CHAPTER THREE

QUEST FOR IDENTITY AND SURVIVAL

The true story of every person in this world is not the story you see, the external story. The true story of each person is the journey of his or her heart (John Eldredge 35).

The quest for identity and survival depends a lot on the emotional, cultural and social stability of an individual. Stability is the ultimate stage of this quest. There is a strong interdependence between the two. One cannot speak of identity without referring to emotional, social and cultural stability. Apart from these three dimensions of the human being, another important aspect of identity is the feminine identity. Most of Desai’s works revolve around female protagonists reflecting their inner conflict in maintaining their individuality and self-identity.

In Cry, the Peacock (1963) Desai’s first novel, the identity crisis of the protagonist Maya stems from several inter-related factors. She is a passionate and sensitive young girl married to her lawyer father’s protégé Gautama. Being a practical-minded person, detached from emotions, Gautama is totally antithetical to her. Maya requires a love partner with wide sympathies, highly sensitive, imaginative and responsive temperament which Gautama lacks. She belongs to a traditional Brahmin family which believes in astrology and other prophetic strains of Brahmintical order. On the other hand, Gautama’s family represents the rational side of life. Her unhappiness is, however, more a product of her own consciousness and her inability to outgrow her romantic and protected childhood as also the prophecy of the Albino priest. She is unable to face the ordinary realities of life.
Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* is a delicate house wife unable to cope with the apathy of the in-laws and the dehumanized and depersonalized urban milieu. But she is not a haunted protagonist who flees from reality. She is an individual involved in the drama of life and death. Maya’s existentialist predicament which is akin to the plight of the love-lorn peacock whose shrieks in the stillness of the night penetrates her heart and leaves it palpitating. She reckons her identity in them. She observes “Now that I understand their call, I wept for them and wept for myself, knowing their words to be mine (*Cry, the Peacock* 97).

Maya is different. She is a fractured self starving for re-affirmation and re-discovery of her identity. Maya did not participate in the intellectual life of Gautama yet her temperamental discord with him fails to engender abhorrence for life. For her the world is still full and herself intact, she gropes for socio-psychic and psycho-emotional values in physical and mad world. Her quest for meaning is material, not chimerical. Her identity crisis is more of socio-physic than of a psycho-ethic nature. Deprived of the sanctions of a harmonious conjugal life, she is out of touch with society-- a “tortoise with its limbs withdrawn” (119).

Maya’s alienation is human. It is caused by her intermittent psychic conformation with death and the albino’s weird prophecy and not just by Gautama’s apathy and callowness. Her quest for identity is concerned with her mental journeys in the world of reality and in the world of illusion. The albino figures in her world of illusion and Gautama in the world of reality. The clash between Maya and Gautama is a clash between illusion and reality. Her very name “Maya” is suggestive of illusion. Their psychic confrontations are attempts to identify assertions, each trying to decipher his or her own identity.
Maya’s compulsive fear and obsessive death-wish manifest in her suicide. They bring about discord in her marital life. Her identity as a house wife is disturbed. Maya’s quest for identity is the eternal quest for freedom, trust, value and meaning in life. It denotes a collective neurosis which shatters the identity of a woman in a male-dominated patriarchal society where women longing for love and security are driven mad or forced into suicide. Maya’s quest for identity assumes a universal dimension. She fails to survive because of her lack of identity. Her identity crisis could not allow her to survive in this male-dominated world.

Maya is identified with a peacock that represents for her the cries for love which simultaneously invite their death. Like her, the peacocks are creatures of exotic world and they will not rest till they have danced to their death. For her, they represent the evolutionary instinct of the struggle for survival. She describes how they dance and the remarkable impact produced on her mind. K.R Srinivasa Iyengar aptly states: “Maya is at once the centre and circumference of the world. Her society whether she is sane or hysterical or insane fills the whole book and gives it form as well as life” (468).

In *Voices in the City* also Monisha, the protagonist, does not find anything worth in the life she lives after marriage. She doesn’t find anything worthwhile in the meaningless existence of woman. Monisha is in search of identity and some meaning in her life. Her relationship with her husband also lacks love. Her husband Jiban is very much self-centered and he doesn’t understand the feelings of his wife. Her married life is marked by loneliness and communication gap. Living in a big family with in-laws she, like Maya finds her life meaningless. Her inability to bear a child, lack of intimacy with her husband, suspicion of her in-laws and lack of privacy and lack of identity drive her to commit suicide.
Monisha’s husband is a product of a conventional culture. He has seen women spending their lives like birds in cages without any trace of aggressiveness or sense of identity. Monisha is a silent and stubborn girl. She does not protest when she is to be married to the most unimaginative man in an equally dull family. She never complains about the family or the innumerable aunts or uncles or Jiban himself. The relationship of Jiban and Monisha is not close but strange. Jiban leads a life in his own enclosure excluding Monisha from it. She is to align herself with the kitchen, the vegetables and looking after numerous children of the family. She is not able to survive in this situation with no identity for herself in the family. She is reduced to being an inanimate object where feelings, passions and reactions have died a natural death. The reason for Monisha’s complete detachment is Jiban and his family. She observes: “They put me always in a steal container, a thin glass cubicle and I have lived it all my life without a touch of love or hate or worth” (Voices in the City 229). But at the end all her feelings were reduced to ashes.

She is affected to the core because even her husband is indifferent to her emotional needs. Her husband remains passive when her mother- in- law beats her. Being a highly educated lady she is not able to find identity in the present situation which is alien to her temperaments. She leads an isolated life though all her- in- laws are around her.

Temperamental incompatibility between Jiban and Monisha causes havoc to her. Monisha’s husband is the prisoner of conventional culture. He believes that a woman’s most important roles besides child-bearing are cooking, cutting vegetables, serving food and brushing small children’s hair under the authority of a stern mother- in- law. Monisha feels that her privacy is denied to her. Monisha is perplexed in her situation
and does not know how to better her situation. She leads a fragmented and strained and starved life in which she finds no meaning or worth.

Her relationship with her husband is characterized only by loneliness and lack of communication. He considers his wife as a good for nothing woman. He does not bother to ask his wife, when he finds some money missing from his pocket. Instead he blames her for the loss of money. That is the last straw. Unable to bear the humiliation she pushes herself to the end. Monisha’s ill matched marriage, her loneliness, sterility and stress of living in a joint family with an insensitive husband do not give her any worth or identity in life. The element of love is missing for survival. Unable to endure her lack of identity and humiliation she commits suicide.

In Where Shall We Go This Summer? Anita Desai presents an intense identity crisis of the central character Sita, a sensitive woman in her early forties. Unable to live in the present she identifies herself with her past represented by the childhood on Manori Island twenty years ago. Sita’s problem seems to be due to maladjustment with her husband. The home life and the surrounding atmosphere are nauseating to her. She is fed up with her husband, a businessman, whose complete lack of concern for her brings her to the verge of insanity. Tragically, her dreams of getting love and affection from her husband end in a nightmare. The point at issue is that her husband ignores her instincts. As a result, the husband-wife relationship gets strained. This comes out in the form of identity crisis for both Sita and Raman who stand for binary opposites.

While Raman is an extrovert and accommodative, Sita is an introvert and pessimist. Being hypersensitive Sita only hates Raman for his lack of feeling but also “derides the subhuman placidity calmness sluggishness and the routine manner of her husband’s family” (Where Shall We Go This Summer? 48). As a reaction against these
when she speaks she does so with a rage and anguish and with “sudden rushes of emotion” (48). In order to survive in this situation she takes to smoking, abuses her children for trifles and flies into a rage. Finally like Stephen Dedalus in A Portrait of the Artist as a Youngman, she chooses three things--exile, silence and cunningness. She has resolved to go to Manori Island as a kind of self-exile in her search for identity in silence and in her revival of the past away from home and civilization. This reminds one of Billy Biswas in Arun Joshi’s The Strange Case of Billy Biswas.

The clash of identities between Sita and Raman that takes an unhappy dimension has other interesting points of focus. At the root of the husband-wife conflict there is the theme of tradition versus modernism. The only thing that represents tradition is Sita’s memory of the past. The present, however, is not religious enough to retain the glory of the past hence her isolation, loss of identity and break down of her relationship with her husband and others in the family. The betrayal of her unconscious inclination to preserve and uphold traditional values of an integrated life in face of the chaotic values of modern city civilization is at the root of her unhappiness and loss of identity. The central issue of the novel is identity crisis as a result of husband wife polarity.

Her husband’s caustic remark that her eagle has been eaten by the crows suggests the future course of her action following her defeat and loss of identity. She hurriedly packs up and leaves for Monori Island in complete defiance of her husband’s hostile and hypocritical world. She returns to her father’s island charmed by him. This is indeed her final effort to try to save her identity by showing her faith in her father’s magic world. Perhaps she is searching for a great revelation or a miracle to happen.

For Sita escape seems almost inevitable when she has to face a life of slow suicide without her identity and self. The problem of survival takes its roots from
identity crisis. To her, her father is all, “He had been a wizard, she accepted that now her father. He had cast an illusion as a fisherman casts a net […] upon a flock of fish in the sea” (100). She tries to gain identity through her father as her relationship with her husband has strained. Her father is a picture of her personal myth, a personal dream, to which her childhood belongs.

At a deeper psychological level Sita’s quest for identity is an outcome of the husband-wife conflict. The insensitive nature of Raman causes serious libidinous problems to Sita. The novel presents a deep crisis of identity and this has made the novel achieve the status of being a masterpiece in the portraiture of Sita. At the end of her stay at Monori Island she comes out as a different personality who is no more disturbed by the concept of time and for her, past, present, and future are melted into one. Now she is the supreme commander of her life, absorbing all the incongruities of her surroundings and her husband and her children. Looking forward to the future she becomes a benign mother, and an understanding and sympathetic wife. Sita’s quest for identity is over. Her identity is one of impersonality. She corresponds with life when it is worth living. Life is a continual process of sacrifice, adjustment and compromise. The novelist’s deep psychological probing into the innermost recesses of the mind of modern man in their quest for identity in the contemporary world is well rewarding. Finally Sita reconciles with her husband after asserting her identity.

Anita Desai, in the Fire on the Mountain draws an extraordinary portrait of an Indian woman striving to establish her own identity. Nanda Kaul is by no means the type of common Indian woman. She is unique in her elegant isolation -thin and straight like the pines of Kausali, high and empty like Carignano where she has retired alone after a long and busy life as a wife and a mother.
Nanda Kaul is the extremely beautiful dignified wife of a vice chancellor. She is the perfect home-maker and admired hostess but she led an empty life devoid of any identity of her own or any meaningful personal relationship. She has to carry on with a faithless husband. She is not able to survive happily in her family which only demands hard work from her but does not care about her feelings. Her husband only gave her that much to keep her quiet but had his real life long affair with Miss Davis.

Nanda’s own children also took her for granted. They were demanding and bothersome and were alien to her. Too many visitors and guests in the house annoyed her. She did not have a breathing space in her own home. She has to cater to the needs of all her family members. The ironical smile with which she used to carry on the tiresome burden of these unending duties, day in and day out indicated that her emotional withering had set in years before she had finally retired to Carignano.

It was very hard for her to survive in such a busy life without any reciprocation from her husband or children. In order to absorb the hurt, the indignity of being just a role, she needed to toughen herself to get insensitized. This was part of her resilience. She had to put up against assaults of life. Coming to live at Carignano was but the logical culmination of her steeled withdrawal which had started long ago. With no identity of her own, she was not able to survive at her husband’s home. After her husband’s death, she moved to Carignano. The Carignano house and the surrounding Kasauli hillscape are extension of her drained inner self.

She wanted her own identity and dignity. She lives in Carignano with nobody to disturb her. She takes recourse to her past. She is forced to turn to the present when Raka, her great grand daughter, the child of a broken home, is thrust upon her. She is annoyed at first as she had enough of duties and responsibilities and now wants only to
be left in peace. But soon her resistance wall begins to show cracks. Nanda tries to reach out to the strange child, to win her interest by fabricating stories about the houses of her father and husband but it does not fascinate the child as she knows that homes may not be that idyllic after all, and consequently finds her granny’s tales too good to be true.

With the brutal death of her childhood friend, Ila Das, she dies of shock. Many a wife and mother of Nada’s generation in India may identify themselves with her. The sad emptiness of a so-called successful wife, mother and home maker is but paradigmatic of the contemporary social situation. Even an extraordinary woman once married has to fit into certain roles and remain shackled. Married life for a sensitive woman could thus be overwhelmingly demanding and also frustrating and withering in the long run. After playing the assigned role and fulfilling the exacting duties imposed by these roles, Nanda refused to be pitied. She built her own identity. She refused to be pitied so she assumed and chose this life. She identified herself with the scorched pines of the bare Carignano. She continued to be upright, rich, proud, dignified and aloof until the thunder struck in the form of Ila’s murder. Incidentally, Nanda takes possession of Carignano and thus starting her new independent life is made to synchronize with India’s independence wrenched after a long trauma of exploitation and betrayal.

In a remarkably terse and evocative language Anita Desai tells the story of an individual woman who emerges as a representative figure with her brave though sad attempt to find an identity of her own. The narration is remarkably known for its swift pace as well as attention for small details.

Desai’s _Clear Light of Day_ can be analysed taking into consideration the psychological motivation. The existential absurdity and lack of communication bring identity crisis to her central characters who are seen in the quest of their individual identity.
In her novel, *Clear Light of Day*, Anita Desai portrays Indian women as marginalized characters facing challenges and burdens imposed by the patriarchal society. They resemble colonial subjects whose lives are fractured. Among the female characters Bim, Tara, their mother and Aunt Mira, are subordinated by a male-dominant culture which underestimates female subjectivity. One way in which these female characters survive is by entering into the male-dominated society and adopting their language and culture. As these women are unable to improve their circumstances, they struggle to establish their own identity using the oppressors’ language and culture.

This novel has two women characters: Tara and Bimla. Bimla is the eldest and Tara is the younger sister. Throughout their childhood Bimla was the more assertive and strong-willed sister. Yet she never moves out of their childhood house and as an adult she is responsible for taking care of Baba, thereby becoming a mother figure to him. Her quest for identity makes her a professor in a college and a caring mother figure to her mentally-retarded brother Baba. She not only teaches in a college and manages to earn a living, but is also part of the domestic sphere she attempted to escape from. She fixed her identity even when she was a teenager. As a teenager, she emphatically declares her refusal to marry. “I shall work – I shall do things”. She went on “I shall earn my own living and look after Mira - masi and Baba and be independent. There will be so many things to do” (*Clear Light of Day* 140-141). Bimla entertains very high opinion about herself. Therefore, her dreams are directed towards becoming free and independent. This is her quest. In this way she asserts her identity. She craves for an individual identity. But at the same time she does not forget her responsibility towards her family. This introduces the paradox and tension inherent in Bim’s longing for independence. This urge is present in her even before she is grown up. She longs to work and do things, but
also affirms her sense of responsibility to her deteriorating aunt and mentally-challenged younger brother.

Bimla weaves her own identity. By the end of the novel Bim resembles Aunt Mira, the spinster aunt devoted to the Das children. She is also educated and professionally competent like Tara. Bim is complex and paradoxical. She is not fully traditional or modern nor is she entirely domestic or entirely professional. Thus she achieves a neutral identity which is constructive.

Anita Desai reveals to the readers unconscious motifs of human psyche, the problem of human relationships and the protagonist’s quest for identity in almost all the novels starting from Cry the Peacock to Fasting, Feasting. But her novel Journey to Ithaca portrays the quest for higher human values and the ultimate truth in this way. Anita Desai portrays the quest for identity of the trio, Lila, the mother, Matteo and Sophie.

Sophie and Matteo are husband and wife. They come to India. When Matteo was young he was not interested in school studies. Matteo’s parents bring forth two main aspects of Matteo’s life: his withdrawal from the school and the appointment of Fabian as a teacher for his further studies. Fabian acquaints him with Hermann Hesse’s Journey to the East which kindles in him curiosity about the philosophy of Vedanta. Another remarkable incident is his marriage with Sophie, a journalist. After their marriage both Sophie and Matteo leaves Italy for India.

The word ‘journey’ in the title Journey to Ithaca represents quest motif of a search for identity. It delineates Matteo’s quest for spirituality and mother’s and Sophie’s quest for identity. The novel’s prologue discloses the early life of Matteo whereas the epilogue deals with Matteo’s marriage with Sophie and his journey to India.
Desai’s *Journey to Ithaca* is a narrative that portrays the cross-cultural complexities of belonging and identity. Through the diaspora experiences of Laila (later called ‘Mother’) and Sophie, Desai depicts the subordinate cultural identities which clash with the dominant cultural identities. Laila’s and Sophie’s journey through Egypt, Paris, Venice, New York and India gives rise to the multiplicity of voices arising out of the mixture of cultures, (ie many centres and many peripheries), and the displaced voice trying to locate its culture through a never-ending dialogue of ‘self’ with ‘other’. This constant dialogue justifies Bakhtins’ notion that nothing exists independently and we all live lives of simultaneity (ie there can be no ‘self’ without the ‘other’)(93).

Desai interweaves the two parallel stories of Laila and Sophie, and through their characters she displays the contrary impacts of cultural interaction on the displaced subjects. Sophie and her husband Matteo’s journey to the East (India) begins in 1975, when they leave Italy (their home land) “dressed in identical blue jeans and t-shirt and sport shoes carrying identical rack sack on their backs as did many of their generations in Europe” (*Journey to Ithaca* 30).Their purpose is “To find India, to understand India and the mystery that is at the heart of India” (57). This desire for the mystical East has been instilled in Matteo through his introduction to Herman Hesse’s *Journey to the East* by his private tutor Fabain. This dialogical encounter with the alien cultures has varying impacts on them. Metteo is able to reconfigure his identity and develop a sense of belonging as he once says, “The past is over, Sophie, over, over, over – not to be repeated. Don’t repeat it” (43). Sophie, on the other hand, starts her journey to India like any other western adventurer to enjoy the exotic East. But her curiosity is soon marred by the compulsion with which she has to follow Matteo from one ashram to another. She is typical of Desai’s protagonists who are:
social- psychic, rebels, recalcitrant selves who find it difficult to compromise with the milieu. The self-frantically endeavours to escape but in the process enters another world equally disturbing and disheartening, thus it lies cloistered in the world when there is a perpetual and persistent struggle between the physical (the present) and psyche (the past) … (Swain 107-108).

She fails to converse with the voices of the adopted culture and is unable to locate a centre or re-root herself in the real India which is so different from the imaginary land of myths, mountains and saints that she had always wanted to explore through characters like Sophie. For Sophie “Matteo has vanished into the heart of the world that remained shut to her. She had not thought she wished to enter in but Meteo’s disappearance was so profound that her uneasiness grew” (Journey to Ithaca 126). Since Sophie is unable to break away from her ethnicity she continues to cling on to her western approach to life. She “smoked a cigarette furtively behind the hut […] feeling both guilty and grateful to be excluded” (53-54). The smoking of cigarette furtively is symbolic of Sophie’s attempt at preserving her identity, like an expatriate she does not want to develop any association, reconciliation with the adopted culture. The dilemma of her identity is visible in the crisis. “I want to go home” (89) and her questions to Matteo. “ Couldn’t we stay in our own country? To die there?” (57).

Being a woman Sophie wants to be a representative of her nationality. Hence she willingly alienates herself and denies understanding the language of the other ashram dwellers. “The pai dogs that barked in the village and in other villages were more comprehensible to her. She listens to their dialogues with greater understanding and sympathy” (53). This interpretation of the animal sounds and willing ignorance to understand the language and the regional pronunciation of the ashram members is
indicative of Sophie’s expatriate nature. Rama Kundu observes: “Sophie and Matteo, whose marriage had been quickened by the prospect of this journey had very soon undergone the bitterness frustration trauma that followed all these India-bound travelers of their times like inalienable shadows” (276). She goes to Goa and joins a band of European ragged mendicants. This failed attempt at self-definition forces Sophie to rejoin Matteo and his sojourn in ashrams. Though Matteo soon finds a Guru in the Mother, Sophie still remains alone and is unable to anchor her new ‘self’. Sophie with her typical Eurocentric vision of India proves to be modest in the new cultural milieu unable to cope with taxing experiences. Her “pilgrimage through India becomes suffused with the rich and aromatic laze of marjuana” (55).

The shift in identity due to the cross-border discourse also involves nostalgic longing. Sophie has only one to listen to her cassette player of the Bramdenburg Concertous. This is an evidence of the plight of culturally displaced subjects. Bakhtin’s example of a two-faced Janus vividly portrays the multicultural identity of Sophie that continues to hinge between her earlier and latter self. Bakhtin observes: “An art of our actual experiencing is like a two-faced Janus. It looks in two opposite directions. It looks at the objective unity of a domain of culture and at the never repeatable uniqueness of actually lived and experienced [. . .]” (2). This constant looking back emerges in Sophie’s multicultural trait and a desire to cease her husband’s complete assimilation with the adopted culture.

Sophie’s need to break Matteo out of the spell of mother (originally Laila) and to pull him out of an illusionary enigma to which Metteo has surrendered his life, forces her into ceaseless efforts to discover the past of the mother. To do that she has “to travel back, back in time although not her own time but the mother’s” (Journey to Ithaca 155). In doing so Sophie visits a number of places, beginning with Egypt, Venice, New York
and finally India which have been the abode of mother at various points of her life. Even after entering into different cultures she is unable to strike roots in any of the adopted lands. Sophie’s search introduces the readers to the multifaceted character of Lalia (the Mother) born in Egypt. Her continuous journey though Paris, Venice and New York metamorphosize her into Lila-Rani-Lalia-Devi. She finally adopts the role of ‘Mother’.

Laila, an Egyptian Muslim girl, daughter of Alma and Hamid, rebels against the traditional code of Muslim religion. Laila’s lecture of unpinning her Egyptian kerchief and leaving it floating through the sea breeze is symbolic of her freedom from cultural moorings. She moves forth in search of her spiritual existence. She is lured into the new direction of spiritualism in her early youth after her encounter with the Hagdeh in Cairo who prophesies her future “Eastward to find a temple [. . .] the temple of the Mother Goddess of the world” (176-177). These words continue to haunt her subconscious mind throughout her odyssey till she finally reaches India, redefines herself as mother and finds her true eternal home. She assures devotees by saying, “the only purpose of our existence here is to experience fully to be fully” (100) that is to fully acculturate ourselves to the adopted land. The entire journey of Lalia delineates her assimilatory characteristics. Her quest for identity and survival culminates in her acculturation.

Like a true immigrant, Laila does not like to conform to the conventions of her ethnic society but rather acculturates herself to the various cultures she passes through. The multi cultural experiences of Laila introduce her to various social and religious cultures (Egyption, European, American and Indian) which she disregards completely. But the one that has a lasting impact on her mind and soul is the oriental (more specifically Indian) culture which she first comes across “through heaps of books (in Paris Books shop) all with titles referring to “L’ orient or L’Inde” (195 ) and a strange dark metal statue in the same shop that struck a dancer’s pose.
To Laila the dancer Krishna whom she meets in Paris seems to be symbolic of Lord Krishna:

It seemed to her that he, the dancer was also the figure she had first seen in a volume of paintings in Madame Lacen’s book shop. He was also God. She had studied in the books . . . He was also the country and the art and the religion that had become her obsession (219).

By joining Krishna Ji’s dancing troupe, she paves the way for herself to come to India. It is in India that Laila, a spiritual quester, achieves an identity for which she revolted against all cultural and patriarchal norms. On her journey to the Himalayas she meets her Master (Guru Prem Krishna ) with whom she lives as a body being one with the soul. It is here that she achieves her spiritual emancipation. After the master’s death she heads the ashram as Mother by doing away with all the patriarchal codes. At this stage she finally reaches the last rung of the ladder of her quest and attains bliss, enlightenment and most importantly the transformation from Laila to the Mother. Laila being a fluid identity is able to rebuild her ‘self’ in the maze of cultural dialogies. It is evident from the aforementioned experiences of Laila that the shift in time and space always leads to the transformation of ‘self’ into ‘other’. N.R. Gopal observes that Anita Desai has created two kinds of characters who can be described as ‘Aye sayers and Nay-sayers’ (47). Anita Desai herself has said in an interview. “There are those who can handle situations and those who can’t ”(Vimala Rao 78). Desai’s Journey to Ithaca introduces ‘Aye’ sayers and as well as ‘Nay’ sayers. ‘Nay’ sayers refer to Sophie who, like an expatriate, continues to yearn for her past and she is unwilling to plant her roots into a new social set up. ‘Aye’ sayers refer to Laila (Mother ) who willingly absorbs the new culture or social set up and is a thorough immigrant.
The next recent novel of Indian-born author Anita Desai is *Fasting, Feasting*. It tells the story of two-middle class families and the allegorical struggles of the individual members to find individual identity and happiness. This meticulously constructed novel gravitates towards the position of woman in the family and explores socially-ordered gender imbalance in domestic life featuring a traditional Indian family in a provincial town in India and a typical American family in suburban Massachusetts. Desai utilizes comparison and contract as an effective writing mechanism which is unique in her approach and successful in execution. Desai’s illustration of dichotomies within the two families range as obviously as the novel’s title.

*Fasting Feasting* examines the intricate web of family conflict and security on two continents. It is the moving story of Uma, the plain and awkward older daughter of an Indian family and of her younger brother, Arun, who is studying in a college in Massachusetts. Their parents are so much of one mind that they are thought of as a single identity MamaPapa. With always at college in Massachusetts and her younger sister married Uma, the eldest child of the family, is a little more than an unpaid servant to her tyrannical parents. Her search for identity and freedom leads her to a convent school, her aunt’s ashram, a sacred river and her collection of Christmas cards.

Desai uses food in this novel to comment on cultural identity. The novel tells the story of two middle class families. The over-bearing parents actually snatch the freedom of their children and make them entrapped. From this entrapment there is no means for them to realize their identity; hence survival becomes very difficult for them. Though they try to come out of the cultures of their parents, they end up in vain and they are not able to build an identity for themselves. They do not have an individual identity. It tells the moving story of Uma, the plain older daughter, in her forties of an Indian family, tied to the household of her childhood and tending to her parents’ every extravagant demand
and of her younger brother, Arun, in Massachusetts. She does not have any identity of her own. She is clumsy and plain and does not excel in her studies and becomes the victim of two annulled marriages. But her sister Aruna manages to achieve success as a woman through marriage to a man who is highly eligible, rich and good looking. Uma becomes marginalized in her family because she has fallen short of the standards which the traditional Indian family has set for its women.

Uma is a pathetic victim of identity crises. She is a passive victim of the tyrannical mamapapa for whom she has to serve at their beck and call. When her mother withdraws Uma from her studies she does not protest nor is she stubborn to go to school. But her sister, who is quite the opposite in terms of appearance and domesticity, gets multitudes of proposals and she quickly settles down. She is successful in having a child and living a higher urban life in a sophisticated flat bought by her husband in an upper class section of town. Uma fails simply because she not only lacks good appearance but also the ability to excel in domestic sphere.

Uma becomes completely caged and entrapped in the clutches of her parents. She is just a little more than a servant. When Uma is offered a job by Dr. Dutt, her mother swiftly turns down the offer. Thus she is totally prevented from any social movement. Having ruined the chances for Uma to be socially mobile by withdrawing her from her education, her over- bearing mother further destroys the possibility of employment offered by Dr. Dutt. Thus she fails to get chances to reveal her identity in society. Her survival becomes strained.

To further compound her sense of ostracism from her family and society Uma has psychical fits which embarrass her family and society. Her cousin Mira Masi considers this to be a mark of Lord on her. Her convulsion is a painful handicap which alienates
her further from her parents who deem the fits an embarrassment to the family. The fits aienates her from her parents, from school, from employability and from society. Uma is an invisible woman because she is sick, unattractive, clumsy and lacks education. On the whole, Uma is a tragic figure.

Anamika, Uma’s cousin, likewise fails in her destiny as a woman though she succeeds in getting married. She has a miscarriage and she cannot bear children. She is considered flawed as a woman by taking away her life. Anamika and Uma are both tragic figures. They become passive sufferers. They are not assertive to justify their identity.

In her own right, Anamika has been a resounding success. She had excelled so much in her studies that she won a scholarship to Oxford. But it was thought as unnecessary for a woman to leave for abroad to study and improve her circumstances. She was quickly pushed into a marriage as that was deemed to be a more appropriate course of action for her. After her marriage she was ill-treated, abused like a slave. She was denied freedom, ill-treated by her mother-in-law and generally denied human dignity until she considered suicide as the only escape. To women like Anamika marriage becomes a prison. Since she could not give birth to a child, she gradually withered away as a woman till her suicide.

Aruna’s victory over Uma comes as a natural consequence of her being able to meet society’s expectation of a woman far more than Uma. The stereotype of a woman is physically attractive, domestically savvy knowing how to dress up and appeal to man. All these apply to Aruna rather than Uma. Aruna takes efforts to improve Uma by teaching her how to apply makeup and the latest fashion in Bombay while Uma is indifferent to such things.
The novel is not merely typically feminist in its decry of the right of woman in India but also the institution of marriage a source of entrapment in India. The institution itself is laden with stereotypes and expectations – that woman must be fertile and a source of child-bearing which Anamika and Uma fail at and thus they feel that they are invalid. As a result Anamika kills herself and Uma goes close to death.

*The Diviners* is organized around the conventional plot of an individual’s search for identity. Morag’s identity is formed by the different role she assumes in the course of her life. Her gender identity within a particular family constellation is important. At the same time one has to consider her position within a social network such as that of the small town of Manawaka. An investigation of the wider context of national and cultural identity is also necessary for the discussion of Morag’s character. The cultural forces that shape Morag’s perceptions are of particular significance in *The Diviners*, as she is an artist who writes within a certain national tradition. Morag’s professional identity as an artist in the novel is a prime aspect of her selfhood.

In *The Stone Angel*, the narrative structure gives expression to the way an individual defines her surroundings whereas, in *The Diviners* the central character is presented as being defined by various external influences. Yet, Morag functions as a centripetal force in the sense of relation. Morag’s quest for identity implies the search for coherence or unity. The initial painful absence which the child experiences at the beginning of the story is transformed into a sense of having found “a place to stand on” as the motto of the novel suggests.

Morag’s quest for identity implies the search for coherence, unity and survival. Morag’s experience of dispossession when growing up as an orphan reflects the situation of the Canadian natives as well as that of the Scottish immigrants who were expelled
from their European home. Morag’s quest for identity and survival is determined, of course, by its retrospective striking out for the territory of the past. This search for ancestors, however, goes beyond the investigation of family roots and it includes the whole history of Western Canada.

With *The Diviners* Margaret Laurence has come a full circle in her writing. At the beginning of her career, she was concerned with the colonial experience of Africans who had been deprived of their rich native culture. While writing her last Canadian novel Laurence recognizes the parallelism between contemporary Africans and Canadian writers.

*The Diviners* is the fourth novel in the Manawaka series. Manawaka is a mythical prairie town based in the past on Margaret Laurence’s own home, Neepawa, Manitoba. It is concerned with a woman’s search for her identity. *The Diviners* is also an epic tale about the origins of Canada as a whole and the French, English and Scottish peoples who formed the nation.

Morag Gunn is the offspring of Scottish immigrants who left their land in the eighteenth century by the highland clearance. Morag is a middle-aged divorced mother and writer. Their situation causes them a great deal of anxiety partly because they feel lonely and unloved and partly because they blame themselves for what they deem to be their largely undesirable solitary status. Thus Morag wishes to understand herself and her life better in order that she might alleviate the chronic self-doubt and self-recrimination from which they suffer. So she indulges in self-reflective writing. This kind of writing gives her comfort and gives reassurance in times of personal crises. As Catherine Belsey explains, “Subjectivity, then is linguistically and discursively constructed and displaced across the range of discourses in which the concrete individual participates (61). What
Morag becomes aware of in their search for a stable self-identity is the profound contradictions at the heart of their being.

By becoming a woman writer, Morag in *The Diviners* has unwittingly transgressed the boundaries of the female subject position offered to her by society. The traditional values and beliefs of her culture continue to influence Morag. Moreover, she is influenced by the ebb of the old ideology and the flow of the new. Morag’s expectations for her life have been conditioned by fairytale models of female development. Morag describes Brooke in the early stages of their relationship as a “prince among men” (*The Diviners* 206). When Brooke proposes marriage to Morag, she agrees to his request and gives up university studies. Morag’s action is typical of a heroine. After marriage Morag realizes that marriage is not a fairy tale. Morag discovers that the traditional role of a wife does not satisfy her. Initially Morag believes that if only Brooke would let her have a child she would be content. Later, she begins to see that the source of her discontentment is something quite different.

She wants to become equal to men so she aspires to be an author. In aspiring to become an author, Morag is participating in the non-traditional ideology of liberal humanism which claims to afford women the same rights and opportunities as those of men. While trying to become an author Morag displays certain traditionally feminine attributes which she considers to be in her best interest. Thus rather than totally rejecting her former roles Morag believes it possible to occupy a unified subject position in order to encompass the various roles of a writer, wife and mother. She is unaware that this new unified role is constituted from two distinct notions of femininity which are inherently incompatible and contradictory.
Morag’s attempt to unite the traditional and the liberal humanist feminine subject positions is suggested by the fact that she limits her career choice to one which she can do while still fulfilling her primary roles of a wife and a mother. Morag is not qualified for a profession. As a result, any occupation she might obtain would probably augment rather than diminish her need for personal fulfillment. Writing, however, does not require specialized training and Morag wanted to be a writer before her marriage took place. When she lives with her husband, Morag writes at the kitchen table signifying the attempt to yoke together the heterogeneous roles of a writer and a homemaker into a unified subject position. She never suspected that conflict would arise in her life and in herself as a result of this attempt.

During her marriage, Morag began writing during the day, while Brooke was at work. On a few occasions, she became so absorbed by her writing that she lost track of time. On one of these occasions Brooke complains “Don’t you think I’ve held back, many times, coming home and finding you sitting there at the typewriter as though hypnotized and no dinner in sight?” (278). Years after leaving her husband, Morag forms a new relationship with a man named Dan McRaith and Morag ambivalently feels that her writing is secondary to the needs of others while at the same time resenting the sacrifices she voluntarily makes.

The incompatibility of the two roles, that of a writer and a home maker and the subject position they reflect is further suggested by Morag in her relationship with her husband Brooke who appears to uphold the liberal humanist ideology of gender equality. When Morag learns that her novel has been accepted for publication, she begins to regard herself as equal to Brooke. Brooke reacts to Morag’s new found confidence and success with hostility and contempt. Morag is frightened and amazed at times by her own
strength. As a result, she embraces the new liberal humanist ideology more completely and leaves her husband for self-identity and fulfilment.

The artist Dan McRait with whom she builds a relationship after many years she had left her husband gives equal freedom to her because she is his mistress not his wife. Despite McRait’s declaration which suggests his desire for an egalitarian relationship with Mr. McRait, it is as unequal as was her relationship with her ex-husband. She realizes that she is the victim of patriarchal ideology by being his mistress. Morag realizes that this amalgamation of traditional and liberal humanist notions of feminity is a contradictory experience. It has taught her that a unified subjectivity is not a possibility if she attempts to live according to the liberal humanist ideology. Once the ideological fog which has enshrouded her subjectivities has been removed, Morag begins to see that whether she was participating in the traditional or the liberal humanist ideology her actual position was politically the same. Thus, Morag succeeds as a writer which gives her identity and emotional and physical survival.

In *The Stone Angel* the quest for identity can be seen to progress almost systematically from the problems of the persona and the unadopted shadow. Hagar Shipley is the protagonist of the novel. She narrates the story of her life and in doing so she tries to come to terms with how the qualities that had helped her have also stripped her of her joy all throughout her life. She then hopes to get a deeper understanding of herself. *The Stone Angel* is a classic study of old age in which a 90- year old Scots Presbyterian woman attempts to come to terms with both her past and her present. Margaret Laurence’s woman characters derive their universal and enduring power in their quest for identity. The quest for identity can be seen to progress from the problems of persona in *The Stone Angel*. 
Margaret Laurence’s *The Stone Angel* is one of the most acclaimed Canadian novels of all times. It was a landmark event for Canadian Literature and the keystone of Laurence’s career. It sets the town, Manawaka, firmly in Canadians’ imaginative landscape and points the way for the works to follow. Unreconciled to old age and approaching death, relentlessly critical, unable to reach out to others, Hagar Shipley is the ninety-year-old narrator of the novel. Irascible, uncharitable, and impatient with the faults of others, she fears that she is about to lose her independence by being placed in a nursing home by her son Marvin and his wife, Doris. Although tough-minded, she is physically frail, often in pain, forgetful and confused. She speaks impulsively and sometimes regrets her harsh words even as she speaks them. She often surprises herself by crying without warning. She praises the ability to speak correctly, criticizing and correcting those who do not. As a tall, black haired, beautiful young woman she had pride and willfulness. She married well below her status the coarse Bram Shipley in defiance of her father’s wishes. After twenty-four years of marriage during which she gave birth to two sons, Marvin and John, she once again asserts her independence by leaving her husband and taking a job in another town as a housekeeper. Although she dotes on her younger son, John, Hagar’s negative attitude towards others eventually alienates her and she returns to live with his father. Even as a ninety-year-old woman, Hagar retains her independence of spirit, fleeing from her home and taking refuge in an abandoned building near the sea. But at the end of the novel she realizes that it is her pride that has stopped her from achieving happiness or peace of mind. Thus *The Stone Angel* tells the story of Hagar’s last journey towards recognition of love and freedom and reveals that through her journey she will eventually give up the excessive pride that she had demonstrated throughout the novel. Hagar’s pride repeatedly imprisoned her within the confines of thwarted affections and misdirected emotions. Her pride serves her best
on her dying days when she will not submit to frailty and deferential concern. She rages against the dying of the light with the same wrong-headed spleen that she always displayed. In the counter point present her pride is heroic. The pride she felt in her youth is present when she’s grown up.

The novel is an unforgettable tale about a proud and courageous woman, Hagar, who is determined to bear the world independently. Hager does not want anyone to feel pity for her, or worry about her journey. Hagar accomplishes her goal, even though she has to shatter her illusion in the process and accept the harsh facts about life and reality. In the final scene, the reader obtains the message that Hagar has reached her independence when she holds the glass of water. As a result, she can leave the world peacefully knowing that in the end she succeeded in freeing herself of any help. Hagar bravely survived her last moments with her reward of satisfaction. Hagar Shipley can be considered a tragic hero because through her struggles she manages to retain her spirit and free will which she exhibits throughout the novel. The readers can relate to Hagar’s struggle through her journey, sympathizing with her feelings, her pain and keeping a part of her with them. In Hagar, Laurence has created the most unforgettable female character in all Canadian fiction. Laurence’s triumph is in her evocation of Hagar at ninety. One sympathizes with her in her resistance to being moved to a nursing home, in her preposterous flight and in her impatience in the hospital. Battered, depleted, suffering, she rages with her last breath against the dying of the light.

*The Fire-Dwellers* is important for its analysis of issues relating to gender, national and regional identities. Stacey is defined by the roles of a wife and a mother. Further, she is a Canadian of Scots descent, born in Manitoba and living in Vancouver and her identity is significantly shaped by aspects of her European heritage, by her location in Western Canada, and by her consciousness of herself as a woman from the
prairies now living in the city. *The Fire-Dwellers* is written in a mixture of discourses which interweave a third person narrative focalised through Stacey, her interior monologue, her memory, and her fantasies, with dialogues representing her interaction with family and neighbours, and a barrage of messages from popular media which are received by her consciousness.

Her life as a thirty-nine-year-old mother of four children with marital difficulties is the focus of an acute analysis of problems connected to identity and survival. “Stacey suffers greatly from the psychological, if not physical, isolation which is one of the conditions of motherhood in the second half of the twentieth century. She is conscious that she lives alone in a house full of people” (*The Fire – Dwellers* 48). This has damaging consequences for her sense of herself. This psychological state is treated in terms of her perceptions of place and space, creating in the fiction an extended exploration of confinement and liberty. The whole text is made up of a concentration of talk coming from different sources, combined with Stacey’s inner monologue, and a relatively small component of external narration. The management of the interaction between voices draws attention to the limited amount of true communication available to Stacey.

Stacey’s husband’s work as a travelling salesman makes him spend much of his time separated from her and when he is at home he avoids speaking to her. This lack of communication between marriage partners is displayed in acute form in their inability to discuss, until they reach a partial resolution at the end of the novel. He is very much anxious to know “the reason why Stacey has secretly kept her father’s old revolver, and Mac’s misplaced anxiety, having seen the concealed weapon, that she may be contemplating suicide” (167). Her interior monologue reveals a sense of herself which is affected by the absence of any support or rewarding relationship with other adults. Her
talk with neighbours is superficial. Her closest contact is with Tess Vogler whose conversation, preoccupied to the point of absurdity with cosmetics and shopping, appears comic until an overdose reveals her hidden despair.

Stacey's discussions with her father-in-law are polite and formal. These dialogues contrast with the painful vividness of Stacey's thoughts, emphasizing her lack of effective human contact. She speaks in a direct, challenging way to the God about whose existence she is doubtful. The fact that her presentation of difficulties and problems is concentrated in this direction indicates the absence from her life of real engagement with other people. In her conversation with her two sons, she comments explicitly on her inability to reach Ian and on her feeling of distance from the younger son, Duncan. A substantial amount of Stacey's 'conversation' is directed at her small daughter, Jennifer, who at the age of two, does not yet speak. The absence of any reply to these remarks further emphasises Stacey's isolation. This produces for her a crisis of identity, announced pointedly in one of her fantasy conversations in which God says, "Sometimes I wonder if I even exist" and she retorts, "I know what you mean, Lord, I have the same trouble with myself" (7). Her thoughts return to the problem of who she is, and this is linked with her roles in the family: "I can't go anywhere as myself. Only as Mac's wife or the kids' mother" (81). She experiences simultaneously a desire to have time for herself, and a contradictory feeling that she prefers to be accompanied by one of her children, because "then I know who I'm supposed to be" (81).

The treatment of the mother-daughter relationship of Stacey and Katie points to general difficulties inherent in this relationship, which present threats to a mother's sense of her own identity. The daughter's adolescence is inevitably accompanied by the mother's ageing, and as Stacey recognises painfully the approach of her fortieth birthday it is in full awareness that she is relinquishing to Katie the role of a young woman which
has in the past been a source of great pleasure to her. Parallel situations prompt Stacey to make comparisons unfavourable to her. When she dances privately and self-indulgently in a moment of celebration, her sense of slight ridiculousness is intensified when later the same day she observes “Katie, young and graceful, similarly dancing by herself” (114). Stacey's comparisons also lead her to recognise that Katie, as she matures, is sometimes capable of greater wisdom than her mother and age does not necessarily bring the benefit of good judgment. The activity of Stacey's memory creates parallels between the two mother-daughter couples, Stacey and Katie, and Mrs. Cameron and Stacey. She is a mother who has herself been in some ways poorly mothered, and this has made her task harder. Her youthful resolution to be a more enlightened mother than Mrs. Cameron is countered by Katie's remark that “what she has seen of family life makes her want to avoid maternity altogether” (102).

Stacey comes to see ways in which her maternal role carries unhappy echoes of her own mother's treatment of herself as an adolescent. As she interrogates Katie about “whether she has smoked pot, and recalls her mother's similar enquiries about Stacey's use of alcohol, she recognizes a situation repeating itself, although with the difference that her mother had appeared confident that she was right, whereas Stacey does not know what she should tell her daughter” (258). So Stacey's aspirations are reviewed in the light of what may be an inevitable pattern of conflict and friction between the generations. There is an implication that mothering may be impossible to do well, and since for Stacey it is her central activity, her perception of what she sees as failure is a threat to her sense of herself. Further, Stacey has to recognize that her first child is now a grown up woman, as separate from Stacey as Stacey herself is from Mrs. Cameron. The text demonstrates through Stacey's experience and reflections, the painful paradoxical truth that the activity of a mother is largely a matter of working towards making herself in the
end unnecessary. She has done her best to bring up her children but she is aware that they are not her possessions because “they belong to themselves” (81). Mothering is an achievement but it leads to a particularly feminine loss since she has sacrificed her freedom to carry out her obligations at home with her family. The messages delivered to Stacey's consciousness by media of information, entertainment, and advertising reveal how her location in a North American city of the 1960s exerts cultural pressures which increase the difficulty of the maternal role. She has a natural anxiety to preserve her children from harm such as road accidents but the ‘EVER OPEN EYE’ of television, bringing into her home awareness of the horrors of the war in Vietnam, exacerbates her worries about the possibility of war and nuclear attack, and thus increases her terror for her children's safety. Magazine journalism directed towards women has demoralising effects which exacerbate Stacey's difficulties. Her mind returns repeatedly, in the earlier part of the novel, to titles of articles she has read. These titles convey a relentless message to wives and mothers about the need for self-improvement, combined with a further message that they can never achieve complete success. Even a woman's caring for her family is turned into a potential source of harm, through the effect on her vulnerable consciousness of headlines like “Nine Ways The Modern Mum May Be Ruining Her Daughter” (10-11), and “Are You Emasculating your Husband?” (48). This is destructive to Stacey's sense of herself, creating a constant awareness of the likelihood that she is doing things wrong, and suggesting that she is always falling short in the activity which is central to her existence.

The novel examines the situation of the housewife and the mother through a pattern of spatial polarities, emphasising confinement in the home and escape from it. There are basic requirements that accompany the role of mother: having to be available to her children, or arrange for an adequate substitute and being always responsible for
their welfare and safety, and Stacey has to fulfill these requirements without relief or support. The effect on Stacey is seen at first in a wish to be 'more free' (2) and in her reflection as she drives with her child to the supermarket, 'My boundaries are four walls' (62). Her longing for freedom is expressed initially by her indulgence in a walk by the Waterfront, a part of the city she hardly knows. Later when she leaves her marital home in anger after a quarrel with her husband, and drives up the Sound, the intensity of her emotional conflict about 'home' is expressed as she urges herself to go home, and simultaneously recognises that "I don't want to go home. I want to go away" (149). Having met the young man, Luke Venturi, who finds her sitting alone by the beach, she leaves home twice more to drive north out of desire for him, and each of her three visits to Luke's house is brought to an end by Stacey's use of exactly the same words: 'I have to go home' (155, 175, 195).

The theme of confinement is reflected in the clearly defined structure of the text. Most of the novel is built on a five times repeated pattern of Stacey escaping briefly from home to gratify a wish of her own, having taken trouble to arrange care for her family, and on each occasion returning late, usually tormented by guilt and anxiety about her children, and always having to face the reproach of her husband or her elder daughter. The conflict between her wish for freedom and her worry about her family and the significance of home as a focus of obligation and anxiety are summed up by the presence in Stacey's mind at the beginning, near the end, and at the critical point in the middle of the narrative where she refuses Luke's invitation, of the rhyme: "Ladybird, ladybird, Fly away home; Your house is on fire, Your children are gone" (1, 195, 263).

Stacey's dealings with Luke Venturi may on the face of it appear insignificant. After three conversations, two of them leading to brief sexual encounters, she returns to her family. She does not meet him again, and when she sees him on a peace march,
accompanied by a young woman, she leaves the march to avoid contact with them. But the visits to his timber house in a setting of trees and water are crucial events in Stacey's psychological life. For her, Luke acts as a therapist. He invites her to express her problems and listens; he reassures her that the fact that she took off is all right. He allows her to cry and assures her that she is not alone and above all he makes her the focus of attention, thus addressing the problem that her preoccupation with her family has submerged her own identity: “Come out. From wherever you're hiding yourself. See – if I look very hard, I can just about make you out in there, but miniature, like looking through the wrong end of a telescope” (155). Later, as well as regretting the loss of him as her lover, Stacey recollects, perhaps constructively, the details of this therapeutic process. Luke does further important things for Stacey. By inviting her to come away with him, he forces her to make a choice - to go back to her children - and thus to recognise where her priorities lie. Her brief sexual relationship with him is important because it is a focus for her realisation that they have both lied about their ages. As she works out that a twenty-four-year-old lover would be more appropriate for Katie than for herself, she has to face the reality and the implications of her own lost youth.

Stacey remembers various stages of her past, but predominantly times in her young adult life when she was confident and happy, in contrast to her present discontent. Her final reconciliation to the reality that now it is Katie, not Stacey, who is the young woman, is worked out through a new version of the dancing image, this time as a fantasy dance performed by Stacey in a Greek tavern. As she brings herself back from imagination to actuality, the thought that from now on her dancing will have to be ‘in the head’, is fused with new insights into both the notion of her confinement in the home and her sense of her problematic identity: “I was wrong to think of the trap as the four walls. It's the world. The truth is that I haven't been Stacey Cameron for one hell of a long time
now. Although in some ways I'll always be her, because that's how I started out” (259). In part, the north is for her a place of escape. At times of anxiety about nuclear war, she has imagined that 'she and her family could take refuge in a self-sufficient existence in the great north woods' (51), and she still fantasises about living by a lake “in the Cariboo, working as a teacher among farmers and Indians (148-9). North is also for her associated with sexual longing, in her passing fantasy about Mac's friend, Buckle Fennick, whose work is driving north to the Alaska Highway, the Cariboo Highway, and the Peace River country. Her meeting with Valentine rises for Stacey issues about her own ethnic identity, and the idea of belonging on the prairies, and makes her reflect on a negative aspect of her own Scottish inheritance. She contemplates the Métis in territorial terms: “once the prairie horse-lords, but now belonging nowhere, and recognises that what her Presbyterian forefathers have bequeathed to her above all is a legacy of guilt for damage done by them to native peoples” (226). Thor and Stacey and Valentine Tonnerre have all come to Vancouver from a home in the prairies, but in very different ways. Thor acts on the assumption that Manitoba is inferior: “he speaks patronisingly about salesmen from the prairies, and claims to be practically a native of Vancouver” (32). Stacey, on the other hand, experiences Vancouver as strange and in parts frightening. Using the key concept of 'home' in a positive sense, she is aware that after twenty years she does not feel 'at home' in the city, and she still occasionally refers to Manawaka as her home (32, 166). “She is conscious of how much of it she does not know. People are defined for her by where they live, and she in suburban Bluejay Crescent is conscious of her difference from those who live in rooms above stores by the waterfront” (4-5), and “those others who inhabit high old houses by the beach”(63). The city has not one culture, but many. Hybridity becomes a theme, pursued further through the textual handling of Canadians relationships to European cultures. The romance is quickly undermined by its context in
Stacey's mundane existence. Her racial antecedents are usually no more than an excuse for drinking Scotch. She cannot belong properly either to European culture or to the Canadian wilderness, and while she cannot escape from her obligation to her home, in the sense of responsibility to her family, there is another sense in which the idea of home is seen as deeply complex and provisional. This is summed up in the way she dismisses her fantasy of herself and Mac taking refuge in the north from a nuclear war, living self-sufficiently and teaching the children all they remember of Shakespeare: “Only one or two snags. Neither Mac nor I could have mustered more than about two lines of Shakespeare, and neither of us would last more than twenty-four hours in the great north woods” (51).

In *The Fire-Dwellers* Laurence creates a far-reaching study of the pressure on her sense of self experienced by a woman in the maternal role, who also has some consciousness of problematic aspects of Canadian identity. Liminality in spatial terms provides for exploration of a time of crisis in Stacey's life, partially resolved through a combination of changes in her inner life effected with Luke's assistance, and by the reassessment of Mac's and Stacey's lives provoked by the death of Buckle Fennick, and by the accident to their son Ian. Time as well as space focuses attention on crossing of borders. While much of the interest of *The Fire-Dwellers* lies in Laurence's ability to open up large issues about Canadian identities which must be left unresolved because there are no simple conclusions, the novel's predominant area of interest, the stages of the life of a woman, does reach a resolution of sorts. The treatment of the identities available to women records Stacey's achievement of substantial insights, in particular her recognition that it is the world, not the house, which is her prison, and her grasping of the truth that she cannot be eighteen again. The text presents Stacey and both of her daughters in phases of significant transition. Her perception of herself caught between
the younger self of her memories and the matriarch she may one day become is balanced with her awareness of Katie's adolescence, and the narrative moves towards a strongly symmetrical closure as her entry into middle age coincides with one daughter's passage into young womanhood. Stacey's eventual choice, to accept home and the restrictions it imposes, is linked inextricably with her submission to the inevitable passing of time.

Both Anita Desai and Margaret Laurance are not only similar in their centredness on women and in their women characters’ quest for identity and survival, but their treatment of nature is also significant in their novels. As nature plays a crucial role in the evolution of the stories and has great impact on the characters, nature becomes predominant in their novels. Thus Geocentricism forms the title of the next chapter.

MamaPapa