CHAPTER II

ALIENATED WOMEN
The plight of modern man has been discussed by Melvin Seeman under a set of five interrelated operational conditions, i.e. powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement, which are nothing but different manifestations of alienation. These alternative meanings of alienation, says he, "can be profitably applied in conjunction with one another in the analysis of a given state of affairs".1 The most obvious symptom of alienation can be seen in a person's shattered consciousness and his "fractionated functions".2 There can be different kinds of alienation. Taviss mentions two kinds of them, i.e. "social-alienation" and "self-alienation".3 Social alienation results from the sense of estrangement brought out by the sudden discovery that the social system is either oppressive or incompatible with their desires and ideals. Self-alienation, on the contrary, means the loss of contact of the individual selves with any inclinations or desires that are not in agreement with the prevailing social patterns, as a result of which the individuals are forced to manipulate in accordance with the social demands, or feel incapable of controlling their actions. To be self-alienated thus means to be something less than one might ideally be if circumstances in society were conducive. Self-alienation seems to have worse...

effects on an individual than social alienation. The former is the more basic form of rootlessness, and can thwart an individual's mental and psychic development in an alarming manner.

It is this human problem that has occupied Anita Desai's primary interest. In her novels, she has presented the dilemma of the modern man effectively. Desai would not be satisfied merely with an uncritical, dull or common documentation of social reality. Her real concern is exploration of human psyche. It is the "private vision" that she tries to capture in her novels. Her writings reveal inner realities and psychic reverberations of her characters.

Each of Anita Desai's novels tries to tackle the central aesthetic problem of the modern writer—the problem of rendering "complete human personality... in an age of lost values, lost men, and lost gods".4 The twentieth century has been rightly called "The Age of Alienation".5 The modern man is doomed to suffer the corrosive impact of alienation, which manifests itself variously in the form of generation gap, the loss or gap in credibility, compartmentalization of life, stunting of personal development and conspicuous absence of a sense

meaningfulness in life, and so on. As Edmund Fuller remarks, in our age "man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but from inner problem... a conviction of isolation, randomness, [and] meaninglessness in his way of existence". In her novels Anita Desai has chartered this very crisis tormenting a sensitive soul.

The pervasive sense of alienation has corroded human life from various quarters. The modern man has shrunk in spirit, languishing in confusion, frustration, disintegration, disillusionment and alienation. His concept of reality itself has profoundly changed may be on account of Bergson's theory of durée, Freud's postulates about the subconscious, Einstein's concept of relativity, and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. Consequently, the modern man suffers from an acute sense of rootlessness, which may manifest itself as "the alienation from oneself, from one's fellow men and from nature, the awareness that life runs out of one's hand like sand...". The injuries inflicted and the scars left on his psyche make him realise only his helplessness. Angst-ridden and utterly hopeless, he finds life 'infinitely vast' without any proper 'linkage' to hold it together from falling apart. Painfully aware of his

6 Edmund Fuller, *Man in Modern Fiction* (New York, 58), p.3.
precarious position, man experiences today severe limitations arising out of alienation.

II

Anita Desai's first novel, *Cry, The Peacock* (1963), is one of the most poetic and expressive Indian novels in English. It expresses the wail of an injured psyche, the afflicted story of blunted human relationship being told by the chief protagonist herself. The novel is the story of a young woman who is obsessed by a childhood prophecy of death of some one very dear to her. She is extremely sensitive and, as a result, is a victim of immeasurable loneliness. The very beginning of the novel highlights the alienation between the husband and the wife by unfolding the relationship of Maya and Gautama. (By no stretch of imagination can one regard Maya, i.e. illusion, and Gautama i.e. the enlightened one, as compatible partners. Their very names are indicative of this incompatibility). The pampered daughters of a wealthy artistic father, Maya has an introvert nature. Unfortunately, she is married to an older man, more to her father's taste, who is detached and care-free and is a serious lawyer. In their temperaments and attitude to life, the two are completely opposite to each other.

An average evening for Maya is not more than a "quiet, formal waiting". Gautama is too busy in his

profession to give her any time. He keeps on telling her to go to sleep while he works at his papers, and does not give another thought to her (p.9). Gautama never notices the sadness in her heart and only pays attention to her worldly necessities. She complains: "And now, seeing me bcreaved seeing tears on my face and my pet gone, he says,"You need a cup of tea," which only show little he knows of her misery (p.9). He even talks of philosophy but fails to notice her loneliness:

... it is his hardness-no, no, not hardness, but the distance he coldly keeps from me. His coldness, ... incessant talk of cups, of tea and philosophy in order not to hear my talk and, talking, reveal myself. It is that—my lonelines in this house ....I was alone. Yes, I whimpered, it is that I am alone, and then gave myself up to a fit of furious pillow-beating, kicking, everything but crying (p.9).

Their married life is without sharing. Even when Gautama and Maya are together, a feeling of alienation always surrounds Maya. She tries to forget her loneliness by letting her "warm tender sensations" bathe her in "their lambency". She tries to "soothe" herself by trying to calm her "disturbed" murmur of her "hesitation" (p. 18).

Losing her pet, who was her only companion, is an unbearable situation for Maya. Expressing her feelings to her husband is in vain. Her feelings are clearly expressed through these sentences:
I shall miss him so-terribly, Gautama, I cried then, the confession tearing out of me in a stormy rush, and even as I wiped away my quick tears, and wept more, I cried to myself—what is the use? I am alone (p.22).

When Gautama keeps on working on his papers till late nights, Maya feels that he does not have enough time to share her feelings. Their lack of communication is a cause of great sorrow in her life. She does not have any hope, and she says:

I turned to the light in his study, a small bright oblong in the silent house. It would be long before he shut his books and came to me. Dared I go in? Beg for comfort? Confess to my loneliness and my terror of loneliness? Useless. Hopeless (p.27).

We find strong evidence to the development of Maya's character in her reminiscences. Hers has been a life which had little touch with reality. She remembers with intense longing the breakfast sessions in the garden "as good as a revel of fairies and elves" (p.43). She was told by her father all the unreal, fictitious tales such as glories and "bravado of Inaian mythology, long and astounding tales of princes and regal queens, of jackals and tigers"(p.43). She herself confesses to have been a child reared away from realities of life, living in a toy world like a toy princes. Looking back on her earlier lift convinces her that it was not a normal life, for in it, realities were left out, which grew steadily
more and more restricted and even unnatural. Even Maya's trusted friends are now careless towards her. She complains that there is not a single friend whose shoulders could be her soothing solace.

Now for Maya the parties are no place of enjoyment. She wants to point out to Gautama how useless the topics of the party are but she knows that it is useless to try to see things by her viewpoint. The injured Maya ruminates:

It is because they are so engrossed in-in all that's gross and useless, that they don't see what really matters. All the truth in living just passes them by, and I am so sorry for anyone—yes, even you, unsuspecting husband who misses it. It is like spending seventy years of one's life in a graveyard—being born in one, and dying in one. It is a waste—a waste. And one life-time is so short, it's over before you know it! (p.91).

Still Gautama misses the whole point. When he asks her what she thinks is the truth of living, his manner is sarcastic. Even though he smiles while talking to her, she feels that there is no communication between them and the separating limbo is always present.

While Gautama's party is going on, Maya passes her lonely hours in her garden, thinking how she has failed to convince Gautama of the perfection of her world. She compares herself with a flower that is bruised and tired, not quite alive or of today. As the party goes on, Gautama's voice comes to Maya in a very impersonal way. Her alienation leads her to an utter desolation:
Already we belonged to separated worlds, and his seemed the earth that I loved so, scented with jasmine, coloured with liquor, resounding with poetry and warmed by amiability. It was mine that was hell. Torture, guilt, dread, imprisonment these were the four walls of my private hell, one that no one could survive in long (p.102).

After experiencing isolation for a long time, Maya begins to feel crushed by the loneliness of soul. She feels so cut off from Gautama's world that "The things we leave unsaid would fill great volumes; what we do say, only the first few pages of introduction" (p.105). Unable to tell Gautama of the incident of the fortune-teller, Maya suffers its fear herself. Sitting in front of the mirror, she tries unsuccessfully to find her own real self. After spending four years completely in loneliness and on account of Gautama's inability to share her feelings, she feels as if she is going mad:

Yes I am going insane. I am moving further and further from all wisdom, all calm, and I shall soon be mad if I am not that already. Perhaps it is my madness that leads me to imagine that horoscope, that encounter with the albino, his predictions my fate? Perhaps it is only a phenomenon of insanity? (p.108).

Whenever Maya wants to talk to Gautama about the attachment of life, he refers to the philosophy of the Gita, telling her "what it says of attachment, all sins arising from it, and the payment for those sins"(p.112). He concludes his
conversation saying that one who is too engrossed in attachment, perishes. Maya feels bitter towards this reaction of Gautama's. She, however, still lives for Gautama. She wants to know if this fact touches him, but she is pained to know the truth. She explains to herself: "Nothing was hidden. All was revealed, and it was not what I hunted for. He was not on my side at all, but across a river, across a mountain, and would always remain so" (p.114).

Maya is so used to being lonely all day that when on their visit, Gautama's mother and sister ask her to go out with them, she refuses. They do not understand how she can be happy in the house all by herself. But Maya tells them that she has her cat to keep her company. They know that she needs human company, but do not realise that it is already too late. When Gautama's mother and sister plan their departure, she begs them to stay as she cannot bear the thought of loneliness any more:

'No', I said, 'no' - and pushed the hair nervously from my face. 'I can't - can't enter that silent, darkened room where I should have to be alone, gazing at the shadowed ceiling, the revolving fan, with no one for company, not even a stray ray of light, for they insisted on keeping that one cavernous room dark and cool for me to rest in. Can't go out to bed in the garden, to be watched over by the moon, the ghost-white moon that sees all, forgets nothing. Can't, can't (p.163).
Maya feels that she has to get intensely involved in family relationship to avoid loneliness. She has a strong feeling that if she could "tie them all into one burning knot of contact and relationship" with her, nothing would be able to separate her from Gautama. She cannot even bear to hear the sound of passing trains because it makes her feel that they all "leave" her "behind alone" (p.164). But her loneliness is a never-ending one. She says: "...what I remember is all I did in those intervals between the intimacies established between my quests and myself, and all I did once I was alone again" (p.164).

When Maya contemplates about the past, her feelings for Gautama become sarcastic:

But do not presume, no one must presume, that our marriage was an empty one, a failure. Nor that Gautama was not more than a figure of granite to me, .... For he was more, so much more... But it it was Gautama who found many more things to teach that heart, new, strange and painful things. He taught it pain, for there were countless nights when I had been tortured by humiliating sense of neglect, of loneliness, of desperation that would not have existed had I not loved him so, had he not meant so much... so that at times I felt it to be a load, and stormed, 'Why should I love him? I wish I do not!' (p.201).

Then comes a time when the feeling of loneliness becomes painless and rather blunted for Maya. She is sad to notice Gautama's tiredness writ large on his face. She says: "I
longed to question him about it, to touch his temples and soothe the pain with caresses and words. But, of course, didn't do so, could not dream of doing so. And yet the alienation, the strain of remaining aloof didn't hurt" her (p.194). That the plight of Maya is the lot of almost all sensitive women characters populating Anita Desai's world, would be clear from a brief discussion of the other novels.

III
Anita Desai's second novel, *Voices in the City* (1965), contains a significant quantity of social criticism in it. It is nevertheless predominantly a story of two world-weary young women and their brother who are doomed to live in Calcutta, the 'city of death'. It explores the inner climate of youthful despair, highlighting the traditional status of women in Indian society and the dominance of the male in it.

Monisha's condition is not much different from that of Maya. She is also one of the typical Indian women always 'waiting' for their husbands. Being alienated from the outside world for a long time, she has become alienated from herself, from her own inner being. Monisha is unable to cope with the people at her husband's home and finds refuge in pouring out her agonies in a diary. Later on a time comes when she can no longer bear humiliations and commits suicide.

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10 Anita Desai, *Voices in the City* (Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1965). Subsequent textual references are given parenthetically.
Anita Desai has delineated Monisha's psychic life at length. The emptiness with which she is surrounded, is eating away her entire self. Her relationship with her husband is characterized "only by loneliness" and lack of proper understanding. She finds her life a virtual imprisonment. Even though she lives in Calcutta, where a crowd is permanently present, she feels alienated from the living world. "No. Only this lack of solitude, this lack of conscience, that is all I mean" (p.118), she herself pinpoints her real problem.

Monisha is so alienated from the outside world that even when she receives company or indulgence in communication, it is short-lived. Anita Desai has tried to bring out the inner feelings of Monisha, and as the reader goes through the novel, it becomes clear that Monisha tries to find happiness in the fleeting moments that she gets, from which she can draw some strength. As she gets a little time to spend with her brother, Nirode, and share her thoughts with him, her crisis seems to be minimised. As she herself confides: "I have never felt so at one with this rough, unaffectionate, undemanding brother. We are completely in accord at last for a moment, a second, before I feel the familiar pain of tearing apart into separateness again" (p.130).

Anita Desai, however, is not so much interested in projecting happy moments of Monisha's life as in giving
expression to her personal grief. When Monisha is accused of theft, she goes to the terrace to spend some time alone. She does not like the noise of Calcutta; she only wants darkness and silence. The novel expresses the feeling of a person who is totally dejected and desires the darkness and silence not only because she wants to be alone but also because this darkness and silence have become a part of her inner being. As she herself says,

Ah splendour-splendour of stars and solitude! ... Splendour of city outspread below me, like a mantle that invites me to step on it. But, queenly, I refuse this singular privilege ... I come here for silence, my few moments of night silence.... Leave me to gather the stars, frosty and distant and cool. Leave me to gather—and then to reject them. Queenly. I'll have only the darkness (p.138).

The basic desire of human beings is to be loved, to be wanted and to feel worthwhile. Monisha also would like her presence to be felt by others. She is, however, always made conscious of her worthlessness and insignificance. It is the feeling of worthlessness inside her that makes her admit:

I am turned into a woman who keeps a diary. I do not like a woman who keeps a diary. Traceless meaningless, uninvolved - does this not amount to non-existence, please? (p.140).
Monisha's thoughts clearly indicate that she is alienated from herself, from her inner self. She is so introvert and alienated that people around her do not seem to actually know her well. Nikhil is a young boy who has his own views about women. Probably what he has seen in the life of Mohisha has convinced him that women keep themselves aloof from the outside world. When Amla asks him about Monisha, he tells her:

I don't know,... how can I know? Women are always locking themselves into their rooms. I do not know if she is ill when she herself in her room, or not. How can I know?(p.161).

When Amla invites Monisha for tea, where she wants to discuss some matters with her, the latter's uncertainty and alienation do not allow her to come alone and talk to her sister. To Amla, Monisha appears to be "the lost princess of the fairy tale who sat somewhere in the deepest shadows of this forest, silent and unattainable" (p.194). How lost and lonesome Monisha is visibly clear from her behaviour in the crowd of the members of her family, relatives and neighbours, who are busy with mundane chores like listening to songs. While standing in their midst, Monisha feels that she is different from others and stands alone, far away from the crowd:

Why am I so sad? Why am I so afraid?... I feel bereft because I have forgotten, I have lost touch.... I could not bear to touch, however vicariously, this appalling exhibition of a
passion that ravages the soul and body and being .... I have never been touched by it, nor ravaged. I bear no scar on by body. I am different from them all. They put me away in a steel container, a thick glass cubicle, and I have lived in it all my life, without a touch of love or hate or warmth on me. I am locked apart from all of them, they cannot touch me, they can only lip read and misinterpret. Similarly, I cannot really hear them, I cannot understand what they say. I have never touched anyone, never left the imprint of my fingers on anyone's shoulders... (pp.239-40).

On a systematic analysis, Monisha finds that her life has been a total waste. She is convinced that nothing in the world is going to make any difference to her. She says:

What a waste, what a waste it has been, this life enclosed in a locked container, merely as an observer and so imperfect, so handicapped an observer at that...(p.240).

Not only Mohisha but also her mother is alienated. Her mother, too seems to have gone through the agony of being avoided by others, which results in alienation, tearing her apart and forcing her to act and react in an unpredictable way. In sheer desperation she eventually lands herself into the arms of a retired military officer. When she writes a letter to Amla, the tone of the letter shows her uneasiness because she has been away from her children. The loneliness was eating her up, for which she blames herself: "But it
seems my instincts have all been wrong, my paradise is a fool's abode, and I have lost touch with my closest ones..." (p. 202). When Nirode comes to the airport to receive her, on her coming back after receiving the news of Monisha's death, her attitude towards her son is strange. Alienation and separateness have made her a different woman. Nirode finds her to be feelingless. While he embraces her, he feels being pushed by his mother slightly as if she does not want him any more:

... for now there was this silent austerity her that had... impressed the hollows beneath her eyes with the purple imprints of sleepless nights, and made her keep her hands quietly to herself in a manner which stated, quite emphatically, that she would never stretch them out again towards anyone, she was concerned only with holding this vessel of sorrow and death (p. 253).

Monisha's younger sister Amla is an extrovert and possesses a sharp sensitivity. She is determined to lead a life different from that of her brother and sister. But she does not succeed for long and begins to realize the hollowness and futility of her own life:

Daily it pursued her to the office, hid quietly under the black mouthpiece of her telephone, shook ever so slightly the tip of her pencil as she traced the severe lines of a well-draped sari, then engulfed her in the evenings when she attended parties at which she still knew no one well, and at night when she tried to compose her
unsteady thoughts for sleep (pp.157-58).

In her desperation and with a feeling of failure, she begins to drift towards an artist, Dharma. However, it does not prove to be the answer to her search for identity and her eagerness to fulfil her life with something meaningful. She is fully aware of her dilemma:

She knew that Monisha's death had pointed the way for her and would never allow her to lose herself. She knew she would go through life with her feet primly shod, involving herself with her drawings and safe people like Bose, precisely because Monisha had given her a glimpse of what lay on the other side of this start, compromising. Yet she was unable... to think of the path or the jungle, of compromise or isolation (p.248).

Also, now Amla begins to understand that Dharma can not give her the two things that she desires i.e."tangibility, [and] permanence", and when reality strikes her, "apprehension" makes her very heart "darken and tumble" (p.212).

IV

In Anita Desai's third novel, Bye-Bye, Blackbird (1977), there is a contrast between "a life of acceptance and adjustment and one of rejection and isolation". Of all her novels, this is most intimately related to her own experiences. She herself has told an interviewer that "of

11 Anita Desai, Bye-Bye, Blackbird (Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1985). Subsequent textual references are given parenthetically.

all my novels, it is most rooted in experience and [that it is] the least literary in derivation". 13 The novel depicts the confusions and inner conflicts of a set of alienated persons. It has rightly been remarked that in the novel "the tension between the locale and the immigrant blackbird involves issues of alienation and accommodation that the immigrant has to confront in an alien and yet familiar world". 14

Sarah, in the novel, suffers from an intense feeling of loneliness and helplessness. She is culturally alienated, and her marriage to a foreigner leaves her in the loneliest path of life. She is always trying to put up a face that is not her own. In the process of adjusting to the demanding situation, she loses her identity. In a sense, Sarah represents all the immigrants' wives who have a basic problem of adjusting to their new life and culture. Sarah, a Britisher by birth and upbringing, tries to adjust with her Indian husband, Adit, but the cultural differences create many barriers between them.

Sarah makes desperate attempts to adjust to the demands of her married life, both cultural and emotional but she eventually fails. Her marriage to a 'wog' compels her to stick "to the loneliest path" and walk "drawing


across her face a mask of secrecy" (p.31). The readers see the struggle of Sarah's two personalities, one which is her natural self of being a Britisher, and the other which tries to become an Indian but fails to throw out the emotional and cultural attachments of her life. Her husband seems to take things for granted and is unaware of the struggle that his wife is going through. He spends his time leisurely with his friends and Sarah is left alone expecting her husband to share her problems and help her overcome them. The indifference of the husband emotionally hurts Sarah: "...unable to part with the warmth of shared experience and shared humour, leaving Sarah to pick up empty cups and glasses and full ashtrays and yawn her way to bed" (p.27). The novelist writes: "To her closed eyes the darkness moved in a tumult of black shapes that would not settle". Her dreams, too, are shattered to pieces, "torn by long blades of rain" (p.50).

Although Sarah is in her own country, she, because of her attempts to change, becomes a stranger to her fellow countrymen. In her heart she wants to become someone who has a definite identity, a person who is acceptable to the new environment, loved by her husband and accepted by the people of her new relationship. She, however, fails to do so and she has to avoid the strange look of her countrymen. The novelist adds: "Those who glanced at her made aware of her by the violence with which she turned away from them felt apprehensive, but since she was a stranger, gave it no thought" (p.31).
When Adit becomes aware of the struggle that his wife is going through, he wants to help her but does not exactly know what to do and how to go about it. He notices the loneliness in Sarah's life, her loss of identity "... she had become nameless, she had shed her name as she has shed her ancestry and identity, then she sat there staring, as though she watched them disappear" (p.31). In his eagerness to help her, Adit suggests that Sarah may visit her friends, to which she is very indifferent and does not react positively to his suggestions. In the final analysis of the whole situation, we find that the matters become worse because Adit is unable to apprehend the real reason in Sarah's anguish and her silence. Even Sarah is unable to define her situation:

If only, she cried out once before the tang of figures succeeded in drawing her thoughts wholly to them, if only she were allowed to keep her one role apart from the other, she would not feel so cut and slashed into living, bleeding pieces. Apart, apart. That enviable, cool, clear, quiet state of apartness. Then she spotted an error in addition, and another, and grew absorbed in correcting them (p.37).

The agony of Sarah is beyond Adit's comprehension. Her dilemma and disillusionment have been succinctly presented by the novelist:
Who was she Mrs. Sen, who had been married in a red and gold Benares brocade sari one burning, bronzed day in September, or Mrs. Sen, the Head's Secretary...? Both these characters were frauds, each had a large, shadowed element of charade about it. They were roles-and when she was not playing them, she was nobody. Her face was only a mask, her body only a costume. Where was Sarah? ... she wondered, with great sadness, if she would never be allowed to step off stage, leave the theatre and enter the real world whether English or Indian, she did not care, she wanted only its sincerity, its truth (p.38).

Desai has projected in the novel the struggling inner being of Sarah.

Sarah is not able to define what she really wants and feels totally lost. In desperation, she sometimes begins to relish the feeling of separateness and aloofness: "Rain streamed down the window-panes she had deliberately left uncurtained for she loved the sight of it closing about her, shrouding her separating her from the world with its lustrous curtain" (p.39). Sarah's life is pitiful because she knows that she is different from Indian wives and can never accept their ways of doing things. It is worth while to note how Sarah dreads to be in the company of these Indian wives. If she really wants to change and adopt Indian ways, one would think that the company of Indian people, especially of Indian wives, would help her in her adjustments. But Sarah's thoughts and emotions show that she is fighting inside her and her personality is torn between the two faces of her life:
She dreaded meeting young Mrs. Singh dressed in pink or parrot green Satin salwar-kameez and always, even in the coldest weather, had two halfmoons of perspiration showing under her shining satin armpits. The thought of her breaking into this catquiet kitchen with a jingle of glass bangles, bearing a plate of rich silvery sweets, made Sarah shrink with dread (p.41).

In her mind Sarah creates her own image of India. She wants others to understand her feelings and cravings for the knowledge of India but finds only Emma understanding.

V

Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975)15 is Anita Desai's shortest novel. It has been welcomed as "an interesting addition to Anita Desai's achievement as an Indian novelist writing in English".16 In this novel, the novelist again brings up the theme of alienation. It has been aptly pointed out that the novel presents a "characteristic variation on the theme of the first novel" and "depicts the aching void in the life of Sita, who is to face the lonelines of a woman, a wife and a mother, by probing deeper into her inner life".17

Sita, a sensitive, overemotional, middle aged woman burdened with and responsible for four children,

15 Anita Desai, Where Shall We Go This Summer? (Delhi: Orient paperbacks, 1975). Subsequent textual references are given parenthetically.


feels alienated from her husband and children. She goes through unbearable mental agony because of her nature. Sits's life in isolation is like the isolated island where she comes to find a refuge. The island, the house and atmosphere only worsen her isolation. Desai has beautifully presented the unescapable condition of Sits's hopeless life. To express Sita's moral perplexity, she quotes a poem by Cavafy: "To certain people there comes a day/ When they must say the great Yes or the great No" (p.139).

sita is very eager to say the great 'No' even if she is crushed inside for the rest of her life. When she comes to the island of Manori, she is pregnant. At this point, she is full of anticipations and expectations to find an answer to her agony and overwhelming anxiety. She is not worried for herself initially. As the novelist puts it, "The woman, clinging now to the children, now to the cart, seemed to an irresponsible degree careless of the effects of the ride on her own condition..." (p.5).

Sita feels miserable because no one seems to understand her. In early years of their married life Sita could not bear the presence of the friends of her husband, Raman, because she considered them as 'nothing'and was suffocated by their 'vegetarian complacency'. "People continued to come and be unacceptable to her. She took their insularity and complacency as well as the aggression and violence of others as affronts upon her own living nerves" (p.49). When Raman had the company of his friends,
she would go to the balcony of her home and spend all the
time smoking and looking at the sea (p.49). Even when she
was with her husband her heart was suffocated by the strong
feeling of alienation. Desai records her mental condition
in the following words:

She sat there smoking ... till he exclaimed,
"Bored? How? Why? With what?" and could not
begin to comprehend her boredom. She herself,
looking on it, saw it stretched out so vast, so
flat, so deep, that in fright she scrambled
about it, searching for a few of these moments
that proclaimed her still alive, not quite
drowned and dead (p.50).

When Sita would sit alone, without any purpose and looking
out of the window blankly, her children would not
understand her behaviour. They would occasionally ask if
she was waiting for some one. She would listen to their
words, trying to relate herself to the question but lost in
her thoughts, she would only say 'Yes' with a nod. However,
she would never answer as to who or what she was waiting
for. Desai delineates the mental state of Sita, trying to
find an answer to the meaning of her life and accept her
present situation. Inwardly, Sita is not prepared to accept
that this was all there was to life, "... that life would
continue thus, inside this small, enclosed area, with these
few characters churning around and then past her, leaving
her always in grey, dull-lit, empty shell. I am waiting,
she agreed—although for what, she could not tell: for the
two halves of this grey egg-world to fall apart and burst"
(p.54).
Every year Sita and her husband went on a vacation, but this time she does not want to repeat the stereotyped vacation routine because she is tired of all that and wants just to be alone. She wants to escape the deep-seated feeling of alienation in her heart. Overwhelmed by a feeling of sadness, she decides to be alone in the secluded island (p.57). Deep down in her heart, she herself has the desire to cut herself off from everything, everyone, including her husband and even her own self. It is surprising that Sita wants to go back to the island of Manori to find an answer to her own agony. When she lived in Manori earlier with her father she had grown afraid of that island and had a sense of relief when she left the island and came to the mainland with Raman:

The mainland the very word implied solidity, security: the solidity of streets, the security of houses; She had not realized then that living there would teach her only that life was a crust of dull tedium, of hopeless disappointment but a thin crust, a flimsy crust that, at every second or third step, broke apart so that she tumbled in, with the most awful sensation, into a crushed pile of debris (p.58).

At that point the mainland attracted her and she felt secure. She did not know then that one day the same mainland would become a place where she would not be happy. Being tired of the ordinary life in the everyday world, Sita hopes that the magic island will provide what she has been longing for. Because she is oversensitive and highly
emotional, her relationship to her husband is not really meaningful, chiefly because he is not concerned about her and does not understand her. When such intimate human relationships lose their meaning, they become boring, dull, and bereft of happiness (pp.144-45).

Sita evaluates her own relationship and gets painfully distressed because she finds no meaning in any of her relationships. She tries to fight and stay at Manori with her children, but she is highly disappointed to find that they are keen to leave the island and go to the mainland to be with their father. Her dreams fall apart and she fails to find any peace on the island and finally loses the battle, knowing that she will have to go to the mainland along with the other members of the family:

She felt the long, straight monotonous tract of her life whip itself round her in swift circles, perhaps a spiral, whirling around had around till its very lines dissolved and turned to a blur of silver, the blurred silver of the mirror-like window panes. All was bright, all was blurred, all was in a whirl. Life had no periods, no stretches, it simply swirled around, muddling and confusing, leading no where (pp.154-55).

Sita is alienated from Raman because of the incompatibility of temperaments, lack of communication and difference in approach towards life. Atma Ram sees in Sita's alienation "the boredom and lonelines experienced by married women
when they feel ignored and unwanted. Sita does not feel wanted. She is such a lonely soul whom no body wants—not even her father, husband, in-laws or her own children. This unwantedness has been the root cause of Sita's loneliness from her early childhood.

Fire on the Mountain (1977), the Sahitya Academy Award winner novel of Anita Desai, portrays the alienation of Nanda Kaul and her granddaughter, Raka. Desai looks into the lonesome lives and isolation of these two characters and brings out their painful fate. Nanda Kaul is forced to live in a secluded place, away from all the members of the family. In the autumn of her life, she loves the loneliness and barrenness of her surroundings not out of choice but because she is forced by her children to go away and live alone. Eventually, she comes to enjoy the peace of the lonely place called Kasauli as also the emptiness of her house. She longs to live her life in privacy, which was never available to her while living with her husband and children. Now her "lonely house" (p.6), Carignano, is a perfect place for her where she can find the peace that she has been desiring for a long time, and the" barrenness" of her house now "pleased and satisfied" her (p.4).

18 Atma Ram, "A View of Where Shall We Go This Summer?" Journal of Indian Writing in English, IX (1 January 1981), p.74.
Desai introduces in this novel the trauma of another married woman who has never enjoyed the happiness of married life. Nanda Kaul was not understood by her Vice-Chancellor husband. Everything that functioned, moved around the husband, and the wife merely had a role of bearing the responsibilities of wife, a mother and an entertainer of the guests, without expecting anything in return.

She does not want anyone to disturb her privacy which she clings to her heart. The life with members of her family and other people gave her nothing but irritation, and now she does not want to see the face of even the postman. She would rather be in the company of pines and cicadas; "To be a tree, no more and no less, was all she was prepared to undertake".(p.4). Hers is the predicament of a person who has given all the years of her life to the household chores and yet never has had any peace, satisfaction or love. Nanda kaul is conceived of in terms of "a charred tree trunk in the forest, a broken pillar of marble in the desert, a lizard on a stone wall" (p.23). After many years she has a chance to be alone.

Nanda Kaul lived in an endlessly suffocating atmosphere. As the Vice-Chancellor’s wife, she was busy all the time with the household matters. She loved her husband and children very dearly but was shocked to know that her husband's love was not for her but for another woman. Desai has once again depicted, through Nanda
Kaul, a married woman's frustrations. Nanda Kaul is a loving wife who waits for her husband in the lawn, walking back and forth. However, when the husband arrives after dropping a guest, he goes straight to his bedroom, and then she has nothing left but to walk in the lawn again but at a slower pace (pp.25-26). The dejection continues to grow in her over the years, and this is the reason why she is overjoyed when there comes and end to this kind of life. We are told: "She had been so glad when it was over. She had been glad to leave it all behind, in the plains, like a great, heavy difficult book that she had read through and was not required to read again" (p.30).

Nanda's loneliness has been conveyed through forceful images. As Desai depicts her, Nanda "looked so exactly like a baby thwarted, wanting attention she did not get" (p.101); "she had suffered from the nimivety, the disorder, the fluctuating and unpredictable excess" (p.30). Nanda learns to draw satisfaction from her life's "barrenness, its emptiness" (p.31), "to add to her own paired, reduced and radiantly single life" (p.31). When the reader goes through her story, he feels a natural sympathy for the miserable woman.

Nanda Kaul is never satisfied with her family life. Her busy, leisure-loving husband never cares for her. And her relations with her children are not intimate either, and at the end they also desert her. Nanda sees
herself as a 'failure' who never has had a meaningful life. As a result, her life is filled with "fantasy and fairy tales" (p.89) rather than realities. The following passage reveals the futility of her alienated life:

Nor had her husband loved and cherished her, kept her like a queen - he had only done enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David, the mathematics mistress, whom he had not married because she was a Christian but whom he had loved, all his life loved. And her children the 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 (p.145).

We can realise Nanda's emotional disturbance as she receives a letter from her daughter Asha, requesting her to look after her granddaughter, Raka. Nanda does not know how to take this letter. She tries "to suppress her anger, her disappointment and her total loathing of her daughter's meddling, busybody ways, her granddaughter's abject helplessness and her great granddaughter's impending arrival" (p.16). Unprepared for this forced job, Nanda helplessly asks herself: "Have I not done enough and had enough? I want no more. I want nothing. Can I not be left with nothing?" (p.17). She loathes the very idea of involving herself in any other responsibility. "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 wished to entertain" (p.17). The arrival of Raka would only mean letting the "noose slip once more round her neck"(p.19).

Raka is another alienated character in the novel. Desai has created a psychologically interesting person in her. Her arrival to her grandmother is an unwelcome intrusion by"... an intruder, an outsider, a mosquito flown up from the plains to tease and worry" her (p.40). Raka, however, is no trouble to Nanda. She likes the beauty of the nature and delights of the Himalayan hill-station. She enjoys the lonelines and listens to the wind in the pines and the cicadas. The sweet melodies of the silence overwhelms her. She is thrilled with atmosphere and ignores everyone including Nanda Kaul (p.47). Nanda after some time comes to want Raka to pay attention to her, be with her, talk to her and share with her, but she is disappointed. "Nanda Kaul is exasperated by this total rejection, so natural, instinctive, effortless when compared with her own planned and willful rejection of the child"(p.47). She cries out I'm shipwrecked.... I'm shipwrecked and alone"(pp.61-62).

Raka is aware of her loneliness. However, she enjoys the company of nature and finds "darkness much friendlier" (p.68). She is least concerned about material items and "normally touched nothing in the house"(p.82). As Nanda notices the difference in Raka from other children of her age, she finds her a challenge to her. But she fails to draw the attention of Raka: "All those graces and glories with which she had tried to captivate Raka were only a
fabrication; they helped her to sleep at night, they were tranquillizers, pills". (p.145).

There is yet another intruder into the solitude of Carignano Ila Das, who is a pathetic creature, an old woman who has struggled all her life. Brutally treated by life, she has had to face many ups and downs and lead a life full of so many contradictions. Her last days comprise that last little broken bit of a crazy life. She is a person who is lonely and full of 'deformities' (p.137). Whenever she comes to visit Nanda Kaul, she brings along with her memories of the wonderful good old days and parties extended by Nanda Kaul's Vice-Chancellor husband.

Ila Das works as a welfare officer. But the money she gets is not sufficient to meet her personal needs. She herself tells us: "I've had to go from pillar to post, trying to earn fifty rupees here and fifty rupees there, with not a room to call my own most of the time, and it's grown worse" (p.125). Nanda feels sorry for her friend and wants to help her. Although both of them are lonely, yet their economic conditions are totally different. When Nanda came to know about Ila's conditions, she almost invited her to come and stay with her. But the latter's pride withdrew her from doing so because Nanda never wanted anyone to ruin her privacy and loneliness at Carignano (p.127). Later on, Nanda realizes her fault in not inviting Ila. When Ila leaves after
visiting Nanda she is concerned about the safety of her friend. Walking home alone, Ila is filled with sadness on account of being old and alone, leading a life with no promises to look up to (p.141). She has to bear the burden of living and earning alone in her old age. Her life ends on a very tragic note. The man whom she helped and gave advice to, rapes her and finally kills her. The sad news has a heartbreaking effect on Nanda Kaul. "Fire on the Mountain portrays thus three different types of alienated figures and tries to bring out their interrelations and differences".\textsuperscript{20}

VII

Anita Desai's next novel, \textit{Clear Light of Day} (1980),\textsuperscript{21} deals with a family whose members are alienated from each other. As in \textit{Voices in the City} Calcutta is referred to as the 'city of death', so in this novel Old Delhi which is the locale of the novel, represents the boredom of its metropolitans.

Bim, the main character, has a younger sister, Tara, and brothers, Raja and Baba. Bim is tired of the dull and boring life of Old Delhi where they have nothing else to do but to wait. She relates her life and its boredom in the city when she says "Old Delhi does not


change, it only decays" (p.5). To Bim, it seems that their life has no meaning or aim and is only getting dull day by day.

In Clear Light of Day, Anita Desai has chosen a problem which is not unknown in many families today. It leaves a very strong but sad impression on the reader, who tends to identify himself with one member of the shattered family or the other. These children face problems in their lives mostly because of the way in which they were brought up. Their parents spent their time playing bridge with their friends and never had any time for their children. John Leonard writes that "these are the children of indifferent parents".22 Their father had stopped visiting the children's room long back and "they knew him only as the master of the entrance and exit"(p.53), and their mother was diabetic and vain who spent long hours at a dressing table before a mirror among jars and bottles that smelt sweet. The parents played bridge "unaware of their daughter's presence outside, ... to whom it had never occured that the child was now a young girl and might like to be taken out with them" (p.138). This atmosphere has an unfortunate effect on the children, who feel "sucked down into the silent centre of a deep, shadowy vortex while they floated on the surface, staring down into the underworld, their eyes popping with incomprehension"(p.22).

Bim's mother missed an evening out at the club, for the first time in twenty years, the day she fell sick and was admitted to the hospital. To the reader's surprise, if she ever regained consciousness for a minute, she murmured the names of familiar cards rather than the names of her children. She died, and it was still difficult for the children to remember whether she was not at the club playing cards. The father also died in a car accident, and again it made no difference to the children. Very ironically Desai writes that "all that disturbed the children was the continuous presence of the car in the garage" (p. 64) rather than the absence of their parents.

Bim and Raja are very close to each other as they grow up and confide in each other and share together many things. But the circumstances and atmosphere make them stand against each other. Raja writes a letter about the house rent which amazes Tara, who unbelievingly says to Bim: "I wouldn't ever have believed-no one would ever have believed that you and Raja who were so close-so close—could be against each other ever. It's so unbelievable" (pp. 28-29). Bim had nursed Raja with the hope that in the fatherless family he would be the man of the house. But Bim is shocked when Raja discloses his strong decision to go to Pakistan. He does not want to spend his life in a meaningless place without any aim. He asks: "You don't want me to spend all my life down in
this hole, do you? You don't think I can go on living just to keep my brother and sister company, do you?" (p.100).

When Raja decides to leave, Tara and Bim are left alone to be each other's emotional supporters. The tragic picture of a shattered family is conveyed through Bim's pathetic complaint: "I wish there was someone else", but "there is never anybody except me" (p.61). To Baba she says: "So now there are just you and I left, Baba....Does the house seem empty to you? Everyone's gone, except you and I. They won't come back. We'll be alone now"(p.101). Bim and Baba are the only ones residing now in the empty house with no hope for anyone to come back. 7-14-345

Desai has introduced a typical Indian character in Aunt Mira, who represents an Indian woman and her plight in the house of her in-laws. Although a distant aunt, she is more with the Das children in their happiness and sorrow than their own parents. Mira Masi presents herself as an old log on which the lives of these children may be rooted and grow. She is like a tree and the earth to this unfortunate family (pp.110-11). But, at the end, we find that like all others in the family, Mira is also alienated and left alone. The tragic end of the whole family tells the story of total alienation of the members from each other.
As we move to Desai's *In Custody* (1985), we go into a revelation of another aspect of human nature. The novel has for its central theme the idea of mutuality, of interdependence, between the creator and the receptor of poetry. It portrays the relationships of people and of the individual to the society. But in this process, the protagonist, Deven, neglects his wife. She is mostly alone to take care of the household responsibilities and of the child.

Deven is crazy about the poetry of an Urdu poet, Nur, and is constantly running away from his family to listen to and record his poems. This destroys the conjugal relationship with his wife. When relationship gets strained, he sees his wife only as a "penny-pinching" and "pessimistic" woman, from whom he wants to run away (p.66). The picture of the wife is that of an abandoned woman. The alienation is so strong that even when they are together, he is filled with a strong feeling of strangeness. He is hurt to notice the decline of his family life; "The tedium if it settled upon him like a grey, crumbling mildew. He felt aged and mouldy" (p.66).

The wife, Sarla, does not have any sympathy with her husband because she does not get any attention and love from him. Because of lack of sharing, "She ..."

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removed herself to the kitchen where she did not need to restrain herself but could find expression in shouting out of the window at the child or over the wall to the neighbours since it was not possible to shout at her husband, at least not without danger of retaliation, (p.127).

Such is the relationship of Deven and Sarla, that it is characterized by anger and frustration only.

Sarla talks to the neighbours once in a while but mostly sits alone busy with her daily chores. Hers is not a picture of a loving and caring wife but that of a lonely and frustrated woman. "When he [Deven] did get home, Sarla was standing in the doorway with her arms and her sari wrapped about her shoulders and her face bent under the thick straggling hair as she talked to a neighbour outside -the picture of an abandoned wife" (pp.65-66).

When Deven goes to Delhi, sarla goes to visit her parents' house for a few days. It is very pathetic to note that there is no warmth of love or longing for her even there. Deven does not expect her to be at home when he returns from his trip. This is the limit of alienation, misunderstanding, distress and frustration: "... the house stood open when he returned to it next morning. Sarla was back" (p.193). Everything in the novel runs at a meaningless pace without surprise, without expectations and without any concern.
In Baumgartner's Bombay (1988) the story revolves around the life of a lonely German, Hugo Baumgartner who is without family or friends. Loneliness had become his destiny and his fate when he met Lotte, another lonely soul. The daughter of a dancer, she was brought to Calcutta when she was ten and has been working there since then. Her husband dies a sudden death due to excessive drinking and Lotte is left all alone once again without any means.

Lotte and Hugo were 'homeless' after the end of the war. There was no home for them in Germany and India. Lotte explains to Hugo"...yes there was nowhere to go. Germany gone-phut. Europe was gone, all of it. Let us face it, Liebchen, there is no home for us. So where can we go?" (pp.80-81). Lotte and Hugo meet again in Bombay, both old, lonely and out of means. Lotte had even tougher times than Hugo, and it is disappointing to know that she, who wore gold bangles at one time, is reduced to this sorry state of want and scarcity. Lonely Hugo is happy to meet lonely Lotte someone from "his own country, -so like his own, he saw their kinship" (p.96).

Then, there is Hugo's mother, who has alienated herself by choice. Like Bim's mother in Clear Light of Day, she enjoys the company of her friends, neglecting her only son. The memory of the visit to Mr.

Friedmann's house is still fresh in Hugo's mind when she "eagerly saw him off and turned to her friends as though she had been waiting for this moment" (p.46). But now Hugo is worried about his mother, who is all alone in Berlin.

In Anita Desai's novels, there are women who are childless, as Maya in Cry, the Peacock and Monisha in Voices in the City. She has also portrayed women who do not have love for children, as Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain. Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? seems to be a careless mother. The mothers of Clear Light of Day and Baumgartner's Bombay are least concerned for their children and neglect them. Their nature and the way they conduct themselves are primarily responsible for their alienation. Alienation crushes them and creates several problems for themselves and others who come into contact with them.