• FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

• CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY
"Fire on the Mountain" is known as another great masterpiece of Anita Desai from the view point of feminism. If one reads the major novels of Anita Desai, one can realise that Desai belongs to the "Female" phase as is identified by Elaine Showalter, during which phase:

"The focus on uncovering misogyny in male texts - is being replaced by a turn towards inward for identity and a resulting rediscovery of women's texts and women."1

This inward search for identity is a common factor among the central women of Anita Desai - right from Maya up to Nanda Kaul. Anita Desai in her novel "Fire On The Mountain" portrays the numerous facets of the woman's experience emphasizing in particular the trials and tribulations of being a woman in a rigid patriarchal culture. In this novel Anita Desai concentrates on the complex questions of women:

"Identity, career, motherhood, marriage, sexual and economic freedom as they become matters for active decisions rather than merely subject for hope and speculation."2

Instead of being bold experimentalists in form and technique Anita Desai carefully portrays the contemporary woman with crisis and conflicts unknown to her predecessors, the major one being her oscillation between the two opposite poles of human experience: erotic urge and the spiritual quest. The present novel attempts to analyse the disintegrated personality of Anita Desai's heroines in the light of these

perspectives in order to indicate how, on the one hand, they are obsessed with their struggle to fulfill their erotic urge, and on the other hand, are engrossed in their nascent attempts to find viable means for their spiritual quest. Desai explores this problematic issue of women's identity in "Fire On The Mountain" from the point view of feminism. We can say that this novel is the story of one woman struggling to cope with her dreams and fears. In "Fire On The Mountain" which is Desai's fifth novel, she penetrates deep in to the psyche of her female character. Nanda Kaul, who has withdrawn herself from all movements of life and lives all alone in a very secluded place on the mountain. The exploration of inner emotional world of a woman, is the main theme of the novel. Nanda Kaul, the wife of an ex-vice chancellor of the Punjab University, buys a house named Carignano in the hill town of Kasauli after the death of her husband. She settles down there alone only with a servant to escape from the haunting memories of her past. She enjoys her solitude and feels happy in the barrenness and emptiness of the house:

"All she wanted was to be alone, to have Carignano to herself, in this period of her life when stillness and calm were all that she wishes to entertain."³

She wants to be left to the pines and cicadas alone. "To be a tree, no more and no less, was all she was prepared to undertake." (P.4) She wants nobody to intrude into her realm and feels disturbed when anybody visits. "Whatever else came, or happened here, would be an unwelcome intrusion and distraction."(P.3) Nanda Kaul longs for the privacy, seclusion, tranquility and solidity of trees: "She stepped, backwards into

the garden and the wind billowed up and threw the pine branches about as though to curtain her." (P.3)

Mrs. Kaul treasures and guards her privacy very intensely with lots of care and concern which gives us an impression that she tries to defend herself against the intrusion of unhappy experience of life which still haunts her and which she wishes to ward off. Nanda Kaul, as the wife of a vice-chancellor of Punjab University and as a mother of her children, had lived a very busy and fatigued life, and hence she wants to enjoy life in her old age with complete peace and silence, without being distracted by anything, Carignano, her house, consoles and satisfies Nanda:

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

Mrs. Kaul feels total silence in her house and takes it as her fortified refuge. She feels an emotional security in this house a thing which she lacked totally in her husband's house. Anita Desai contrasts this house sharply with "that house - his house, never hers. (P.18), though she perfectly ran that house for her husband and family but there was no touch of emotional attachment to that house. The escape of Nanda Kaul to Kasauli was not like the escape of Sita. (in Where Shall We To This Summer?) to the Manori Island for, Sita had opted to go there by her own wish whereas Nanda Kaul was forced to life in Carignano by the desertion for her children. Yet Nanda Kaul feels contented with Carignano's stark, secluded and sunny splendor. Its seclusion and serenity

is symbolised by freedom and calmness of life. Though Nanda Kaul can not be described by Desai as a neurotic or hypersensitive woman. She is a sub-normal person who being bored by ordering "too many servants." (P.29) and entertaining "too many quest" (P.29) and tending "So many children" (P.29) in her past, tries to bury herself in the silent spaces of Carignano. Anita Desai presents in this novel very sharply woman's feeling of alienation which is deeply rooted in Mrs. Nanda Kaul who does not allow her to be mixed with others again. Here Carmen Concilio's observation is worth quoting:

"Where in modern societies, and to some extent also in the traditional Indian to be marginalised, Anita Desai centres her novel on the character of an old woman, Nanda Kaul, who deliberately chooses a marginal place to live in."  \(^5\)

Living at the bungalow, Cargnano, a rather desolate and haunted house in Kasauli, Nanda Kaul has decided to cut herself off from her past which was sore and to live only in the present. She cares to live simply and without thrills. She has no fear of death which seems to her as natural life itself. Her link with life is tenuous. She could imagine herself as just about anything in the universe "a charred tree trunk in the forest, a broken pillar of marble in the desert, a lizard on a stone wall." (P.23) This state of mind is of result of a painfully cultivated emotional asceticism or perhaps, a kind of spiritual withdrawl that makes her look upon life with complete indifference.

Nanda Kaul stubbornly tries to convince herself that family ties, filial love, housekeeping, social contracts were all tire some. She had at one time discharged her duties suitably as mother of many children and as wife of the vice-chancellor of Punjab University. She had such busy life

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that she really felt fed up with her life. Nanda Kaul's feelings about her husband's house is:

"The old house, the full house, of that period of her life when she was the vice-chancellor's wife and at the hub of a small but intense busy world, had not pleased her, its crowding had stifled her."\(^6\)

It's crowding had stifled her. After her husband's death her sons and daughters left her alone. That is the way the memory of that past as the wife of the vice-chancellor is painful to her. Struggling with the threats to her freedom and her integrity Nanda desperately needs to protect herself from dissipating and sinking in the crumbling world around her. Such is the paradoxical situation in which Indian women are enmeshed. It was a life devoid of fulfillment, and loneliness was forced upon her:

"Nor had her husband loved and cherished her and kept her queen - he had only done enough to keep her quite while he carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David, the mathematics teacher whom he had not married because she was a Christian but whom he had loved, all his life loved. And her children were all alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them. She did not live here alone by choice - she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing."\(^7\)

In other words, Nanda Kaul's determined 'detachment' and non-involvement...which Maya and Monisha aspired for, but Sita experienced,

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\(^{7}\) Ibid, P. 145.
is the direct corollary of her busy, but empty, life as the wife of an ex-vice-chancellor. He does not love her as a wife but treated her as some decorative yet useful mechanical appliance needed for the efficient running of his household. We are told that every visitor who saw her affirmed:

"Isn't she splendid? Is not she like a queen? Really, vice-chancellor is lucky to have a wife who can run everything as she does and her eyes had flashed when she heard like a pair of black blades, waiting to cut them." 8

However, her own people fail to appreciate her beauty and dedication: "Nor had her husband loved and cherished her and kept her like queen." (P. 145) Nanda serves herself from mental derailment and courageously brings up all her children not only because of her sense of duty towards others but also because it imparts a meaning to her otherwise insipid existence: It has been a religious calling she had believed in, till she found it fake. It had been a vocation that one day went dull and "drought struck as thought its life-spring had dried up." (P. 30) Here Anita Desai vividly underlines the fate of a married women in Indian society. The society is in a state of transition with our cultural values in the melting plot. One could sense in Desai's novel a compelling urge for a way of living which would respond to the inner most yearning of women for freedom and self dignity. Nanda's compassion for other's an art, she had practised for years, in finally mastered at Carignano. "The care for others was a habit Nanda Kaul had mislaid." (P.30) Where she wants to be left alone admist the pines and cicadas. Her husband and children never tried to understand her feelings. Her husband's continuous illicit relation with Miss David, the teacher of Mathematics, disturbed her

terribly. She always remains busy in fulfilling the wishes and requirements of his status, and never resented his immoral way. But her inward disturbed, lovely life and her inner self. As a result of it, she was deeply alienated from her husband and children. Her children after their settlement adopted a cold behaviour towards her. She realised that she was insignificant to them. Neither her husband nor her children showed any attachment and affection to this dutiful woman. She could never share her happiness or sorrow with them. After her husband's death, her children came to help her to vacate the vice-chancellor's house and to move to Kasauli:

"For a while, they had stood about, in Carignano, like too much furniture. She had wondered what to do with them."9

However, soon her children went away, and none of them could stay with her because:

"She no more wished to add to them then she wished to add to her own, reduced and radiantly single life."10

Nanda Kaul readily discharges her duty towards her family but in doing so loses her individuality and identity. She is so busy raising the family and discharging the duties of mother, housewife and hostess that in the evening of her life, she is happy in her seclusion even though it is partly voluntary and partly circumstantial and in her old age, Nanda wants to save her privacy in Carignano which she never did in the past. This shows the emotional hollowness and vacuum of her life. She does

not want to bother about the world around her because she thinks that active life is full of duties:

"She had been so glad when it was over. She had been glad to leave it all behind, in plains, like a great, heavy, difficult book that she had read through and was not required to read again." 11

Nanda Kaul's secluded and peaceful life is disturbed by the letter. When the postman gives her a latter, she received it unwillingly because she knows that in it there will only be either demand or request. This shows that her children do not write her without selfishness. The letter she receives is from Asha (her daughter). Asha who requests her to take care of her great grand-child Raka, who has just recovered from typhoid. It makes Nanda Kaul uneasy and she struggles "to suppress her anger, her disappointment and her total loathing of her daughter's meddling, busy body ways." (P.16) Since Nanda Kaul had treated enough her children, grand children, servants and guests in her past. She wanted no more to be host again to anybody. That is why she does not want to keep her great grand child Raka in her house. She wants to live like a free soul, free from duties, responsibilities and attachment of any person or place. But her daughter Asha's letter imposes upon her the responsibility of looking after the child. In her unconscious mind she thinks that she will have to take care of Raka's food and warn her against the stones in the garden under which some scorpion may be hidden. In it Anita Desai reveals natural qualities of femininity. Nanda is not completely alienated from her children, but merely makes a show at it so that no one can see those wounds which are caused by their indifferent attitude. She thinks that her privacy is going to be threatened by the presence of Raka, but her thought

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regarding Raka soon proves to be wrong as she finds her great grand
daughter, a strange isolated child whose own wish for silence is as intense
as her own. What is remarkable about Anita Desai’s psychological
probings of the women is that she includes females of different age
groups. It is not that she confines herself to the young or the middle aged.
She has also perceptively explored the psyche of a girl in "Fire on the
Mountain". Anita Desai's protagonist faces the predicament of the tragic
isolation of the individual and consequent sense of the absurdity of
human life. Anita Desai tries to focus on the predicament of women in
male dominated Indian society. In Raka, Desai presents before us another
facet of feminine psyche a child going to girlhood. Raka is an unusual
child, her name does not correspond with any of her physical
characteristic:

Raka meant the moon, but this child was not
roundfaced, ............Nanda Kaul thought she looked like
one of those dark crickets that leap up in fright but do not
sing, or a mosquito, minute and fine, on thin precarious
legs."¹²

If Nanda Kaul defends her privacy fiercely, Raka too is absolutely
independent, satisfied with her own self and never bothering her Nani.
She is so self-absorbed that any effort on Nand Kaul's part to attract her
completely fails, even her fantastic tales. She was the child who never
played games. Instead of listening tales from Nanda Kaul she prefers to
go out doors all by herself, roaming in the desolate hills and forest. She is
obliquely defiant she is mistress of herself. Once coming from her usual
ramblings through the hills and forest she speaks to herself. "I don't care-
I don't care- I don't care for anything". Her child like quality and introvert

nature is the result of her traumatic childhood. Once she stealthily goes down the hill to the club of the research station on a moon-lit night and while she spies on the drunken orgy in the club her mind is flooded with the unpleasant memory of her childhood days of her drunken father coming home late at night and beating her mother and she hiding somewhere in the room:

"...........her father, home from a party, stumbling and crashing through the curtains of night, his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse - hares filthy ........and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes and wept.....her mother was crying. Then it was a jackal crying."\(^{13}\)

It is this traumatic childhood experience that has such a dehumanising effect on Raka's mind that she becomes apathetic to finding any interest in childish game and there is nothing child like in her character. The childhood experiences of Desai's woman characters have left an indelible impression on their minds for most of them their childhood holds the key to the type of adults that they have grown into Usha Pathania says:

".......their experiences and interactions during this formative period when combined with their congenital hypersensitivity contribute towards their inability to establish and maintain harmonious inter - personal relationships in later life."\(^{14}\)

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Raka's childhood experiences are traumatic throughout. Her aggressive father and ever suffering, submissive mother force Raka to withdraw into a cocoon and live in a make-believe world of her own for Nanda Kaul, the child is like ......an intruder an outsider, a mosquito flown up from the plains to tease and worry." (FOM P.40) Raka to feels as an stranger at Carignano. When she enters her room, she feels." ......as the newly caged, the newly wild ones do ......"(FOM P. 40) when she goes out to enjoy the natural scene of Kasuli, she does not find beauty and watches only." rested tins, bundles of stained newspaper, peels, rags and bones, all snuggling in grooves, hollows, cracks and sometimes spilling" (FOM P. 41). In it Anita Desai presents a very pathetic picture of girl child who wants to know the realities hidden under the external beauty. In her character, Anita Desai presents the vital aspects of feminine psyche of a girl child who wants to fulfill her dreams. From the hill top Raka wants to fly in the air like an eagle. This shows that she wants to control her senses and wants to be a detached girl. Her natural detachment gives her the confidence that she lives in this world as a fully controlled girl. She wants to be the complete master of her sense. She believes that she can move higher than anyone else. She very soon knows about the sordid realities of life and cruelties of male dominated society towards women. Her detachment indicates that she does not bother about the duties of life, obedience and discipline. She says"

"I am shipwrecked, Raka exulted, I'm shipwrecked and alone. She clung to a rock - my boat alone is my boat on the sea, she sang."15

Raka is alienated from her parents from this world and even from her great grandmother. The root cause of Raka's alienation is her broken

home. Raka is internally afraid of her immoral and drunkard father because he often beats her mother. She is an emotionally starved child and her mother is helpless to take care of her due to her pathetic condition. Raka cannot face the hard realities of life, and therefore, she isolated herself from everything and person. She can not tolerate this violent world's approach towards women and like her grandmother she runs towards the Carignano. If Nanda Kaul has arrived at this condition of absolute loneliness after many rejections and sacrifices, Raka is born to it. Nanda Kaul also discovers that Raka is very much like her. She tries to attract her attention by creating a world of fantasy about her own childhood, because Raka's indifference becomes a challenge to her. Raka and Nanda represent two kinds of feminine sensibility and their world has been contrasted to show the nature of their respective isolation. Nanda Kaul loves stillness, barrenness and withdrawal whereas Raka loves movement, greenery and detachment. Raka feels drawn towards the beauties and delights of the Himalayan hill-station. Betrayed by her own children who have compelled Nanda Kaul to lead a lonely life, she holds herself aloof from Raka who also neglects her great grandmother. Both Nanda and Raka love loneliness. But the two 'loneliness' have been contrasted although the point of contrast is very suitable: Nanda Kaul's indifference, loneliness and withdrawal are born out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation whereas Raka is a recluse by nature, by instinct for "She had not arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice. She was born to it simply." (P.48) commenting on Raka's and Nanda Kaul's contrasted stances R.S. Sharma observes:

"Nostalgia for a lost innocence and awareness of decaying life are recurrent themes in Anita Desai. In this
novel the contrast between the two is made evident in the two characters Raka and Nanda.  

The main reason for Nanda Kaul's and Raka's love for privacy is rooted in some of their bitter experiences of life. In Nanda Kaul's case, she also remains haunted by the memories of her past. 

Ila Das's arrival is the second shock to Nanda Kaul's illusory world as it again reminds her of the stark realities which can not be evaded by coming over to Kasauli. The visit of Ila Das reminds Nanda of her past, her school days. She opens the 'unwilling gate' and invites Ila to enter:  

"Here she come, Ila Das, still little Ila Das with what remained of the pig tail wound on top of her head like a tea-casy, an egg-casy, yellowed rather than whitened by age, and Nanda Kaul looked down from her height having invited her to tea, having failed to put her away out sight and mind. Here she was, that last little broken bit of a crazy life, fluttering up over the gravel like a bit of crumpled paper."  

In character of Ila Das Desai, represents before us a different facet of feminism. Desai's preoccupation with Indian women is genuine. As a part of the feminine sensibility of a rapidly changing nation she has the opportunity of sharing the feelings of a women under various circumstances. Ila Das, the friend of Nanda, recalls that they.....had played together as a children, children's games like oranges and lemons and cooking doll's meals under the gol-mohur trees, with scared blossoms and yellow pods for food."(P. 8) Nanda and Ila had gone to school together. But Nanda got married in early youth, and she discharged her

domestic duties very well. Like Nanda Kaul and Raka, Ila Das had a very painful past:

"........Her mother lay rotting in bed with a broken hip that would not mend, and her father was dread of a stroke. The family fortune divided amongst three drunken, dissolute sons as in a story, and not a penny of it to either of the two clever, thrifty, hard working daughter Ila and Rima, was then quickly becoming a thing of the past, no longer retrievable. The sons had been sent to foreign universities - to Heidelberg, Cambridge, Harvard and wherever they were. Each had contrived not to attend a single lecture, to drink themselves ill, to find the nearest racecourse and squander their allowance on horses and never won. To begin with, their father had paid their debts, then begin to sell his own horses, his carriage, his house, his land, when he dies, not one of them came to the funeral. They knew there was nothing left for them to inherit. They pestered their mother and two sisters then, for the last of the jewellery, and soon had them driven out into rented rooms and boarding-houses, finally to whatever roof charity would hold over them. Eventually, blessedly, they died or disappeared."

Among the other women in the novel presented by Desai, Ila Das stands out as pitiable, helpless woman who holds on to a pride and self-righteousness totally unsuited to the changed unfavourable condition of her life. Her present condition is totally different to her childhood because she was born in to a traditional family. She has now reached this tragic, lonely situation due to the dissipation of her responsible brothers and her impractical upbringing. Then Nanda Kaul had Ila Das appointed as a

lecturer in the Home Science College by her vice-chancellor husband. But happy days did not last long. After the death of the vice-chancellor when the new vice-chancellor took over, he did not make Ila Das the principal and she, hot headed as she was, resigned and had to face worse days. She works at Kasuli as a welfare officer. Nanda Kaul's unfulfilled life is repeated in the case of Ila Das the pathos of whose life is as moving as that of her friend. In "Fire on the Mountain" Ila Das is projected as a character with all Desai's reactions to the changing customs and cultures of the Indian society. The problems, the agonies, the insecurity, the oppression and the indifferences through which she grows up, are a part of modern life of women that one finds in Desai's description of women in "Fire on the Mountain". Her sympathetic attitude for the suffering women flows like an under current pervading the fictional world with density that is simply Desai's. Inspite of her pitiable position, Ila Das shows concern for others. Ila believes in her ideals: She thinks that she can work wonders by reaching out to the innate goodness of the villagers among whom she works. She works as a welfare officer and is always surrounded by the superstitious, illiterate villagers who can never understand her views. She goes to places from where she received information about child-marriage and threatens people saying that they can be sent to jail for it. Unfortunately, she does not take life seriously. Preet Singh, who is very angry with her as she tries to prevent him from selling his daughter to a rich land owner, attacks her. In the evening when Ila Das comes through the forest path, Preet Singh behaves roughly with her:

"It abounds in images that evoke a sense of harshness, of sounds that grate on one's ears and of colours loud and gaudy."  

The figure of Preet Singh emerging from the rocks is a ghastly sight in the still quiet hill side. But nobody comes to help this woman. Preet Singh strangles her and rapes her dead body:

"Crushed back, crushed down into the earth, she lay raped, broken, still and finished."  

The Novel deals with the tragedy of a woman Ila Das. Her life symbolises the tragic life of woman in our society. This incident suggestively points the condition of women in Indian Society. This show man's cruelly and woman's helplessness to save her honour and life from Animal-like man. She symbolises the meaninglessness and hollowness of women's life. Here Tong's observation is worthily quoted:

"A woman may say that she diets, exercises and dressed for herself, but in reality she is probably shaping and adoring her flesh for men. A woman has little or no say about when, where how or by whom her body will be used."  

In Ila Das, Desai presents the psyche of a woman who leads a tragic life and ultimately her life ends tragically. This indicates the miserable condition of woman in man-dominated Indian society. She always treated inferior to her brothers in her house. Anita Desai exploits the situation of Ila's rape murder to present problems that confront women in a male dominated society. Ila Das, Nanda Kaul, Asha, Raka suffer in one way or another at the hand of men. Though, Ila Das is unable to look after herself properly. She shows unending concern and love for poor. Her struggle to reach home through the dark, lonely area is symbolic of her fight against the dark forces of life. Her journey

symbolises her courage and optimism. Her tragic death at the hand of Preet Singh is symbolic of the irony of life. Exploration of this theme is the central focus of the novel. The rape of Ila is presented in elaborate detail. Preet Singh's rape is an act of vengeance. It was the only successful revenge that Preet Singh could inflict on Ila who had interfered in the matter of his seven year old daughter's marriage to an old man. He worked to humiliate Ila for the injury she had caused to his male ego. Nanda is informed telephonically about the outrage by the police inspector. The news of the tragic death of Ila Das shatters Nanda Kaul's world of reverie into pieces. The illusory world which she has created as an emotional shelter completely breaks down:

"She had dropped the telephone with her head still thrown back she gasped. "No" no it is all lie! No it cannot be. It was a lie! Ila Das was not raped, not dead she had lied to Raka about everything." 22

She tries to defy the horrible death of Ila Das so that she may bridge the gap between the sordid reality and the illusion of noble life. When Raka returns home, setting fire to the forests, she finds her sitting. Nanda lies on the:

"Stool quotations to be given as next paragraph with her head hanging, the black telephone hanging the long wire hanging." 23

The news of Ila Das's death so shocks Nanda that she "twisted her head. then hung it down, down let it hung." (P.145) and Raka's act of setting fire to the forest is symbolic of her revolt against the cruelty and

violence rampant in our society. Raka, however, Proves a stronger mettle as R.S. Sharma says:

"Raka resolves to destroy a world where a woman can not hope to be happy without being unnatural."24

Anita Desai in this novel presents a sensitive and through study of the underlying sensibility of a certain class of women. Nanda Kaul’s desire for aloneness is because of her husband, family and society have not been able to give love and fulfillment. As Kristeva rightly explains in her book about Chinese women:

".........can not gain access to the temporal scene, i.e. to political affairs, except by identifying with the values considered to masculine ...... we have been able to serve superman. A few enjoy it. Others, more bound to their mothers more tuned in as well to their unconscious impulses, refuse this role and hold themselves back sullen, neither speaking nor writing, in a permanent state of expectation punctuated now and then by some kind of out brust: a cry : a refusal, and hysterical symptom." (Fire on the Mountain).

As we look at the women in Desai’s fiction, we find interesting development in their response to the temporal order. The figure of Nanda Kaul can be seen as the one who refuses society in her old age, after her responsibilities are over and duties fulfilled. She belongs to the third category of woman whom Kristeva describes, who neither enjoys nor sulks, neither identifies nor punctuates her "state of expectation" by sudden out brusts. Nanda is the woman who rejects conformity having one experienced it. She has no wish to join the temporal order. Island she escapes by refusal:

"To refuse both these extremes. To know that an ostensibly masculine, paternal (because supportive of time and symbol) identification is necessary in order to have some voice in the record of politics and history......to act first with all those who "swim against the tide" all those who refuse - all the rebels against the existing relations of production and reproduction. But neither to take the role of revolutionary (male or female): to refuse all roles, in order, on the contrary, to summon this timeless "truth" - formless, neither true or false, echo of our jouissance, of our madness, of our pregnancies - in to the order of speech and social symbol." 25

With in a traditional framework of gender roles that can be seen to cut across cultures and, in the process displays a different form of refusal in Nanda Kaul. One can say that Desai's novel "Fire on the Mountain" is the story of one woman struggling to cope with her dreams and fears. It is an attempt to give voice to that long muted silence which has been a hallmark of Indian womanhood under patriarchy. For not only do we hear the sad and quiet voice of Nanda Kaul but the cool and indifferent voice of girl child Raka and the voice of Ila Das which is like "a cackle of an agitated parrot" (FM 111). In this novel Desai addresses the nature of 'refusal' and inscribes it with a craving for a sense of place in Indian women. Kristeva too argues in favour of woman's refusal and sees it as a genuine reflection of woman's dissatisfaction:

"......by calling attention all times to whatever remains unsatisfied, repressed, new, eccentric, incomprehensible, disturbing to the status quo." 26

Desai's women are shown in search of a place that would accommodate their need for "refusal" of the patrilineal society. Kasauli fills this void in Nanda and later in Raka and Ila Das. Anita Desai's protagonists have made a decisive permanent departure from the solidity and clutter of social life. As Cixous asserts the:

"City is man, ruled by masculine law."27

And there Nanda Kaul has unrecognized, unloved life in city, we are led to believe, life with the husband and her children "was alien to her nature (FM 145). Being outside in a man's world. Desai's women assert a need for a women's time. For Nanda it is realised in old age. Carignano on the mountain top is set off as a contrast against the full and busy life that Nanda Kaul lived as a vice-chancellor's wife in Chandigarh. AS we assess her need we see in her a sense of ennui and a disappointment in her life as a householder. As a Vice-chancellor's wife she is a woman whose faction within a feminine subject position is that of duty and subservience. Nanda Kaul is unhappy in that role. Desai's deviant women challenge the:

"Prevailing assumption that motherhood and child-rearing bring women natural self fulfillment."28

Woman as mother is assumed to acquire a specific status in society. Mouthing becomes an area for woman wherein she is able to realize herself. It gives her status and value by acknowledging the boredom and tedium of marital and maternal life. Women like Nanda Kaul and Ila Das are going against the current. They question what tradition decrees. Nanda does not revel in motherhood. Her maternal concerns has oppressively overshadowed her personal concerns. Nanda in escaping

27. Cixous, Helene "Castration or Decapitation?" Tran. by Annette Kuhn, Sign 7, 1981, P. 49.
from the city not only is she trying to escape from the demands of the patriarchal system but also her own past. The sweeping view from Carignano, both of the mountains and the plains is a symbolic of the spiritual and earthly transcendence that Nanda Kaul wishes to attain. It gives her the space to contemplate and assess the nature of the existence. On the surface Kasuli is stark. Yet, it is the place she can call her own. At a manifest level it could be argued that Nanda Kaul's retreat to the mountains is a significant gesture to protect herself. On the one hand she is seeking to be desireless and on the other hand her renunciation of the world is marked with profound disillusionment and unhappiness. Nanda Kaul seeks to enclose and shut herself off into the world which neither demands nor promises. Nanda Kaul wishes to become like the child in the womb that neither owes nor fulfils. It alone surveys the prospect within. From the sweeping hills she is also seeking an inner calm and tranquil. In this respect it is important to point out that she succeeds only partially and is miserable. In Nanda Kaul's retreat to the mountains, Desai presents symptomatic of her desire to be a Sanyasi, a recluse. Through Sanyas she wishes to attain the possibility of liberation. She asks for complete release. It is in epicurean term atarexia. A state of untroubledness an absolute tranquility, a release from the pains of mind that a woman like Nanda Kaul is aspiring for. The nature of Nanda Kaul may be understood with these words of Dr. S.P. Swain:

"Nanda despises almost everyone who comes her way: her haughty, complacent daughter Asha, her pale and fragile granddaughter Tara, her elusive volatile and cadaverous great granddaughter Raka and her old, decrepit and emaciated companion Ilia Das."29

In Nanda Kaul, Desai presents a woman who suffers from existential problem and is a victim of alienation and abnormalcy in her attitude towards other. From the very beginning of the novel we are made aware of Nanda Kaul's rejection of the world of demands and request. She is tired of it all. As a mother and a wife she had no self of her own, every thought, every action of hers was centered and occupied by those who lived with her. She had neither time nor space to nourish her interest. She had no private self. It is through Nanda Kaul and Raka Desai seems to be spinning the vital aspect of feminism in the novel. What happens when one object confronts another? A struggle ensues. A close combat results in the pursuit of the one and the flight of the other. Each is repeatedly wounded in the symbolic realm and is equally conscious of her rejection. (The unfaithful husband, the Image of the drunken father beating Raka's mother, the rape and murder of Ila Das, the Issue of marriage of Preet Singh's seven years old daughter to an aged widower are moments that reinforce women's objection). These are the Image of the masculine order, intensely psychical and brutal signs of violation that exist in the society either in the name of tradition or as a result of women's silence where speech is deemed contrary to their nature. Raka has no wish to confine herself in to the centre of adult world. Anita Desai throws ample light on what motivated Nanda Kaul's loneliness. She also throws subtle hints and suggestion about Raka's love of loneliness. Raka and Nanda are alienated from each other because each of them has been alienated from society. Their loneliness is caused by their family and the circumstances of their respective lives. In this connection R.S. Sharma has correctly observed:

"The lack of communication between the tow suggest a sickness of soul which is imposed upon them from outside."
Nanda Kaul had lived a kind of life which did not involve her "self". It was full on the surface but empty at the care. The Trauma of childhood on the other hand, had blunted the native thrust of Raka's soul. Thus, they both seek to exclude what they need most the security and fulfillment of love. Nanda Kaul's gradual involvement in Raka's life is suggestive of this need. Raka's indifference, in fact, accentuates her desire for tender bond of love.  

Raka finds her Nani's world of fantasies as painful a distraction as her mother's world of nursing homes and mysterious illness. It is Raka's indifference, her complete independence which attracts her, which she desire for herself. In her Nanda sees an authentic image of her desired self. She had many children and grandchildren but only in Raka does she see a reflection of what she would love to be "You" are more like me than any of my children. You are exactly like me Raka."(FM 64.). Nanda Kaul sees Raka as her lost self. It is the girl child who becomes the role-model for an old woman. Nanda is seeking an assurance, a comforting feeling. In Nanda, Desai reveals simple wish of a woman, who wants to be loved and to love. Nanda is a woman who wishes to exchange love for love. She is more powerful, more courageous than any of Desai's adult women. In Nanda one witnesses a woman who refuses all roles. She sees herself neither in society nor in family for she is too much of an individual but in the spirit of Raka she witnesses a mystical fervour that is desirable and enchanting, enlightening and satisfying. Nanda Kaul had retreated to the mountains, away from the demands of the flesh and faces, not only seeking retirement but also a life of contemplation. She had hoped to ascend and soar above human attachments and obligations. She was

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convinced she had nothing to do with world of requests and queries. She wanted to be free from bondage. Carignano’s remoteness, its stillness and calm were the very features that made it convincing a landscape of refusal:

"Have I not done enough and had enough? I want no more. I want nothing. Can I not be left with nothing."[31]

Is this what Nanda Kaul wishes for herself? Does this explain her need for renunciation? Is her renunciation an act of volition? Desai seems to be questioning this in the novel and further in Raka. Desai reveals psyche of a girl who feels that men are more dangerous than any wild animals. The young boys in the club seem to her more dangerous than the jackals. She is badly frightened by the cruel ugly side of life and feels insecure. Raka’s love of solitude becomes an expression of her attempt to achieve self-possession. Raka is conscious of her state and fits in very well with her new surrounding. Raka is, indeed, the newly born woman, a woman whose craft lies in being selective about people, places and listening, a woman who knows how to avoid, a woman who resists and it is in the Kasauli, she has discovered her new-found freedom. Her setting the forest on fire is a gesture of defiance and a significant refusal of the existing order. The fire serves a purificatory function. It is not only cleanliness and purifies but is a vital move towards liberation, that is truth, Desai explains:

"Don’t you see it is because she is the only absolutely pure character amongst all the others and she doesn't want to have anything to do with all the lies and illusions in which the other characters are living. In silting a fire, she really

burning up all these illusions and all their fantasies and reducing them all to just a fake of ash, which is truth."³²

Raka was different to Nanda but this difference was shrouded in a deeper understanding of the refused and rejected Nanda Kaul. Here it would be interesting to point out how the world process, the Samsara, is thought of as feminine in India - It is the woman who is considered to be the adhara i.e. support, as opposed to adheya, meaning that which is to be supported i.e. the masculine principle:

"The way of the sun is the way of mosksa, whereas the way of the smoke, takes man back into the womb at the mother, whereas moksa delivers him from the cycle of rebirth .........feminine figure as she has been depicted in Indian art is the visual representation of the way of smoke into which all those who are to be reborn are to enter."³³

Raka, the moonchild, becomes a symbolic threat to the masculine principle for she has paved the way for "smoke" by setting the forest on fire. It is also her refusal to compromise. In a distinctively question mode Desai's women in "Fire on the Mountain" offers us a critique of society. In Ila Das's case, she is conscious of her refused status but unaware of her misfortune, a misfortune that would be fall her in the dark of the night. The tragedy of Ila Das is more gruesome pushed beyond choking, the woman welfare officer's voice is not only stifled permanently but her body too is violated and finished. She is laughed at as a hysteric and is later decapitated, silenced because the society sees her as a disparagement of the existing social order. The tightening of Preet Singh's fingers around

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³² Seguet, Pascale, "An Interview with Anita Desai", Commonwealth Essays and Studies, 1988 P.44
her mouth is a moment of male assertion which forces her to gasp and finally chokes her to death. As Cixous says:

"They are decapitated, their tongues are cut off and what talks isn't heard because it's the body that talks, and man doesn't hear the body....the woman who disturbs and is nothing but disturbance."\(^34\)

As a welfare officer Ila Das has been nothing but a nuisance in the eyes of orthodox men like the priest and Preet Singh. Her talk of change and social reform is seen as a threat to the old and oppressive, that is, the patriarchal order. In her Desai presents a woman who disturbs by challenging and suggesting. She is the voice that disturbs, amuses, irritates, the voice of the body that men begin to fear therefore decide to kill. She is an utterance. She speaks and is dislike, made fun of, for doing so. Speech becomes a sign of refusal and men cannot take it, accept it and hold it. They can only silence it through violence and decapitation, rape and bloodshed. Rape implies the highest insult and injury to the woman's pride and dignity. It symbolizes the rape of woman's dignity and her worth as a woman. Anita Desai reveals in this novel, by Nanda's death and Ila Das's rape-murder the process of disintegration - social-economical - political - emotional - psychological - ethical - spiritual - disintegration woman suffers in male-dominated society. Nanda too suffers the psychological shock of rape and feels, like Ila, that her womanhood is defiled and insulted. She realizes the helplessness of women in the world.

The anger and plain with which Anita Desai narrates Ila Das's rape and murder is a pointer towards universal violence against the female. Raka's final utterance - against the death of two sensitive lives -"Look, Nani, I have set the forest on fire. Look, Nani, look, the forest is one fire."

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\(^{34}\) Cixous, Helene "Castration or decapitation? Translated by Annette Kuhn, Signs 7, 1981, P. 49
(FM. 145) acquires tremendous symbolic significance. Anita Desai seems to suggest that loneliness is the problem for all women - girls, spinsters as well as married women - and death alone serve as release from loneliness. Nanda Kaul as and old woman caught in the web of "self contradictions". She wavers between tow contradictory forces: withdrawal and involvement, detachment and attachment, "the need to withdraw in order to preserve one's wholeness and sanity and the need to be involved in the painful process of life." (FM. 218) as Martin Buber would put it. Nanda the oldest of Anita Desai's protagonists and Raka, the youngest character take recourse to self-destructive isolation. While the older woman has a tendency to look back and regret, the younger one is terrified of past, present and future, striving to shut out the agony of experiences. Both of them suffer from self-alienation of a severe kind leading them towards neurosis. They suggest a sickness of soul which is imposed upon them from inside. By the presentation of Nanda, Desai reveals before us harsh realities of women's life. Nanda's difficulties arise out of her intense self-contempt resulting from her failure in life. Nanda Kaul's alienation with her husband is the most unpleasant fact for her life, which she deliberately suppresses in the subconscious mind. Nanda Kaul endures all sufferings in he married life patiently. She also endures her husbands relationship with Christian lady for the sake of her children and her married life. But, for Mr. Kaul, a wife is a non-entity. As R.S. Pathak rightly points out:

"Far from being a happy wife, she felt like an animal put into a cage and very skillfully trained to dance ..........at the command of the ring-master - her domineering husband, whom she could not defy." 35

Desai presents a vital picture of women's repression in "Fire on the Mountain". The telephone call, announcing the death of Ila Das overwhelms Nanda Kaul with spite for herself. The deaths of Ila and Nanda are interpreted as the final reality suggesting the facility of woman's existence. Ila dies because of her concern for others and Nanda dies because of her concern for her loneliness. As Usha Bande explains:

"Feminist criticism spots out a social reality in their deaths, signifying the social forces which destroy woman from within."^36

For the novel "Fire on the Mountain" Bande's observation about women's seems right. Apparently, Desai's "Fire on the Mountain" is suggestive of the revolt of the new generation of women against a world dominated by harsh and cruel men. Raka is a symbol of new generation, like the fire on the mountain. Desai spreads a burning awareness of woman's condition in our society. Anita Desai perhaps suggests that the myth of masculine superiority is some how preserved in the area of physical strength. She, through Ila Das's rape and Nanda Kaul's life of compromise shows her conscious awareness of woman's position in society and we finds all the aspects of feminism in Anita Desai's novel "Fire on the Mountain". By having a psychic evaluation of all the above mentioned women protagonists of Anita Desai, we can say that the novelist has a mastery ove the minute portrayal of feminine psyche. It is her competency that she has not portrayed the inner world of women of any particular age, but of all age groups. Desai's fictional characters struggle for their liberation from being manipulated by a corporate society reeling under the throes of capitalism and thereby save themselves

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from self mutilation. They are in dynamic involvement with and at the same time are critically opposed to the system of society in which they live in order to assert their feminine self. At the end we can say that she wants to say that the helplessness of the women to find a suitability of existence can be eradicated, not by introspection but by contending intuition.

"Clear Light of Day" Anita Desai pleads for a new social order where women are not solely dependent on men for their spiritual and material happiness, but find sources of satisfaction other than those of marriage and family. Desai's novel "Clear Light of Day" represents her notion of feminism. Her novel "Clear Light of Day" Anita Desai states:

"My novel is set in old Delhi and records the tremendous changes that a Hindu family goes through since 1947. Basically, my pre-occupation was with recording the passage of time: I was trying to write a four-dimensional piece on how a family's life moves backward and forward in a period of time. My novel is about time as a destroyer, as a preserver, and about what the bondage of time does to people. I have tried to tunnel under the mundane surface of domesticity."37

She further states in an interview:

"........my books are about women. It's only because I understand them better being a woman writer. I certainly am interested in women."38

The pattern of female renunciation that the author upholds in this novel through Bim Das, the middle-aged spinster heroine, is not merely physical abandonment of one's family or an escape from family responsibilities, it involves instead the sublimation of one's emotions, a laying bare of one's soul until there is no barrier left between oneself and other. The theme of alienated self is again handled in Desai's "Clear Light of Day" through the character of two sisters - Bimla and Tara. This novels is mainly concerned with the anguish of a sensitive woman, Bim, who is the eldest child in the family and who wishes to live in the world of fantasy and memory. Familial relationship is again highlighted in this novel too and it is about the Das family consisting of the parents and their four children among whom Bim is the eldest. The death of her father makes no difference for Bim as he was a passive type of creature who had shown no care and concern for his family. After the death of her father, Bim assumes the role of a father or a guardian for her younger sister, Tara and her two brothers, Raja and Baba. She becomes so over involved in her family responsibilities that she even suppresses her emotions and remains unmarried throughout her life. What makes her disturbed and distracted sometimes is the behaviour of her family members who didn't care even a bit for her and are busy in their own families. The nostalgia she feels for her past makes her sad and somber. The childhood intimacy of her brother and sister is gradually lost. In order to fulfill their aims in life, they are scattered here and there, and they have forgotten the sacrifice of Bim. The despair and isolation of Bim is shown through the image of mosquito:

"Tara and Bakul, and behind them the Misras, and somewhere in the distance, Raja and mosquito like sip her blood. All of them fed on her blood.........Now when they
were full, they rose in swarms, humming away, turning their back upon her."39

In these lines her dejection and despair is clearly portrayed. The silence of Bim who withdraws herself from the El Dorado of life to shoulder all alone the responsibility of looking after her mentally retarded, dumb brother Baba is symbolised by the image of a "snail slowly, resignedly making its way from under the flower up a clod of earth only to tumble off the top onto its side an eternal, miniature Sisyphus."(P. 2)

In this novel Desai depicts two facet of feminine psyche. The two sisters-Bim and Tara, differ from each other in their attitude and behaviour. Anita Desai has taken pains in depicting the character of Bim and Tara. In this regard, Shyam M. Asnani remarks thus:

"The most prominent feature of Anita Desai's art is the delineation of character. She is primarily interested in the portrayal of female protagonists as living in separate, closed, sequested words of existential problems and passions........, she does something unique by portraying each of her individuals as an unsolved mystery. Almost all her novels (except Bye-Bye Black Bird) portray female protagonists who are hyper-sensitive solitary and introspective. They are the people who are always quite aware of living on the brink, who show a marked tendency towards neurotic behaviour."40

Most of the characteristics described above are true so far as the character of Bim is concerned, as she suffers from an acute existential

problem. Desai presents Bim as a middle-aged woman teaching history in a college and lives the life of an ascetic. Being devoid of the warmth of human relationship or familial relationship. She seeks solace and shelter in reading books, and this becomes her obsession now. Bim and Tara are real sisters but their life style are different. Tara after marriage with Bakul widely travels abroad, while Bim does not go anywhere. Bim compares her life with Old Delhi and Tara's with New Delhi. She says:

"Old Delhi does not change. It only decays, my students tell me it is a great cemetery, every house a tomb.........Now New Delhi, they say is different. That is where things happen."\(^{41}\)

Tara, tremulous, with a rush of emotions an insecurity that seeks constant shoring up, reminds one of Maya, the highly strung female protagonist in "Cry The Peacock". Here Tara's flights of fancy are kept somewhat in check by Bakul, her assertive diplomat husband. In a subtle but decisive manner the self image of Anita Desdai's protagonist structures the way in which all violence and disturbing things are due to man and patriarchal power. Her women know how they have been trapped and how they can begin to live a fresh but the obstacle is man. Man enter in her world as a disturbing factor. But in the process, she reduces the patriarchal discourse to a set of clichés and soon her women are caught by fantasy. Tara is not at peace with herself. When challenged as to what she would like to be on growing up, she chooses to be a mother, much to the merriment of Raja and Bim. Yet, she is the only one who escapes the pall of decay and death, that the old house casts on all. She is the only one who realises what she had set out to do, however, imperfect model may be thereof. She comes to the old decaying house,

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trying to exorcise the ghosts childhood and adolescence. The past bears
down on her with the intensity of a half-remembered dream. Tara does
not feel free with the company of her husband. Though Tara shows her
unwillingness to go outside with her husband, yet she is afraid of him
because he may lose his temper. The fact is that her husband does not
bother about her sadness and even does not try to know the reason of her
refusal to go out with him. She is afraid of her husband Bakul's
dominating nature. It shows that there is disharmony and lack of mutual
love between husband and wife like other women protagonists of Desai.
There is no proper understanding between them and there exists lack of
communication between them. Bakul is practical and is guided by mind,
while Tara leads a life full of womanly emotions. This difference of
temperament between husband and wife develops hollowness of their
married life. She has changed herself outwardly as desired by her
husband but internally she is unchanged. However, Tara feels depressed
when she sees:

"......that the dullness and the boredom of her
childhood, her youth, were stored here in the room under the
worn dusty red rugs....."^{42}

Here in these lines Desai reveals the inner psyche of a woman
repressed by her family circumstances. She still wants to enjoy those
rustic pleasures which she had enjoyed in her childhood. She
nostalgically recollects her past. She is obsessed with the fear of her
childhood with her parents remained very busy in their social life and did
not have time to think about the emotional needs of their children. While
her brothers had good understanding and they were happy in their
childhood. She remained alone and left insecure. She did not want to

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come in contact with her father and mother, and was afraid of them. Her innocent mind was full of the fear that her father would kill her mother by injecting syringes in her body daily. She could see her mother's:

"Flabby, floury skin punctured with a hundred minute needle-holes.....surely these were the sign of death, she felt, not of healing."43

As a grown up lady after the death of her parents, she was often full of dreadful imagination that a pair of terrible ghosts of her dead parents would certainly catch her one day. Infact, her childhood obsession and fear never permitted her to grow a mature lady. Tara could never enjoy happiness in her childhood or adolescence and could never have courage to share her feelings with her dominating nature's husband. She always felt wistful and lonely. Only Miramasi provided her protection in her childhood. There is lack of courage in her nature due to which she lacks the power of taking any decision herself, and this temperament always forces her to escape from difficult situations. When she finds her sister Bim insulted by her brother Raja, she wishes to be away from it:

"Whenever she saw a tangle, an emotional tangle of this kind, rise up before her, she wanted only to turn and flee into that......land in which she lived with Bakul."44

Her mind is always full of the sense of insecurity and fear. She is not able to communicate with others. She lacks in self-confidence and courage. Infact, she could not adjust herself either with her school or with her family. She has alienated herself from her home and society also. In this novel Desai presents her feministic view and presents Tara as an example of women's repression in this male dominated Indian society.

44. Ibid, P. 23.
Tara's homecoming brings with it a lot of pleasant and unpleasant memories of childhood. Tara a girl of modest ambitions is "Physically smaller and weaker than Bim", and she lacks Bim's "Vigour, her Stamina" (P. 123). Here is the difference between the two sisters:

"Bim, of course, worshipped Florence Nightingale along with Joan of Arc in her private pantheon of saints and goddess and Tara did not tell her that she hoped never to have to do anything in the world, that she wanted only to hide under Aunt Mira's quilt or behind the shrubs in the garden and never be asked to come out and do anything, prove herself to be anything."\(^{45}\)

Here we see two different types of women, Bim is a woman who is quite ambitious to shape herself as a Florence Nightingale or Joan of Arc, while Tara rejoices over having sheltered and cloistered life of her home in the company of Mira Masi.

Bim, the eldest among all the brother and sisters of the Das family, is the main figure in this novel. She experiences despair, pain, troubles and anxiety from her childhood to her maturity. But she possesses a strong will-power and avoids her troubles. She wants to have a positive approach towards life. She avoids her boredom by keeping herself busy in her studies. Her brother, Raja and she have the same interest in studies, and therefore, they come closer. But soon he detaches himself from her due to his developing maleness. After the death of her parents she is solely responsible to look after her brother and sister because his brother Raja does not try to share the responsibilities of family. Raja does not bother to carry on the business of insurance of his father, and avoids the monotonous atmosphere of his family. Consequently, she is left alone to

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run the family. Later on, he leaves his house for Hyderabad. His
departure hurts her feelings and creates loneliness and vacuum in her life.
When Tara is married to Bakul, she feels that she and Raja have betrayed
her. Mira Masi, the cousin of her mother, comes to help the children, but
unfortunately she also dies. Thus, she is left alone with her mentally
retarded brother Baba. She often sees the ghost of Mira Masi. All this fills
her will the feeling of loneliness and insecurity. But she overpowers her
fear. She realises that it is wish to accept like as it is than to struggle with
it. she faces problems and anxieties of her life, but she never makes a
compromise with the value of life. She always tries to search the real
meaning of life and her identity and because of this decides not to marry.
She can marry her family doctor, Dr. Biswas, but does not Dr. Biswas
says:

"Now I understand why you do not wish to marry.
You have dedicated your life to others to your sick brother
and to your aged aunt and your little brother who will be
dependent on you all his life. You have sacrificed your own
life for them."^46

Bim is being measured against convention social matrices. The fact
that she chooses to independent, she starts teaching and performs her duty
towards her mentally retarded brother, Baba. She says:

".........Now there are just you and I left, Baba, she
muttered. Does the house seem empty to you? Everyone's
gone, except you and I. They won't came back. We'll be
alone now. But we don't have to worry about anyone now -
Tara or Raja or Mira-Masi. We needn't worry now that
they're all gone."^47

^47. Ibid, P. 101.
Here in this novel Desai reveals the condition of a woman who is helpless and feels alienated from all, but she makes a compromise with her lonely life. However, in very difficult moments of loneliness, she feels alienated and wants to run away from life. Bim's brother Raja marries, Benazir, the daughter of his landlord Hyder Ali, and settles down in Hyderabad in his father-in-law's house. But she and Baba still live in the old house of Hyder Ali. After the death of his father-in-law, Raja writes a letter to her informing her that he is the new landlord of her house. He further writes:

"When Hyder Ali Sahib was ill and making out his will, Benazir herself spoke to him about the house and asked him to allow you to keep it at the same rent we used to pay when father and mother were alive......I want to assure you that now he is dad and has left all his property to us, you may continue to have it at the same rent. I shall never think of raising it or of selling the house as long as you and Baba need it."\(^{48}\)

This letter offends and deeply hurts her. She feels humiliated also. She does not want to see him again because now he is not her brother but is her landlord. She completely alienates herself from Raja. By alienating herself from Raja she thinks that she is independent and can work according to her wishes. No wonder when Tara insists her to go with her to Raja's house, she says:

"You say I should come to Hyderabad with you for his daughter's wedding. How can I? How can I enter his house—my landlord's house? I, such a poor tenant? Because of me, he can't raise the rent or sell the house and make a profit—imagine that. The sacrifice!"\(^{49}\)


\(^{49}\) Ibid, P. 28.
She loses her faith in basic human values. But soon she realises that she has some misunderstandings. She wants to remove her misunderstandings by living in the present instead of the past, but she lacks courage and she is unable to avoid her past. Actually, her inner self has become and inalienable part of her past. She thinks that her brothers and sisters are very unkind and ungrateful, and are like mosquitoes. They suck her blood to get their life. She feels that she is useless for he brother and sister. Her deeply hurt feelings do not allow her to understand others correctly and see the truth. She is so repressed from her circumstances that Baba also sees her a burden. When she receives a letter from her father's office to attend a meeting, she speaks to him angrily to go there inspite of the fact that he is mentally retarded. When Tara advises her to consult Bakul about this, her ego is hurt. She decided to stop her father's insurance business and wants to sell all the shares, for she thinks that her father failed to provide his children any solid ground and has left behind only fifth which she has to clean. Apparently, she is deeply disturbed. But soon she repents for saying so and realises that the fifth is in her mind and she should remove it to see her present and past clearly. She realises that she should remove the fifth of prejudice, pride and ego from her mind. When the fifth of her mind is removed she understand her feelings as clearly as the light of day. Bim realises that she will have to forgive her brother her brother and sister and accept Baba. But she is afraid of the act of forgiveness because she knows that it is not easy to shun the ego and pride. Soon she realises that love must be selfless. She begins to read book "Life of Aurangzeb" just to calm down her tense mind. She very much likes the following lines:

"Many were around me when I was born, but now I am going alone..........strange that I came with nothing into
the world, and now go away with this stupendous caravan of
sin.\textsuperscript{50}

These lines influence her deeply. She thinks about her life and
sacrificed her ego. With open mind she forgives her brother and sister.
Her heart is calm and she tears Raja's letter to pieces. When Tara and
Bakul go to attend the marriage of Raja's daughter, she asks Tara to
inform Raja that she wants to meet him, and therefore, he must come to
her. When she asks Baba to go to attend the marriage and he refuses to do
so. She is very happy for everything is:

".......cleared out of the way finally. There was
nothing left in the way of a barrier or a shadow, only the
clear light pouring down from the sun.\textsuperscript{51}

Bim is a finely etched, figure, standing way ahead at the other
women in Desai's fictive world, illumined as she is by education and
intelligence rather than by blood or tradition or other social necessities. In
acknowledging herself's already an anachronism, by standing upon her
own lonely resources to meet the discrepancies between dream and
objective action, desire and fulfillment, hunted mystery and painful
revelation. She performs the noblest duty of her bread and demonstrates
its greatest assert-intelligence. She knows there are no answers to her
tormented vision, yet she strives to be whole, to be same amidst all decay,
destruction and death. She is Desai's study of the intelligent woman's
psyche, the woman who is aware of her potentialities and sense of
direction. She rebels against the compulsion to succeed in conformity.
She refuses to accept and compromise. She is aware of the incompatible
sex roles inflicted upon women by society, of the determinants and

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, P. 177.
threats to feminine identity. Burdened with responsibility. She is pinned down to narrow worlds of immobility and non-choice. In a society where no room is made for woman's sensibility or individuality, where every attempt at asserting her femininity and individuality leads to her being dubbed neurotic, where her male counterpart invariably fails in her traditional masculine role, the woman is made to feel, she is a frail bark upon the waters of life. Yet, there is hope in woman like Bim, who have the courage to withstand the onslaughts of time and society. Who lead their lives on their own terms who ask for the deeper morality of intelligent begins. Who struggle for the loyalties of sensitive human relationship. Bim is victim of circumstances. Since, Bim is used to taking decisions, facing challenges and being strong from her adolescent period. So, she feels identity crisis. Her family poses a threat to her high aspirations and ambitions. She is of uncompromising nature and so she is unable to adjust herself to the changing circumstances. The character of Bim is a self-sacrificing. Admits the heavy responsibilities of life she never thinks about a conjugal life for herself. Her sense of loneliness and frustration becomes all the more obvious after the death of Mira Masi and feels quite deserted and forlorn; Mira Masi, the cousin of Bim's mother, her husband goes to continue his studies in England but there he dies. Her in-law does not accept her, and blames her for his death. Bim's mother brings her to her home. She works sincerely in the Das family in order to satisfy her feeling of love. In Mira Masi Desai presents a very pathetic picture of women in our society. She was bearing all the troubles in her life because of being a woman. She looks after the children's of Das. However, when the cow drowns in the well and calf dies in absence of mother, she feels terribly guilty. This fills her with a sense of dreadful alienation and she begins to take wine. Ultimately, she gets mad. The children of Das's family also do not give her the love and needs. Wisely
enough, she wants to avoid all the attachment of her life, so that she may die calmly. Finally she dies. Thus, Bim, Tara, Mira Masi all are alienated from their home and society, but ultimately they realise the real meaning of life and feel delineated. Bim has the intelligence of view privilege and duty in proper perspective, the intelligence to gaze steadily at history and not be overwhelmed by present fears and needs, and the intelligence to look farther in to the future to see the ancient patterns of humanity, rise and fall and regroup. Though Bim Desai makes us aware for women's situation in society and rising the concept of "New woman". Anita Desai's emerging "New woman" is contemplative about her predicament and choses to protest and fight against the general, accepted norms and currents. What is different to face the consequences of their choices. Anita Desai asserts that her protagonists are new and different:

"I'm interested in characters who are not average but have retreated or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against,...the general current."52

It is for them a challenge to better their own personal existence. As a new woman Bim choses to redefine her position in society. As we compare Bim to some of the earlier female figures in Desai's fiction we witness a shift in perspective. From the women who sulked and sighed for recognition and love, for example, Maya and Sita, housewife Nanda Kaul who detested her life that had been wasted on an unfaithful husband and demanding children, childless and unhappy Monisha, shadows of Sita's run-away mother, Raka's weak and ailing mother, Bim and Tara's mother all these female figures evoke elaborate images of disquiet and of female repression and servitude. Some of them are so deeply entrenched

in the tradition value system that they fail to question the relevance of its assertion or their own expectations. Those who involved and up in hysteria or suicide. Their lives without meaning and substance bore them. They are in search of an existential refuge, but once such a refuge is provided, they realize they can no longer survive in its midst. Married to affluent husband, they have to rely on patriarchy for subsistence. Educated but servile, married but unhappy, they have nothing of their own to fall back upon. As wives they fail to understand or to be understood, as mother their failure is of a greater significance for they are unable to reach their children. As daughter, they have received no maternal guidance. So what remains perpetual failure as a woman. They can not respect themselves. They have pride in being what they are. This lack of self-possession heightens their sense of victimhood which is left without any fulfillment psychic or moral. These lives without fulfillment are lives deprived, lives dissatisfied, lives unanswered. It is here that Bim emerges as an answer, an alternative, an image of New woman. It is in her that we see a woman's landscape becoming a landscape of affirmation. Desire and refusal, magic and deceit in the woman's world had been dismissed as irrelevant in a man's domain. Public and private words did not meet. Lives were compartmentalized. Isolated and withdrawn, unloved and unhappy these women sulked in their windows with a wretched pent up anger. It becomes apparent that women's anger and refusal to conform tends to challenge the existing patriarchal system. It is neither easy nor desirable to sympathize with such behaviour. It evokes a certain distrust. They are neither lovable nor loved. Furthermore, they have nothing positive to say about themselves. They are negative and negated by focusing on the female outsider and her conflicting need for recognition Desai has opened ground for speculation. If refusal is one form of protest, assertion is another. If dependence
entails boredom then self-sufficiency is the answer. We find, then, that for Desai as much as for her female protagonists, struggle leads to a recognition of one's limitation and a clearing up of those norms and conditions which impede women's progress. Maya in "Cry the Peacock", suffers from a victim of her own fragility. Unlike her, Bim "In Clear Light of Day" is an older woman with a mature understanding and a desire to live a full and radiant life. She works towards the betterment of society and makes herself useful. She does not recede into narcissistic imagination. She sees to the need of others. She is a woman not in a search of vocation but in control of her vocation. Her vocation of love and living is not a mere abstraction, a product of fantasy, but adds significance to her everyday life. Bim is a possible new woman who has learnt that the possibility of accommodation in modern society can come only with a degree of self recognition and practical wisdom. It can come with a possible negotiation between the woman's role within the family and the society. Although Desai feels there is nothing new in Bim for:

"Women have been committed to responsibilities for centuries and a great many older women in the past generation were very courageous and strong, had great achievements."\(^{53}\)

Bim renegotiates the terms of woman's life indeed, although she is no great women's liberator nor a social reformer. She is out of the ordinary lot of women. She is an exception to the ordinary. Bim's life has been unheroic in worldly terms but as far as the values and the ideals of on individual go she is new to Desai's fiction. Despite the unexception nature of her life, she comes out as different from the other women. She shares their affinity with the landscape. Like Maya, the garden occupies a

\(^{53}\) Quoted from "The fiction of Margarete Drabble and Anita Desai", New Delhi, Apprendi X B.P. 252
prominent place in her life. What is striking is that having made a journey out wards in space Anita Desai's New woman protagonist decides to return to the closure of the house but with a different intent. Bim is aware of the duties and responsibilities and restrictions imposed by the house and seeks to realize herself both inside and outside the house. Bim is therefore the woman that one could look forward to, unlike Desai's earlier women protagonists. Bim escapes the heterosexual plot, that is, she turns down marriage and maternity but looks after the everlasting baby in Baba. She is not a biological mother but is a strong maternal figure in terms of responsibility, caring and commitment. It is with her that the house acquires a new meaning. It receives a new shape and a form. It is in her that we see how one can work and subsequently succeed in representing woman's time. Bim demonstrates that woman's desire for affirmation, can be expressed by being able to negotiate between the social and the imaginary. As in some of the earlier women an identification with one should not necessarily lead to separation from the other. As a young school-girl and later as a woman she retain her interest in the social world. As we see her development of life we see her as a victim of society, ruled by masculine law. As a young girl Bim meets the challenge of the outside world. She with her strong instinctive personality makes a decision:

"I shall do things".......I shall earn my own living and look after Mira-Masi and Baba and - and be independent."54

Herein, she constructs a new definition of feminism. Bim is the new woman who by asserting her desire for independence, for knowledge, for self-mastery is choosing to be an individual. This is the first note of originality that strikes Desai woman. Hitherto her women

were not aware of their needs. Thus They were unhappy and dissatisfied with their lives and had limited control over them. Bim, on the other hand, is aware of what she would like to be, to do. She too goes through periods of unhappiness. She is also moody, cynical and dissatisfied. She is short-tempered like the rest but what makes her different is that she is loving and responsible. Above all, she is humane. What she does not out of a sense of duty only but out of love for her family. What she aspires for is not mere happiness in marriage and children but a life enriched in values and vocation. In Bim, Desai has created a new woman who is very much an exception to the rest. She meets the challenge of the outside world. She is responsive to those around her and in sufficiently aware of what she wants from life. "Clear Light of Day" reveals the possibility of a choice available to women. It becomes a study of shared past and individual guilt, of shared uncertainty and individual suffering. The novel explores the restraints imposed by the house and links it with the possibilities that the world can offer to its inhabitants. The closure is seen in contrast to the vibration of the outer world. Yet, this closure is not viewed with contempt or disdain. It can be broken and resisted in the figure of Bim. Bim's school girl vitality receives no challenge from Tara. Tara is quiet and preferred the familiarity of the home but Bim is not like her:

"Whereas school brought out Bim's natural energy and vivacity that was kept damped down at home because of the peculiar atmosphere of their house, school to Tara was a terror, a blight, a gathering of large, loud malicious forces that threatened and mocked her fragility.......to Bim, school and its teachers and lessons were a challenge to her natural
intelligence and mental curiosity that she was glad to meet."\textsuperscript{55}

Life does not end inside the house for Bim. She chooses to be different. She creates what she in a way likes most. She pursues her interest in fact, history, chronology. What shapes Bim's heroinism in her inner sense of rebellion her childhood experiences at home, her parent's indifference, Masi's widowhood and more so the spirit of the house according to Ellen Moers:

".......the clash between intention and realization is the drama of literary creation itself. And where heroinism is concerned, the by-products of the struggle-changes in literary form and language, in tone, imagery, setting are often more interesting and more important than the particular heroines it has produced."\textsuperscript{56}

Unlike, her sister Tara, Bim has always been a fighter. She pursues knowledge and a career. She even becomes a surrogate mother to her brother Baba. In the words of Desai she is a "triumph" and a "paradox". She chooses to retain her individuality and work with a degree of self-possession. But somewhere deep inside her Bim is aware of her limitations:

"How my student would laugh at me. I'm always trying to teach them, train them to be different from what we were at their age - to be a new kind of woman from you or me - and if they knew how badly handicapped I still am, how I myself haven't been able to manage on my own - they'd laugh, wouldn't they? They'd despise me."\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{57} Desai Anita, "Clear Light of Day", New Delhi, Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 1980, P.123.
Although she does not see herself in this light, Bim is a new kind of woman. Her decisiveness distinguishes her from others and her simmering dissatisfaction brings them somewhat closer to her. "Clear Light of Day" is a novel of female development as much as a novel of female choice. Desai seemingly explores that varied alternative women can and do choose according to their nature and circumstances. She focuses on women's inner needs and anxieties which is known as the main trait of feminism. Bim chooses to be a woman of vocation. She, unlike her sister Tara, is in pursuit of knowledge and has no room for romance in her life. She chooses not to marry which is an unlikely proposition for an Indian woman. In her uncharacteristic response to marriage Bim expresses her need to be different. Stripped of her desire for husband and children she values her love of her siblings and her commitment of vocation. She recognizes the difficulties that women like Mira-Masi had to face in an indifferent patriarchal system. The mode of argument is that it is her mother's indifference and her aunt's powerlessness and her father's disinterest that has shaped her desire for autonomy. Yet in doing so she neither renounces her maternal instincts nor her personal ambition. She fulfills them. What we see in her is a femininity which survive without seeking recourse to marriage and children. For Desai, female building has not been a stagnant, static state of no return. It is continually evolving, a sign of human progress and capable of producing better human beings. Bim is eroding a centre hitherto linking women's destiny with marriage and children and viewing it as an only means of fulfillment in their lives. Her act of renouncing the two is matched by her thralldom to her sibling and her students and also her pets. I is not state that she aspired to on the contrary. Having recognised in adolescence what she aspired for Bim seeks model of feminine self-assertion. Through the characters like Bim, Anita Desai pleads for better
role models and support structures for women, especially women past their prime, over forty, when they perceive they are useless appendages, their primary jobs of bringing forth and rearing children having ended. The difficulties of bridging and gap between aspiration and reality, of juggling domesticity, love, children, career and emotional fulfillment leave women exhausted and often on the verge of mental crises. The existence of such a malaise, in India and elsewhere, points out the tensions involved in contemporary loving. Anita Desai's exploration of the disturbed psyche of Indian woman ultimately leads to an emphasis on loneliness the inevitable lot of women. By making a domestic context and family relationships the microcosmic scene of woman's yearning for detachment and response from the material place. Desai interrogate the limited frame of reference within which women's lives are structured in Hindu culture. The domestic world, for a large number of Hindu women, is still held to be the equivalent of the satisfaction of their material and spiritual desires. Aunt Mira widowed at the age of fifteen, when she was still a virgin, Aunt Mira had no option but to submit to the callous Hindu dictum for widows and become the "Maid of all work", first in her husband's family and later in the Das family. Bim appears as new woman of the coming years. She is independent and liberated and yet there is no mark of arrogance or superiority in her. Bim is very clear about her aspirations urges an expectations, yet she is not the one to roll in pity about her alienation. If she left cheated and stranded and thought Raja and Tara to be selfish. She was ready to forgive them. She was ready to see every flaw of others in the light of understanding. She would have to forgive her parents too, towards whom she was resentful because she could not grasp the disturbed atmosphere of their lives. Bim is able to obtain everything in life without the help of the masculine forces due to
her confidence in herself. It is Bim that we recognize the emerging new and independent woman that Simon de Beavoir delineates:

"Once she ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumbles: between her and the universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator."

Bimla and Tara in their quest for identity, liberty and individuality act and react in radical ways to the set conventional construct. Bim uses to do manly duties and breaks the traditional norms and currents. Here Mrs. Desai seems to suggest the significant sign of New Woman. Anita Desai's "Clear Light of Day".

Clearly connect the desire for freedom of the spirit with the freedom of body and mind. Centering on the older woman protagonist, quest for spiritual liberation, novel exposes and rejects the perplexing dilemma of the Hindu woman who can achieve spiritual fulfillment about the codes of Brahmical orthodoxy that define women within the confines of their domestic existence, particularly in terms of their conjugal and maternal responsibilities. "Clear Light of Day" dramatize the difficult struggle by which women seek detachment from the ties of the material plane in order to enter a space, traditionally reserved for men. Desai emphasize the need for (a modified form of) female renunciation especially in a cultural context that denies full personhood to women. In an act of subversion against such a circumscribed milieu, Desai permits her protagonists new patterns of spiritual subjectively which take into account their justified need for spiritual repose. We see Bim in "Clear Light of Day" as a woman in her unconventional search for inner peace and tranquility. She gave a different meaning to the doctrine

of feminism in her novel "Clear Light of Day". The women protagonists of Desai hold centre-stage in all her novels. In focusing on the working of the mind of the protagonist, Desai presents their capacity for dissent. A marked development is seen in a chronological examination of the protagonists. In "Clear Light of Day" Desai introduces us with an intelligent, independent - minded protagonist - Bim, who is willing to enter the traditional male dominated society, choose a career and earn her livelihood. Bim tries to and succeeds in rising above the constricting influence of her family, breaking off the shackles of her past and bringing order to her life. The positive note on which the novel ends is a personal victory of Bim. She represent the real spirit of feminism and faces the reality around her with courage:

"Everyone's gone, except you and I. They won't come back. We needn't worry now that they're all gone. We're just by ourselves and they're all gone. We're just by ourselves and there's nothing to worry about." 59

Desai has succeed in presenting the feminine psyche with all its variety and shades. According to Shanta Kishnaswamy:

"Being a woman is problem. All the rules and restrictions against which little girls chafed and women grumbled about were designed only to block all routes to escape from the conventional mode of living from 'society that beastly tamer......." 60

In Desai's "Clear Light of Day" Bim suffers for her pride of being a woman and ultimately reconciles herself to reality. Anita Desai portrays

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woman as not totally cut off from familial and social ties but women who remain within these orbits and protest against monotony, injustice and humiliation of society. Through the character of Bim, Desai wants to highlight the sensibility of modern women in India. Dr. S.P. Swain writes thus:

"Desai discovers the ultimate truth of life in an intuitive apprehension and human acceptance of the polarities and paradoxes of life. The existential angle acquires a new dimension. Bim achieves her "Feminine self" in fusion, not in fission, in association, not in alienation, in affirmation, not in negation. Her help commitment to her past as a maternal symbol, a feminine principle sustains her against the revenges of time." 61