being referred to as the distaste of her son-Nirode. The plot creates some sensation with the addition of disgust, repulsion, irritation, hatred and disconnection of Nirode from his mother. Further it intensifies the impact of his mother by the visit of his sister Amla to him. Nirode admits his rage before Amla against his mother. Amla’s advice to her brother to take her help in his despair to continue his literary magazine, Voice, be able to better the poor in the society, annoys Nirode. He responds in irritation against the mother and declines to accept her help. The passage under discussion tells the strained relationship of his mother and father too. Monisha undergoes inner paroxysm as a broken bird. She goes through the experience of ignorance and ridiculousness because of her discontented womanhood:
Like a burst of wild feathers, released full in my face, comes the realization that they are talking of me, my organs, the reason I cannot 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, worked in blood, laid open, laid bare to their scrutiny.

Her continuous fears for motherhood turn her phobic. She is almost a walking ghost. Monisha is a persistent shy woman who keeps all her anguish within and does not reveal her troubles even to Amla. The unseen motherly-pang of the plot has an influence on the life of Monisha. Neither does she disclose her clandestine to her in-laws. The entire structure of the novel revolves round the mother affair. The younger brother of Nirode, Arun marries Agnes and flees from home. Monisha builds up the inherent personality of fear-psychosis due to the messiness of her family. The depressing flash of human sentiment hit the intensity of her inner psyche. In a fit of nervous break-down, she empties on her body the highly inflammable liquid and fires a match and dies. The novelist unveils thus a submissive world of human relations through the disaster of Monisha.

*Bye-Bye, Blackbird* is another story of diverse human relationships. Adit and Dev are the two most important characters, who stand for two major rivulets of life. Adit from the beginning of the novel grows affection to the western way of life, especially to England:

*Dev made spitting sound and sat up; hugging his knees, now unquestionably chilled by the green, unripe shade of chestnuts and by the encroaching evening.* ‘I would not live in a country where I was insulted and unwanted’, he said grandly.

The novel furls opens with Dev’s arrival to England. Dev comes to England simply for his education and the wish to be an *England-returned teacher.*
The vital difference of societal and educational factors between the East and the West is what Dev examines:

*That's all you people do-you lazy immigrants. God, you should go mad-mad, when even school boys can call your names on the streets, when you find that the London docks have three kinds of lavatories Ladies, Gents and Asiatic. But what did you? You laughed.*

Dev compromises with England inspite of some social and intellectual differences between England and India. Nevertheless, the author has mainly analyzed here the psycho-phobism of the innermost regions of human consciousness. Dev is keen to be an England-returned teacher but he also shows his hatred to the social system of England. Adit willingly marries an English girl Sarah, and eventually grows his fondness towards England. He tries to be sensible to this country where he lives for his future. Adit, a balanced personality, responds to situation in life. He describes England in his words:

*I am happy here ... I like the girls here-I like their nylon stockings... and I used to like thatched cottages and British history and reading the letters in The Times, like choosing between three kinds of lavatories.*

It seems that the people of England show its natural entity in the clairvoyant growth of the two characters—in *Voices In The City* named Adit and Dev. Dev demonstrates detest for the ways and style of living in England but gradually he develops his penchant for the country. With the development of new ideas within the characters, the plot of this novel grows. Sarah forgoes her reserved nature for the sake of her husband. She is the character who curves a suitable balance among diverse groups of human relationships.
Sarah hangs in between her natural preference and enthusiastic acceptance but she demonstrates her courtesy to be the typical Indian companion. India is close to the heart of Dev while Adit is fascinated towards England. Sarah has different attitude. She refuses to give up her attachments with England for the sake of human relations. But finally, she surrenders herself to the ways her husband demanded of her and also readily departs from her homeland for her husband’s native land-India:

*Despite the totally English tone of her childhood, she cast back no look of English nostalgia upon it. Was this dismissal another result of her un-English marriage? It was as though she had chosen to be cast out her home, her background, and would not be drawn back to it, not even by her husband.*

Adit is totally disillusioned; the fear psychosis creeps in his mind. He decides to leave England which so loves him. There is an emotional upheaval and dilemma if he would go back to India. At last, he disregards the plastic, snobbish life of England. He honestly confides to Sarah:

*I've loved England more than you. I've often felt myself half English, but it was only pretence, Sally. Now, it has to be the real thing. I must go. You will come?*

Sarah’s trustworthiness towards her husband unites the wobbly marriage bond. She conceives and wonders of the difficulties she might face in the hectic and long journey to India. Sometimes she also becomes the victim of psychic repulsion against the situations that she has to encounter. But she treasures the unfastened moments with Adit. In order to share her mind and soul, Sarah binds herself in this marriage knot. She lands up sacrificing her wishes and desires like a typical Indian conventional wife and compromises with her destiny. For the sake of her husband and motherhood, she leaves behind her homeland:
She felt it again-this light, pinching contraction inside her chest followed by a throb and flowering of warmth-when she entered her flat and saw it already stripped of half its furnishing, open boxes lined against the wall, while her cat disconsolately nosed about the contents of one, then the other—all the disorder and promise of a house about to be abandoned. 24

Thus, there is a slow neurotic change in both the characters:

…the truth was that his disenchantment with England had begun sometime before he read the news in the paper. 25

There are three parts in Where Shall We Go This Summer?- Monsoon 67, Winter 47 and Monsoon 67 again. This novel outlines a traditional approach to varied human relations again. The background for the freedom movement of India's Independence, a world of wonder, enchantment and fallacy, and it is about tensed relations between father and daughter, husband and wife.

Based on the method of the stream-of-consciousness, this story occurs chiefly on an island in the Manori village. This island is known as an island of miracles. In fact, Sita's father settles here on this island, leaving the busy and hectic life of the city. Through the scheme of calling back a world of memories, one comes to know all about Sita and her father's past history in the chapter entitled Monsoon 67.

Through this scheme of narration, unconscious mind moves forward and brings forth the episodes of Sita's marriage with Raman, Sita's childhood and her family and finally her strained relations with her husband. In the second chapter entitled Winter 47, the starting of this novel occurs.
Sita does not compromise herself with the life of a village which is an evil mass of over-flowing drains, gaping thatched roofs and mud huts all battered and away. 26

The disagreement of Sita for delivering an unnecessary fourth child builds up a rift with her husband. Raman and she come to this island of miracles with her daughter and son with an expectation of aborting her pregnancy there. Like her father, she desires to experiment with the miracles by chanting mantras. She recollects the days spent with her father who was respected for his miracles by people as a saint and as an incarnation of God Himself. Sita becomes submissive as Raman, a man of the middle way fail to understand the depth of Sita’s heart. She now begins to smoke. She becomes a disinterested and non-active in her husband’s things:

It was there that she started smoking, a thing that had never been done in their household by any woman and even by man only in secret and began to speak in sudden rushes of emotion.27

The second part of the story tells the us about the close attachment between Sita and her mother. She is closer to her mother than her father. Sita is able to connect her past with the present through the memories and flashbacks. Her husband does not complete her expectations as she waits for an intense and ardent love from him. She longs for an ideal balance between the body and the spirit in her love. She considers physical love is simply the appetite for sex. Her husband and his friend have been compared with a band of animals:

My pet animals—or wild animals in the forest, yes. But these are neither—they are like pariahs you see in the streets, hanging about drains and dustbins, waiting to pounce and kill and eat. 28
Sita thus belongs to a family which has been spiritually rich. As a girl, she had experienced, with her brother Jeevan and sister Rekha, the mystery of life in this Ashram. This Ashram forms her personality. Psychologically, the strained relations of her mother and father formed an indelible impression on her mind. Like Maya, she sometimes seems rebellious towards her husband, even quarrels with him over petty domestic matters. Again and again, she thinks of her parents' strained relations and of her mother's departure for Banaras where she stayed till her death. When Sita recalls the memories of her mother, she perceives the natural inner pangs of a lady:

*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.*

This passage opens up two aspects: first, the cause behind her mother leaving her father and, secondly, her differences in opinion with her husband. The fleeing of her mother formulates an unconscious string in Sita's mind. Her thoughts in loneliness on the island give a realization to Sita about the tensed relations between her parents.

Her father was a well-read man who had studied Emerson, John Stuart Mill, Locke, Rousseau, Hume, Thoreau and Bertrand Russell as a politician, and he often referred to them in his speech. Jeevan reveals another secret of his father. He points out that his father had a *mistress, perhaps, a second wife, and the desertion by their own mother.* But the episode of mother-father relationship remains unknown to all. Sita faces these problems first in her own family and then the cold relations with her husband. She is overpowered by grief. Her marriage did not give anything gratifying to her, it was *empty and meaningless.* She is stunned by her womanly emotions when she comes to know the real motive of Raman's arrival. He comes not to satiate her emotional fervour, but to see his children. She thus experiences the stinging of numerous scorpions in her body. So she now thinks of divorce. Raman also becomes nervous by her sensitive nature and gets ready to release her from all household tasks. Her idea of love can be elucidated by an example in the text.
She tries to remind Raman of love from him:

_Do you know, in all these years we have lived together, in Bombay, I have known only one happy moment._ 30

Disenchanted as she is, she wishes to free herself from monotony, dreariness, tedium and mental exhaustion. She, in her anxiety, swings between the emotions of liberty and responsibility, thus, shows the superhuman consciousness. She tries to control her depressing emotions and somehow comes out victorious over her limitations.

_The Fire on the Mountain_ has been divided into three parts: Nanda Kaul at Carignano, Raka comes to Carignano and Ila Das leaves Carignano. The writer unites the subtleties of varied groups of human relations in this novel. The novel skillfully displays the unconscious eagerness, curiosity for pursuing the unfulfilled ideals, search for belongingness and feminine sensibility in three female characters: Nanda Kaul, Ila Das and Raka. Like _Voices in the City_ and _Where Shall We Go This Summer?_, Carignano too exists like a living entity in this novel. The scene of this house becomes suggestive of the future happenings.

On the crest of a mountain, Nanda Kaul begins to live after the sad demise of her husband. In order to lead a serene life, she comes to stay here permanently:

_Everything she wanted was here, at Carignano, in Kasauli; here on the ridge of the mountain in this quiet house. It was the place, and the time of life, that she had wanted and prepared for all her life—as she realized on her first day at Carignano with a great cool flowering of relief—and at last she had it._

The house becomes symbolic of Nanda's lifestyle. There is no continuity, like the traditional novel, in running the story.
It is in episodic form. Nanda Kaul leads an isolated and a lonely life, which is full of quietude and solitariness. She does not like to be disturbed in her peace by anybody else. She has associated herself permanently with the grandeur of the Bungalow and the natural life of it. The comparison drawn between Nanda Kaul and her garden is very evocative:

*Like her, the garden seemed to have arrived, simply by a process of age, of othering away elimination, at a state of elegant perfection. It was made up of a very few elements, but they were exact and germane.*

Through Ila Das, Mrs. Desai lets time come in full swing. Past memories of Nanda Kaul unfurl the image of time:

*Why, it’s been a little bit of the past come alive. As if the past still existed here and I could simply come and visit and have a cup of tea with it when I was tried to the present.*

As a social reformer, Ila brings forward the social cause for humanity. Ila intentionally chooses the hard life of a social worker. She had a separated family, as all her sons had been sent to foreign universities, but none of them did very well in his faculty. Ila's husband repaid the entire amount overdue, but her sons were so self-centered that they did not even bother to attend their father’s funeral. As Ila Das surrenders to all her physical and worldly attainments, she undergoes a metamorphosis of character. This change in her enables her to embrace a wider vision of life for serving the cause of humanity. She has no religion of humanity. As she fights for the women's cause, she encounters injustices, cruelties and atrocities against them in the male-dominated society.
Nanda is so far, able to avoid the self hatred by escaping alternately into the intra-psychic defenses. Finally, the telephone call, announcing the death of Ila Das, overwhelms her with spite of herself. Metaphysically, the deaths of Ila and Nanda are interpreted as the final reality suggesting the futility of human existence. Ila dies because of her concern for others, Nanda dies because her concern for loneliness. Both involvement and non-involvement signify a tragic sense of unfulfillment. From psychological standpoint we analyze the forces destroying Nanda as the compulsions of self-destructive drives generated by the torment of a life which has been a failure.

Finally, the pessimistic thoughts, chaos and destruction overshadow her real self. Nanda condemns herself as the murderer of Ila. Disparaging drives work on her silently but fatally. She doesn't commit suicide but her death wish, expressed in the previous pages works on her psyche. Finally it causes her death:

..you have no idea what it has meant to me to have you here at Carignano, to come and see you today. Why, it's been a little bit of the past come alive. As if the past still existed here and I could simply come and visit and have a cup of tea with it when I was tried to the present.  

*Journey to Ithaca* makes a remarkable opening in Indo-English fiction in contrast to the other novels of Anita Desai. Anita Desai has initiated a method of Prologue and Epilogue in this novel like the trends in Greek drama. The structure of the novel has been grouped into four proportional parts. Like Epilogue, the first part of the novel is the journey of Matteo, his childhood, marriage with Sophie and the responsibility of his parents in tending their children-Giacoma and Isabel—after he leaves for India which is portrayed with precision. Again, his school days is made very clear to the reader in Prologue. He went to school when his uncle escorts him there with his own sons. Matteo considered the school to be like *theorem set within a larger theorem.*
So, this arithmetical accuracy created a sense of being a failure as a student in his early age. His school life baffled him like the geometry and algebra. Therefore, whenever he was queried about his progress in school, his reply to questions was morose and monosyllabic. Due to this, his parents were compelled to withdraw him from the school and make a time-being effort to make him study at home.

A significant phase begins in his life when he marries Sophie and they leave for India. The difference in personality which distinguishes Sophie from Matteo is the key ingredient of this novel. Matteo, as a searching soul comes to India only for increasing the power of his faith which picked up from The Journey to the East. Sophie, on the other hand, exclusively relies on her analytical views as a journalist. This part of the book unfolds various complex incidences like their visits to ashrams, their east-west clashes, their practical presence in kumbh-gathering at Allahabad, their coming to an ashram in Bihar and again their dislike towards the rituals of the ashram. Though Sophie and Matteo come to India to satisfy their spiritual urge, they have a design, a pattern, to their wanderings.

The mind of a journalist is revealed when she inquires from a European, Pierre Eduard whether God could be perceived only in one way in India:

*Can there not be many ways, more than one way the Christian way to glorify God? he raged. Hers is to create belief in people through her powers. Is that wrong?*  

Towards the end of the novel, Sophie experiences a transformation. She is the very same person who had disbelieved the benevolent gestures and fidelity of the Mother. Diya asks Sophie, *What will you do now, Sophie? Will you follow him?* Sophie answers - *I'll have to, what else?*
A few uniqueness are worthy of mention based on the above wellknif plot of Ms. Desai. In contrast to Raja Rao, Mulk Raj, R.K. Narayan and Bhabhani Bhattacharya, Anita Desai differs from the conventional pattern of building a plot. She closely resembles Virginia Woolf in exploring the psychic power of the characters in her writings. Her primary attention is to discover the secret channels of human dilemma. She has commented herself:

*Writing is my way of plunging to the depths and exploring the underlying truth. All my writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things.*

In Anita Desai’s novels, mostly all her characters, openly or indirectly, are gripped with the pessimism.

**5.4 Writing Techniques And Symbols Of Anita Desai**

Like Virginia Woolf, Anita Desai’s concern is to scoop out interior area of women’s sensibility rather than the physical or apparent human problems. Ms. Desai traces the impact of the outer events on the inner consciousness of the character. The emphasis is on the impact of sights and sounds and physical movements on the consciousness of her characters. To convey this stream of consciousness, she uses a style that is supple and suggestive and a language that is poetic. The use of symbols, therefore, becomes inevitable.

The journey itself is a symbol that refers to the pursuit of spiritual realization. It is a quest for spiritual transcendence. Having married, Matteo and Sophie set out for India dressed in identical blue jeans and T-shirts and sports shoes.
But there is one important difference in respect of the hair. Sophie's hair was very short while Matteo's hair was growing long. The contrast in appearance is suggestive of the contrast in their temperament. Matteo's long hair is suggestive of his spiritual inclination. The short hair of Sophie probably suggests her preoccupation with the mundane. This difference in temperament leads to clashes, conflicts and incompatibility. It is on the life of the Mother of Pondicherry ashram that Anita Desai bases the character of the Mother in her novel *Journey to Ithaca*. Both have great artistic attainments while Mira, the name of the Mother of Pondicherry Ashram, had inquisitiveness for anything to do with art, with aesthetics—music, painting etc.

Laila, the name of the Mother before she attained spiritual realization, refined the art of dance. She is trained the eurhythmic exercises which fails to amaze her. She joins a dance school to learn the basics of dance. Dance is a medium through which one can express emotions like pleasure, sorrow or wish for Laila. Dance can convey things through movements and gestures that act as symbols. This thought of dance that Laila has is fundamentally different from the Western notion of dance but it has a close proximity to Indian form. From master Krishna she learns dancing and receives appreciation for this creative art. The novelist establishes the subjective reality of her protagonists' being and conveys the peculiar intensity of the feminine sensibility.

According to Madhusudan Prasad, imagery projects reality with the help of artistic parallels more powerful and eloquent than common collocation of words. He describes Desai’s imagery as chiefly *anticipatory, pre-figurative or demonstrative in nature....... considerably functional..... lusciously lyrical, her image patterns are singularized by interrelatedness and continuity*.  

The fight and commitment drive is expressively handled in a way that is unique to the narrative. The subject and the construction of *Journey to Ithaca* brings human interfaces vividly. Actions are like heroic fights of the protagonist Mother. This has a close connection with the journey of life of Mother-Laila.
5.5 Conclusion

Anita Desai intertwines themes such as the sufferings of existence, the metaphysical void, the fears and apprehensions of her protagonists whose morals, ethics and principals are jeopardized, which, in turn, stand in the way of the individual's self realization. However, there is an honest attempt suggesting a struggle and attain a maturity of outlook, and positive growth. Her strong point is the exploration of sensibility - the particular kind of Indian sensibility that is ill at ease among barbarians and the philistines, the anarchists and the amoralists, as appropriately remarked by K.R.S. Iyengar.\(^{39}\)

Since the publication of her first novel, Anita Desai has received substantial critical acclaim. Her works have elicited five full-length studies besides quite a few articles and essays. Her marked edge derives from the richness of her narrative technique and the vast extension of the inner world that imparts a problematic and elusive nature to her writings. Some critics refer to her anti-fiction and consider her a novelist of moods, of persistent states of mind and psyche. For him, Desai, through her first two novels, found a departure from current modes of fictional writing.

The novelist weaves social fatalism into a coherent pattern to communicate the tender sensibility of a woman. But she renounces the social obligations and claims quite a few times that she has interest purely in individual entities rather than the society. Societal problems encroach wherever they impinge on the characters.
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