Survival means surviving against odds. It cannot be interpreted as a flight from stress situations.... Trying to live with the help of survival strategies ... is to behave like a person who keeps taking aspirin for an aching tooth instead of going to a dentist to have it filled or extracted. (Solanki 176)

Owing to the intricate concatenation of circumstances most of the major characters of Desai in Bye-Bye Blackbird, Where Shall We Go This Summer? and Fire on the Mountain feel acutely alienated. Unlike the alienated chief characters of the other novels of Desai, these characters, being disgusted with the prevailing situations and undergoing a cornucopia of agonizing moments, ultimately flee to far off places with false hopes of finding solutions for their problems. Inspite of the flight they resort to, their problems hopelessly remain unresolved. The failure of these characters to understand the significance of fully adapting themselves to the harsh realities of existence makes them perpetually vulnerable and they continue to helplessly move in the realm of uncertainty without the essential sense of belonging.
While portraying the maladjustment, alienation and escapism of its major characters, *Bye-Bye Blackbird* "seeks to explore the complexities of the dilemma of immigration by focussing upon its attractions as well as its repulsions" (Varma, "Bye-Bye Blackbird: The Dilemma of Immigration" 96) and presents the impact of the racial and cultural prejudices on their personality. The strong influence of England on Adit and Dev is similar to that of Calcutta on Nirode, Monisha and Amla in *Voices in the City* that both attracts and repels them. Adit, an Indian immigrant, settles in England due to economic reasons. The non-availability of suitable employment with handsome emoluments in India makes him come back to England.

Adit is fully aware of the fact that the immigrants are inhumanly insulted in England. In a cocktail party given by Christine Langford he feels so much isolated and humiliated that he is forced to seek the company of Sarah, an English lady. The main purpose of Adit's marrying a white woman in England is to avoid the racial hatred and the gnawing pains of cultural alienation. In this context what Solanki says is highly revealing:

Adit makes Enland his home by marrying an English woman and by settling down in London. This is a form of escape to avoid humiliation and neglect, which he experiences while living in an alien land. He thinks that his escape into Sarah's love can cover up his
feelings of alienation and loneliness. (88)

If Adit says with ease and confidence that he is happy it is only on the strength of the fact that Sarah is his wife and his crosscultural marriage can be a protection against racial prejudices and onslaught. But contrary to his calculation he continues to feel alienated. There is no denying the fact that Adit tries to accommodate in accordance with the demand of English culture and ignores the insult he faces but he is not successful owing to the strong impact of his own culture on him. As Aithal observes:

With some difficulty, he has found a job as a travel agent and has been generally content with life. Like his fellow immigrants, he quietly pockets racial insults and humiliations to which he is continually subjected. Fed on English literature in school back in India and exposed directly to English life and manners for years, he now feels a sense of cultural affinity. This closeness, however, does not obliterate the sense of his own cultural identity. He secretly longs for Indian food, music and friends. (156-157)

Adit is haunted by the desire of going to India to eat hilsa fish, see Sarah dressed in saris and gold ornaments and listen to the shehnai and sitar in the night. He finds it
extremely difficult to eat British food and he cannot take 
British broths and stews. When the Indian food prepared by 
Sarah is not to the satisfaction of Adit, the latter himself 
goes into the kitchen to prepare the food he likes. Though he 
longs to visit India to have the things he likes he is not able 
to avoid being fascinated by the beauty of the English 
countryside. Beginning to love England and contrasting India 
with England he admires the latter:

Nothing ever goes right at home -- there is famine 
or flood, there is drought or epidemic, always. Here 
the rain falls so softly and evenly, never too much 
and never too short. The sun is mild. The earth is 
fertile. The rivers are full. The birds are plump. 
The beasts are fat. Everything so wealthy, so 
luxuriant -- so fortunate. (Bye-Bye Blackbird 129)

Inspite of his admiration and love for England, the 
country is not ready to accept Adit as India does not accept 
Hugo Baumgartner in Baumgartner's Bombay. Though Adit proudly 
tells Dev that he is different, that he lives for the moment, 
that he does not worry about anything and that he is happy, his 
real colour comes to the surface when he gets short shrift and 
is insulted by his mother-in-law in Hampshire. His visit to 
Sarah's parents is "marred by tactlessness, by inane 
misunderstanding, by loud underlining of the basic disharmony 
of the situation" (Bye-Bye Blackbird 175). This unfortunate
experience violently intensifies his longing for his own country and makes him lose his interest in England. Feeling depressed as never before, his attitude towards England undergoes a profound change. As M. Prasad rightly points out: "His Anglophilia gives way to a sudden, disturbing nostalgia for his homeland" (55). Deeply stung by the humiliation and filled with anger Adit becomes uncontrollably agitated and what he sees in England appears displeasing to his eyes.

Adit intensely longs for Indian landscape, Indian cattle, Indian vultures, Indian rivers, Indian sunset and anything Indian. Even Sarah is shocked over the intensity of his increasingly growing nostalgia for his country: "She wondered how he had kept this amount of yearning shut up and enclosed inside him for so long, releasing it now like a dam that releases its water when it is full of bursting" (Bye-Bye Blackbird 184). He visits his favourite places but in all these places he feels the sensation of not belonging. Like Sindi Oberoi in Arun Joshi's The Foreigner, who acutely feels alienated in the thick crowd of America, Adit feels alienated in England inspite of his cross-cultural marriage, money and a decent employment. London, once proudly considered by him as the golden Mecca, now appears to him to be completely different.
Disenchanted with England Adit belligerently asks Sarah to wear a sari on their wedding anniversary without bothering about the embarrassment in her tone. Accusing English people of xenophobia he mercilessly shouts at Sarah at the height of his anger. He is determined to go back to India and he does not care to even consult Sarah. The outbreak of Indo-Pakistan war conveniently gives him an opportunity to carry out his intention. Informing Sarah of his decision of returning to India he tells her about the unreality of his existence in England. Frankly expressing the fact that he has hitherto pretended to love England, he says that he resolves to lead a real life in India. But his resolve is nothing but a ploy to escape from England. Making an apt comment on Adit's strategy Solanki says:

For him it is increasingly difficult to live in a society where a person has no respect. He tries to escape and decides to go back to India. He doesn't disclose that he is escaping due to his bitter experience, but puts forward the excuse of Pakistan's attack and his feelings for his own country.... (89)

Though Adit feels terribly insulted by the unthinking act of his mother-in-law, this experience is not something he could not have ignored and if he had had a deep sense of accommodation he could have easily forgiven her. But
unfortunately by his over-reaction he has made a mountain out of a mole-hill. His decision to return to India not unexpectedly triggers off many problems to Sarah but he does not even try to understand them. In this respect he can be bracketed with Gautama in *Cry, the Peacock*, Raman in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* and Jiban in *Voices in the City*, who are equally apathetic to the agony and anguish of their wives.

Adit's resolve to lead a real life in India is not very strong. His statement to Sarah that they will come back if they do not like India obviously shows his vacillation. His impulsive decision to go back to India "is an escape... into the tradition from which he had escaped earlier" (Wandrekar 156). It is likely that he will regret his rash decision if he is not able to get a suitable job in India. It is unlikely that he, who is not sympathetic to Sarah in England will treat her gently if she fails to adapt herself to new situations in India.

Dev, another Indian immigrant and a close friend of Adit, suffers from racial and cultural alienation and lack of adjustment. Even after undergoing a long process of being repelled and attracted by England he is not able to achieve a sense of accommodation and he is acutely tormented by a sense of uncertainty. Like Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* he profoundly longs for a life of variety. Witnessing the ill-treatment the
immigrants are subjected to and realizing that he will not be allowed to enjoy life in England Dev becomes furious. Whereas Adit silently swallows all the insults heaped on the immigrants Dev vehemently revolts against them. His acrimony and impetuosity bring to mind those of Nirode in *Voices in the City* and his rebellious reaction is as impotent as that of Nirode. As Hari Mohan Prasad rightly observes: "Dev simply zig-zags: he is a feeble character with loud words, a thundering cloud without rain" (61-62).

Dev is extremely angry that the London docks have three types of lavatories -- ladies, gents and Asiatics. Feeling insulted, he tells Adit that he will not live in a country where he is humiliated. He feels intensely agitated over the sheepishness and soft attitude of the immigrants. He is perplexed to find the thickly populated London streets to be completely silent. The strange experience of Dev reminds one of that of Chaudhuri in London which he describes in his essay "The Eternal Silence of these infinite crowds":

Life in London, even in the most crowded street, seemed like a film of pre-talkie days. I had an uncanny sensation when I saw unending streams of people going along Oxford Street, and heard no sound. As they moved into the underground stations they looked like long lines of ants going into their holes. When after living in the bazaars of India for
years I saw a sight like that, it was only natural that I should paraphrase Pascal and cry out, "The eternal silence of these infinite crowds frightens me!" (47)

Whereas Chaudhuri is surprised over the silence of the English, Dev feels irritated over it. Making a pertinent comment on the resentment of Dev, Hari Mohan Prasad rightly points out: "Dev's grudge is funny.... Dev's reactions are ... illogical. In fact, he beats his wings in a void. To tell the truth, there is a trait of confusion in his character" (59-60).

Dev's anger and resentment is suddenly replaced by his exhilaration. His uncontrollable excitement on seeing the Battersea power station is a clear indication of the immaturity of his mind. His ecstatic outburst completely shakes him out of his present attitude of hostility. Standing in awe of the raging fire in the power station he tells Adit that they should kneel down, sing and pray to it. But his mood of exuberance and jubilation is short-lived and it gives place to the mood of alienation when he undergoes the agonizing experience in the London tube. The nightmarish venture gives an insight into his fear, agony, alienation and claustrophobia:

He descends, deeper and deeper, into the whitetiled bowels of Clapham tube station. Down into the stark caverns artificially lit by way of long, ringing
staircase where draughts sweep icily up and down and yet leave the underground airless, suffocating. The menacing slither of escalators strikes panic into a speechless Dev as he is swept down with an awful sensation of being taken where he does not want to go. Down, down and farther down -- like Alice falling, falling down the rabbit hole, like a Kafka stranger wandering through the dark labyrinth of a prison.... In a panic he throws himself into the tube that has come slipping in like a long worm, and is carried off by it, hurtling through black tunnels in which the air is choked with soot and cinders and the very air is black as in a tomb. (Bye-Bye Blackbird 57-58)

Dev, who is frightened, becomes immensely happy on seeing Indian traders. Feeling exhilarated by the Indian atmosphere and exhibiting a trait of schizophrenia, he wishes that Indian traders and Indian army should come to England. Vehemently wishing to abolish the British Railways and the British public schools he wants to replace Latin and Greek with Sanskrit. Expressing his desire to make the English eat chilli pickles and tandoori chicken and rassum he likes the British women to wear sari and the British men to put on dhoti. His strange attitude of adoring and loathing makes one feel that Dev is not certain about his temper. On his uncertainty Desai says that he
is "the bewildered alien, the charmed observer, the outraged outsider and thrilled sight-seer all at once and in succession" (Bye-Bye Blackbird 85).

Dev maintains some sort of love-hate relationship with England. Though he feels humiliated, he decides to seek a job in London. His decision to be employed does not mean that he has developed a sense of accommodation. His economic difficulties force him to do so. Relegating his purpose of studying in the London school of Economics to the last position, tending to worship at the shrine of Mammon and expressing his keen desire not to return to India he tells Adit that he can not go to college and that he wants life, money, and freedom, not restriction and discipline. His secret intention of acting like "an ambassador" (Bye-Bye Blackbird 123) brings to mind Henry James' The Ambassador. This novel describes a middle-aged American going to Paris. Like Dev, who begins to dislike everything in London at the beginning, the American disapproves of whatever he sees in Paris. Ultimately he makes a complete volte-face and decides to stay in Europe like Dev, who also does a complete about-face and resolves to stay in England. But Dev's decision does not guarantee him the type of life he contemplates. There is every possibility of his desire for enjoying life being thwarted here. If he is not able to live as he likes, it is likely that he will change his resolve to stay in England. He has not yet realized the
importance of adjustment.

The forceful impact of the pastoral landscape and its memorable serenity Dev experiences in Hampshire appears to strengthen further his desire for living in England. The soft-flowing river Test and its surroundings that soothe and lull Dev remind one of the river Wye and its background about whose beauteous forms Wordsworth evocatively writes in his "Tintern Abbey Lines". Impressed by the healing and chastening power of the lovely forms of Nature Wordsworth declares that he is able to perceive the harmony that prevails everywhere in Nature. The serenity of the scene makes Dev forget everything and he is filled with joy. Describing the effect of the idyllic beauty of the English countryside on Dev, R.S.Sharma says: "The healing touch that Nature gives to Dev's anguished soul has something Wordsworthian about it" (85).

On seeing the grazing cows that scrutinise Dev by the river Test, he wonders without any feeling of agitation whether "they see in him, his dark skin and black eyes, something alien and exotic" (Bye-Bye Blackbird 169). For the first time in England such a thought does not upset him as unjust. This experience is the real beginning of Dev's sense of accommodation in England. Being influenced by the beauty of the English countryside Dev positively exhibits a perceptible change in his attitude towards England. Oblivious of the vulgar
phrases such as "boot-licking toady" and "spineless imperialist-lover" (Bye-Bye Blackbird 19) by which he uncharitably mocks at Adit, he goes to the extent of loving England.

Even as one tends to get the favourable impression that Dev is poised to adapt himself to the unfamiliar situations in the alien country, he begins to be assailed by doubts and uncertainty quickly dispelling the good impression he has created. His irresolution is noticed in his experience in the bus he gets into after walking out of Waterloo station:

While buying his ticket he felt certain -- and then not so certain -- that he saw a glint of scorn in the conductor's eye, the abrupt way in which he handed him his ticket and then kept him waiting for his change. He wondered if the old lady beside whom he sat down did not clutch her handbag and lean away from him as though she suspected a smell. (Bye-Bye Blackbird 230)

The precariousness of the behaviour of Dev expectedly sets off intense speculation about his action and future. Dissatisfied with the unsureness of Dev, Maini aptly comments: "The image of Dev as "a Kafka stranger wandering through the dark labyrinth of a prison" is academic and misplaced. It's a
figure of rhetoric, not of reality. Thus, his later "conversion" appears as suspect as his initial rebellion" (127). When Adit finds it difficult to adjust, he suddenly leaves for his country. If Dev faces a similar situation in England he will escape like Adit because a few chinks are unmistakably visible in Dev's armour of accommodation. As Tripathi rightly predicts: "Adit had success, money, romance in England but somehow he discovers he cannot live there forever. Even Dev, the skeptic, who is momentarily elated by the job in England, will someday follow Adit's example" (60). Barring the proverbial slip, Dev's escape is very much on the cards.

Whereas Adit and Dev experience alienation in a foreign country, Sarah faces it in her own country. The alienation of Sarah is the direct result of her maladjustment and her alienation is very different from that of the other major characters of Desai. When Jain asks Desai about this difference in an interview, she answers: "This is because she chooses it deliberately whereas for my other characters it is a part of their personality, part of their nature. She chooses it by marrying a foreigner. She is an exile in her own land, in her own country" (15). The only character who comes almost close to Sarah as regards alienation is Bim in Clear Light of Day and she invites her alienation by deliberately embracing celibacy. Whereas Bim is able to overcome her alienation, Sarah is unable to get over it because she is not as accommodating as Bim, who
is endowed with courage and determination.

The alienation of Sarah starts with her aversion to the life-style of the English marked by sameliness, repetitiousness and monotony. As Monisha in Voices in the City feels disenchanted with the humdrum life of the people of Calcutta, Sarah feels dissatisfied with the banalities of the people of London. She specifically stresses this aspect to Adit, who does not like the criticism of Dev about the regimented life in England: "I should think ninety out of every hundred here live lives exactly alike. Every evening they watch the same programmes on the telly, every Friday night they go to the local for a pint..." (Bye-Bye Blackbird 127).

The strict discipline imposed on Sarah by her parents and the unharmonious relationship between them largely increase her alienation. When Sarah ignores a letter of advice from her mother Adit promptly tells her that she should be grateful to her mother. But Sarah becomes furious and says that she will not listen to her mother's advice even for a moment because her mother has never cared for Sarah's individuality and always insisted on her duties and responsibilities, not on her rights. Her angry outburst reveals the pernicious impact of regimented home-life on her. The strained relationship between Sarah's father and mother drains away her love and respect for them. When Desai writes about the kind of relationship existing
between Sarah's parents she crisply observes: "...she scolded him in tones that would lead anyone not present in the room to think she was speaking to an unusually naughty and tiresome dog. He never answered" (Bye-Bye Blackbird 144).

Feeling disenchanted with her puritanically drab existence and the loveless life of her parents Sarah tries to escape by marrying Adit. But her marriage ironically heightens her sense of alienation. The primary reason for this is that though Adit and Sarah love each other, their marriage is not entirely rooted in love. It is mainly a kind of instrument to escape from their alienation that constantly keeps disturbing them. Pointing out the fact that Mira and Richard in Kamala Markandaya's Some Inner Fury intensely love each other, Bande stresses that "this kind of perfect unison in love is lacking in Sarah-Adit relations" (125).

The fact that her parents are unhappy over her marriage to Adit deeply depresses Sarah. She is much worried that the good impression that she is a disciplined girl is dispelled. Her cross-cultural marriage against the wishes of her parents, who indirectly give vent to their anguish, makes her think that she has disappointed them. Her failure to satisfy her parents creates in her a sense of guilt. The fact that she has married a man who is both racially and culturally inferior adds to her
unhappiness. As Bande succinctly observes:

Those who are bold, like Sarah, Bella, and Emma, in accepting the erstwhile colonial people, are ashamed to own in public. Those who are staunch, consider the colonial man inferior. This situation arises because of the myth of the cultural superiority perpetuated by the colonizers... If Dev and Adit writhe under the consciousness of their colonial past, Sarah too suffers as the values imposed on her by her culture are so imbedded in her that she does not have the courage to break free. She loves Adit, has sacrificed much for him, but she can not tear asunder the invisible bonds of race superiority. The self-possessed Sarah at home becomes utterly lonely and self-conscious in public. ("Anita Desai's Bye-Bye Blackbird -- A Colonial Experience" 194-195)

Deeply tormented by her anguish that her own people will look down upon her for having married a foreigner, Sarah tries to escape by withdrawing herself from her friends, colleagues and other people. Ashamed of herself, she withdraws even from the world of her childhood. When Maya in Cry, the Peacock and Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? are faced with crises they take refuge in their childhood experiences. But Sarah does not want to look back. Becoming unusually reticent, she avoids answering personal questions from her friends. Instead,
she wants to listen to them. Her unwillingness to answer questions about Indian ways of cooking and her parents-in-law readily prompts her friend Julia to react angrily: "If she's that ashamed of having an Indian husband, why did she go and marry him?" (Bye-Bye Blackbird 37). Sarah's friends are not able to understand that she feels psychologically alienated.

With the intention of avoiding her own people, Sarah resorts to walking lonely without being noticed by others. Even unfamiliar people feel shocked by the speed with which she turns away from them. Adit notices her anguish of loneliness but he does not know the real reason for this. Realizing that she has not seen her friends for a long time, he encourages her to visit them but she flatly refuses without giving any reasons. She feels deeply offended when the school children insult her: "Hurry, hurry, Mrs. Scurry!" (Bye-Bye Blackbird 32). Becoming nameless and shedding her identity she suffers silently. The world of Adit and his Indian friends poses Sarah many cultural problems that she finds very difficult to cope with. As Aithal says:

Adit's Bengali music is all dissonance to Sarah's ears. Sarah cannot join him and his Indian friends in their conversation, jokes and laughter, remaining a foreigner in their world. She has problems wearing the Indian sari and jewellery. The rituals and beliefs of the one mean nothing to the other, which
makes each of them groan in pain at the lack of regard shown by the other, for what each holds dear. (158)

Without knowing the means of solving her psychological and cultural problems Sarah wants to escape by hiding. Perplexed by her loss of identity she questions herself on the roles she plays:

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, who... kept order in the school and was known for her efficiency? Both these creatures 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? (Bye-Bye Blackbird 34-35)

The unexpected decision of Adit to leave for India increases her agony and problems. Instead of being courageous she allows herself to be consumed with doubts, fears and uncertainties. Though engulfed in vacillation, anxiety and insecurity the predicament of Sarah forces her to go along with Adit to India. But her lack of adjustment in England makes one predict that she will not adapt herself to new situations in
India. Commenting on the intention of Sarah's going to India Solanki points out: "Sarah's plan to leave for India with Adit is an attempt to escape into space" (91).

In Where Shall We Go This Summer? the neurotic and insane intention of Sita not to give birth to her fifth child is extremely unreasonable. Sita who has had four children with pride and pleasure that goes with pregnancy now strongly displays rage, fear and revolt when she is pregnant for the fifth time. Like Deven in In Custody, she shows her anger by throwing away things like slippers, papers, and nightgowns. Feeling disgusted and alienated she neglects her physical appearance like Bim in Clear Light of Day. Sita who has been finding it difficult to adjust to her situations in the last twenty years of her married life now refuses to adjust any further: "Very hard -- this making of compromises when one didn't want to compromise" (Where Shall We Go This Summer? 148).

When Raman tells Sita that she should bear with disappointments in life she immediately retorts that only cowards will tolerate them. Whereas other people put up with violent, ugly and cruel happenings in life, she finds it impossible to do so and she has debunked the authority of society and its conventions. Her hypersensitive and introverted personality and uncontrollable behaviour makes one ask oneself
if Sita is going to meet the fate of Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* and Monisha in *Voices in the City*.

An analysis of the unreasonable and violent attitude of Sita towards life gradually reveals her problems that are familial and psychological. Sita's unusual childhood experiences have deeply sown the seeds of insecurity and alienation in her consciousness. Like Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* she is a motherless child and due to the complete absence of love of her mother, paternal care and the friendly company of her sister, she misses the life-giving advantages of a harmonious family that are imperative for any child in its formative years. As a result, she has no sense of belonging, security and satisfaction. She is deprived of emotional fulfilment. She does not have the opportunity of experiencing the significance of mutual understanding and trust. Explaining the important role of a mother and family in the life of a child, Bande succinctly observes:

A family is the most important internal group to condition a person's relationship to himself. R.D. Laing considers family to be internalized in each one of us. It is like a flower, with mother as the centre, the children as its petals around it. The most vital link -- the mother -- is missing in Sita's life. Unknown to her, a deep seed of insecurity is sown in her life. This leads to an
alienation from self. Her vague fears, an abiding sense of dissatisfaction, nausea and mortal dread of taking on responsibility of the new-comer -- all point towards the sense of insecurity bred in childhood. (108)

Sita's father is also responsible to a large extent for her deep sense of alienation. Though her father rules over Manori island "like Prospero in Shakespeare's The Tempest", (M.Prasad 69) he utterly fails to realize the unenviable condition of motherless Sita. Whereas Maya's father in Cry, the Peacock gives Maya overprotection to compensate for the loss of her mother, Sita's father does not care a damn for Sita and he totally neglects her: "She wore a frock that was ragged and patched. She owned no shoes. All she had that remotely resembled a jewel, an ornament, was a shell..." (Where Shall We Go This Summer? 83).

Sita's sense of alienation is aggravated by the partiality of her father, who has an unnatural affection for his eldest daughter, Rekha. Making a comment on the effect of the strange attitude of her father on Sita, Solanki says: "Her father's strange behaviour with his daughter fills Sita with deep distrust and fear of male in her unconscious mind. These negative feelings adversely affect her relationship with Raman" (48). This attitude of her father not only widens the rift
between Sita and her father but also deprives her of the love of Rekha. The atmosphere of neglect and partiality hurts and infuriates Sita and she becomes rebellious.

Like Nirode in *Voices in the City*, who becomes jealous of his talented brother Arun, Sita is envious of her talented sister, Rekha. Father's incestuous relationship with Rekha on whose stolid shoulders he always places his arm and whose fingers he squeezes when they sit together, his "underlit night-time aspect" (*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* 76) and his illegal connection with Phoolmaya, a beautiful fisherwoman, have terribly shattered Sita's faith in the goodness of the world. The harsh revelation that Rekha is her step-sister drops "on her skin like acid" (*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* 79) and it further increases her feeling of alienation. Jivan's heart-breaking disclosure that mother has run away to Benares painfully shocks Sita.

Like Hugo in *Baumgartner's Bombay*, Sita has no opportunity of mingling with children of her age group. She has no friends and is totally deprived of the chance of social interaction and of sharing her thoughts and feelings with friends. Her isolated childhood marked by alienation, dissatisfaction, insecurity, fear, shock, neglect and partiality do not conduce to a harmonious development of her personality.
The marital discord between Raman and Sita heightens the latter's sense of alienation. Commenting on the incompatibility of the temperaments of Raman and Sita, Pathak observes:

The marital discord results chiefly from the dichotomy between two irreconcilable temperaments and diametrically opposite viewpoints represented by Sita and her husband, Raman. Sita... feels alienated from her husband ... and undergoes unbreakable mental agony because of her high-strung sensibility and explosive emotionality. (28)

Like the marriage of Gautama and Maya in Cry, the Peacock and of Jiban and Monisha in Voices in the City, the marriage of Raman and Sita is not based on love and understanding. The primary reason for the failure of the marriages of these ladies is the incompatibility of their respective parents. As Banerjee suitably points out: "This marital maladjustment seems to be a legacy of unhappy parents to their daughters regarding the Desai novels" (164).

Raman who is neither an introvert, nor an extrovert marries Sita out of pity and lust. Sita, on the other hand, who is deserted and isolated by all her family members, looks upon Raman as her saviour:

It was as though he had been expressly sent by
providence to close the theatrical era of her life, her strange career, and lead her out of the ruined theatre into the thin sunlight of the ordinary, the everyday, the empty and the meaningless. She had left with relief, worn out by the drama of Manori, longing for the sane, the routine-ridden mainland as for a rest in a sanatorium. (Where Shall We Go This Summer? 100)

Pinning her hopes on Raman, Sita longs for love and security from him. But the apathetic attitude of Raman inconsolably disappoints her. Like Jiban in Voices in the City, Raman does not care about the problems of Sita. She is sad that though they are very close, he does not even know that she feels dull and bored. Like Suno, in Desai's short story "Studies in the Park" Sita astonishingly witnesses a vision of divine love between a Muslim couple, who make her life seem a shadow. Seeing the unforgettable scene of a young woman being lovingly caressed by an old man she "suddenly became acutely conscious of what she was missing in life. After that it became impossible for her to make any compromise" (Bhatnagar 148).

Sita's recollection of this scene in the Gardens underscores the fact that she longingly expects Raman to show the same love that the old man showers upon the Muslim lady but
Raman miserably fails in this regard. As Bande points out:

Sita is like the helpless Muslim woman, needing all attention and tenderness. She expects Raman to be like the lover, making her realise how valuable she is to him. Raman, however, does not honour the claims of her bargain, and the dream is never realised. (110)

The incompatibility of temperaments between Raman and Sita is effectively conveyed through their diametrically opposed views towards the hitch-hiker episode and the crows-eagle scene. Identifying herself with the hitch-hiking foreigner, who is a failure like Sita, the latter greatly admires his bravery. But Raman considers the foreigner a fool who does not know which side of the road to wait on. Misunderstanding Sita, Raman considers her admiration for the hitch-hiker as an act of disloyalty. But actually her sympathy and admiration for the foreigner is a strategy to satisfy her pride: "From psycho-analytical point of view, this shows her hostile-aggressive drive, not only for a vindictive triumph over Raman but also to restore her neurotic pride. This is an attempt at self-preservation" (Bande 112).

Like Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, who identifies herself with Peacocks, Sita identifies herself with a wounded and proud eagle. Unable to bear the cruel sight of a young eagle being
mercilessly whipped and torn by the crows with their beaks, she makes efforts to save the helpless bird but in vain. When Sita is very unhappy about it, Raman, without realizing the anguish of Sita, touches her on the raw by laughingly uttering that the crows have made a good job of her eagle.

The incompatible temperaments of Raman and Sita and their discordant viewpoint often cause conflicts between them leading to marital discord. Like Nauda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain, Sita feels bitterly alienated from her children. The children of Sita are not attached to her. Like their father they like to live in Bombay. Unlike their mother they are interested in the culture of Bombay. Menaka does not have any faith in her mother and she entirely depends on her father for her studies. This unhappy situation upsets Sita's equanimity and she becomes aggressively bellicose. The magnitude of Sita's alienation from her children is brought out when she painfully expresses her views on children: "Children only mean anxiety, concern -- pessimism. Not happiness. What other women call happiness is just -- just sentimentality" (Where Shall We Go This Summer? 147). The uninteresting existence of the members of Raman's family bores Sita to tears. Like Monisha in Voices in the City, Sita revolts against their sluggishness. On the belligerency of Sita, P.F. Patil points out: "Sita's revolt is representative of an intelligent sensitive woman's revolt against the male
smugness and philistinism trampling all finer values in material life" (138).

The impact of Sita's alienation has unconsciously infused a sense of fear into her personality. Sita feels so frightened that even very commonplace city incidents and other insignificant scenes begin to disturb her mind: the fighting of her sons at home, hurling their bodies at each other, the street fighting of ayahs and Menaka's crumbling of the new buds of a plant and tearing of her own paintings to pieces. As S.D.Sharma says: "Even her own children -- Menaka and Karan appear to her as two machine procreations wholly bereft of conscience and finer feelings" (2). Sita hates the urban milieu which is heavily marked by brutishness and boredom. Even the reports on the Vietnam War and the photograph of a weeping woman affect and agitate her.

Alienated from her husband, his family, children and urban society and realising the impossibility of continuing to live in Bombay, Sita desperately escapes to Manori "as a means of redemption" (Chellappan 13). But contrary to her expectations she shockingly realizes the disappearance of the magic and glory of the island. Feeling insecurely isolated she begins to perceive the reality of life in Manori island:

It was no place in which to give birth. There was no magic here -- the magic was gone. She laid her hand
protectively on her swelling stomach. What if, as her husband had warned, something happened? For all her inspired words, she knew she could not shelter it inside for ever. (Where Shall We Go This Summer? 112)

Sita's lonely condition in Manori makes her admire her husband's courage and hard work. This admiration causes her to realise that she is an escapist. Like Harish in Desai's short story 'Surface Textures' and Pat in 'Scholar and Gypsy' another of her short stories, Sita has escaped from responsibilities:

She had escaped from duties and responsibilities, from order and routine, from life and the city, to the unlivable island. She had refused to give birth to a child in a world not fit to receive the child. She had the imagination to offer it an alternative -- a life unlived, a life bewitched. She had cried out her great "No" but now the time had come for her epitaph to be written -- Che free per viltate il gran rifiute. Very soon now that epitaph would have to be written. (Where Shall We Go This Summer? 139-40)

Although Sita begins to realise that she will have to write her epitaph in Manori, her point-blank refusal to go back
to Bombay with Raman on the ground that "I can't go through it all over again" (Where Shall We Go This Summer? 140) makes one suspect the sincerity and credibility of her intention of writing her epitaph. When, disgusted with the unreasonableness of the argument of Sita, Raman starts to leave the island, Sita becomes acutely aware of her isolated condition. Her action of following "the trail of footprints he had laid out for her" (Where Shall We Go This Summer? 150) appears as a symbolic gesture.

However, Sita's willingness to go to Bombay does not mean that she has developed a sense of adjustment because her doubts and confusion of her life do not give that impression:

But was she sure it was not the other way around after all? Had not her married years, her dulled years been the false life, the life of pretence and performance and only the escape back to the past, to the island, been the one sincere and truthful act of her life, the only one not false and staged? How could she tell, how decide? Which half of her life was real and which unreal? Which of her selves was true, Which false? All she knew was that there were two periods of her life, each in direct opposition to the other.... She shook her head angrily at the confusion, the muddle of it all. (Where Shall We Go This Summer? 153)
It is true that Sita is on the refreshing threshold of making a compromise with the reality of existence but like Adit, Sarah and Dev in Bye-Bye Blackbird, she is terribly haunted by doubts and uncertainties. Her agonizing interrogation, and her view of life that is "simply swirled around, muddling and confusing, leading nowhere" (Where Shall We Go This Summer? 155) are concrete pointers that she is not fully prepared to reconcile herself to the actualities of life. As Bande rightly observes:

At times one finds Sita's affirmation and reconciliation too unassertive, signifying a defeat of individuality. At the end of the novel we can not tell whether she manages to lead a healthy life after her return to Bombay, or she simply strides back into her former neurotic rages and fears. (119)

Atma Ram is of the opinion that Sita has made a "reluctant compromise" (79). Even if one accepts the view of Atma Ram this unwilling compromise is not at all an achievement on the part of Sita because in the last twenty years of her married life she has been reluctantly compromising with life. Since Sita is utterly confused about life, her return, mainly prompted by her feelings of insecurity and isolation in Manori, can be considered as an escape to Bombay from where she has escaped earlier. The sort of reconciliation and regeneration achieved by Bim by Clear Light of Day is missing in Sita. Unless she is
prepared to fully adapt herself to the cold realities of human existence, her life will again be miserable in the mainland where values have become meaningless and human beings irrelevant.

Like Where Shall We Go This Summer? that portrays the miserable life of Sita, Fire on the Mountain delineates the pathetic existence of Nanda Kaul. Instead of being happy about the news of the impending arrival of Raka, her great-grand daughter, at Carignano, Nanda Kaul becomes silently furious that Raka will be a threat to her privacy gained only at the very end of her life. Expressing her unwillingness to receive Raka she petulantly moans: "Have I not done enough and had enough? I want no more. I want nothing" (Fire on the Mountain 17). Besides this, Nanda's desire to be a tree, her wish to be away from the world of demands and requests and her desperation: "Discharge me. I've discharged all my duties. Discharge" (Fire on the Mountain 30) unmistakably point to the presence of some deep-rooted embitterment in her heart that constantly keeps tormenting her. Stressing the same point Raizada aptly says:

The intensity of the feeling with which Nanda Kaul treasures her privacy and the care and concern with which she guards it give an impression that it is her defence against the intrusion of some unhappy
experiences of life which still haunt her and which she wishes to ward off. (44)

The reasons for her bitterness, disgust, irritation and self-pity lie in the loveless atmosphere of her home that leads to her psychological problems. Like Maya in Cry, the Peacock, Monisha in Voices in the City and Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? Nanda Kaul, the oldest of Desai's protagonists is also a victim of loveless marriage. Compared to the lot of Maya, Monisha and Sita, Nanda's fate is worse. The agonies of Maya, Monisha and Sita emanate from the lovelessness of their respective husbands. But neither Gautama nor Jiban nor Raman bears the ugly stigma of being unfaithful to their wives. Nanda's Vice-Chancellor husband not only does not love her but, much to her vexation, has been shamelessly carrying on a life long affair with one of the lecturers. In Voices in the City, Otima's affair with Major Chadha ruins her husband and in Fire on the Mountain Mr. Kaul's affair with Miss. David irretrievably shatters Nanda's life and alienates her from her husband.

Besides the disloyalty of Kaul, none of her children is attached to her. In the absence of the specific details in the novel about the behaviour of the children of Nanda, it is difficult to establish the exact reasons that have caused the loveless relationship between her and the children. But that Nanda has miserably failed in human relations is amply clear
from the fact that she has no friends worth mentioning except Ila Das and Nanda does not feel any special affection even towards her.

Nanda's deplorable selfishness and her incapacity to place herself in another's position are the possible reasons for her failure to love and understand her children. The fact is that the sense of alienation is mutual. As Pathak points out: "In her real life she was not happy and satisfied. She was twice alienated: her busy, pleasure-loving husband had nothing to do with her private self, and her relations with her children were not intimate either" (39). Neglected by her husband and children Nanda becomes the embodiment of unhappiness. Commenting on the unhappy life of Nanda, Banerjee observes: "She decorates the dinner table in silk saris as a competent hostess, seething under the cover of the contented appearance with the hell fire of deep and irrevocable frustration" (167).

Mr. Kaul's infidelity and the indifferent attitude of her own children slowly develops in Nanda a sense of insecurity. Unlike Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? Nanda is not able to revolt. Her inability to protest and assert herself in her family is an indication of the weakness of her mind. Consequently she accepts her unenviable position and silently performs her duties without any sense of involvement. As Pathania rightly observes: "Nanda Kaul's relationship with her
husband was nothing beyond the duties and obligations they had for each other. The same is true of her bond with her children" (113).

Tormented by alienation, frustration, betrayal and disappointments, Nanda is forced to avoid her family members. She refuses to adjust any longer. Like Sita, who runs away to Manori, she escapes to Kasauli to forget the unbearable burden of her painful past without realising that the past can not be forgotten. When Sita guiltily realises that she has escaped from her responsibilities, she is ashamed of her irresponsible action. Nanda, who has fulfilled all her obligations towards her family should have naturally been proud of her sense of responsibility and spontaneously derived a sense of satisfaction. But curiously she is neither proud nor satisfied. Her statements prompted by her deep frustration show that she has only painful and uneasy feelings. As Bande points out:

Her utterances have a note of compunction. A woman who has carried out her responsibilities towards her husband and settled her children in a spirit of self-sacrifice, has a sense of satisfaction. This contains a joy of creativity, not the tinge of remorse. The inner urge of human life is to create, to generate, to make alive, to bring forth something new out of the hidden treasure of being. Nanda on
the contrary derives a weird sense of happiness, of a release from bondage, when the responsibilities are over. (94)

The chaotic and pernicious familial atmosphere of Raka is solely responsible for her maladjustment and psychological alienation. Whereas Nanda is a victim of her loveless husband, Raka is a victim of her loveless and careless father. Her father's cruelty and ill-treatment of her helpless mother crushes her faith in life. The unnatural revelries of the people in the ballroom of the club suddenly reminds her of her father's atrocious behaviour at home:

Somewhere behind them, behind it all, was her father, home from a party, stumbling and crashing through the curtains of night, his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse -- harsh, filthy abuse that made Raka cower under her bed clothes and wet the mattress in fright, feeling the stream of urine warm and weakening between her legs like a stream of blood, and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes and wept. Under her feet, in the dark, Raka felt that flat, wet jelly of her mother's being squelching and quivering, so that she didn't know where to put her feet and wept as
she tried to get free of it. Ahead of her, no longer on the ground but at some distance now, her mother was crying. (Fire on the Mountain 71-72)

Raka's parents fail to give her love, affection, emotional satisfaction and a sense of security and togetherness that are very imperative for the normal growth of a child. Like Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? Raka is completely neglected by her father. The sorrowful state of her mother does not give her time and strength to take care of Raka. As a result Raka's childhood experiences do not give her happiness and confidence. As Pathania observes:

Childhood is a formative period when a person has intrinsic desires for spiritual health. He discovers the beauties and sweetness of human relationships through love. Raka's parents have no time or inclination to cater to the emotional need of their child. The mother is in such an unhappy predicament that she cannot do anything for Raka. Her shattered mental equilibrium and deteriorating physical strength render her abject and helpless. The father has no time to look after the well-being of his child. Consequently, Raka's traumatic experiences deprive her of a child's innocent trust and feeling of joy in the company of others. (110)
Again, like Sita, Raka does not have the opportunity of sharing her feelings and knowledge with the children of her age. Her fearful childhood experiences kill her tendency to socialize, sap the natural urges to participate in life and fill her heart with distrust, hatred, apathy and suspicion. The fall-out of the unhappy and ungratifying home atmosphere of Raka is that she turns her back on human beings and hates any contact with them. The observation of Solanki underlines this point:

She takes recourse to self-destructive isolation and hostility generated out of her encounter with the violent and aggressive environment of her home. The brutal treatment meted out to her mother by her father terrifies Raka of human connections and experiences. His violent behaviour after drinking creates anxiety, frustration and a conflict in her tender psyche. The agony of her experiences impresses her with the belief that violence and aggression are a part of the essential human condition. Companionship and loving interaction based on the principles of mutual trust and respect are not a portion of her experience of life. She therefore, feels no need for human company. (134-135)
The nightmarish experiences of both Nanda and Raka who are not poised to accommodate each other make the unexpected meeting between them a mere formality. As Desai ably says:

Then it was not possible to postpone the meeting any longer and both moved a step closer to each other and embraced because they felt they must. There was a sound of bones colliding. Each felt how bony, angular and unaccommodating the other was and they quickly separated. (Fire on the Mountain 40)

Whereas Nanda's planned escape and withdrawal into isolation cannot permanently close the lid of her past, Raka's escape into isolation does not pose any problems to the latter. The tragedy of Nanda's situation is that she is haunted by her sad memories of her past that "has been an endless story of suffocating weariness" (Pathak 38).

Nanda's remembrance of her past immediately brings to mind the two beautiful lines from Emily Dickinson's poem cited by Desai as an epigraph in Clear Light of Day:

Memory is a strange bell -
Jubilee and knell -

In Clear Light of Day the memories of the past are a jubilee to Tara but to Bim they are a Knell of agony and so she tries to escape from them. In Fire on the Mountain the past memories of
both Nanda and Raka are a knell of disaster and they, therefore, try to escape from them. In their attempt to avoid human contact, Nanda and Raka deliberately ignore each other but the reality stares them in their faces and they find that it "was not so simple to exist and yet appear not to exist" (Fire on the Mountain 47). Even in their efforts to avoid each other Nanda is not as successful as Raka.

Nanda is shocked to realize that her planned rejection of Raka pales into utter insignificance when compared to the latter's rejection of the former that is done with perfect aplomb. As Ganguli points out: "What the older lady has striven to do artfully, the child seem to do effortlessly" (41). Nanda is greatly baffled by Raka's deep sense of independence and her habit of making no demands. Feeling hurt by the fact that she is completely ignored by Raka, Nanda becomes increasingly aware that Raka is the perfected model of what she herself wants to be. Striking a note of temperamental sameness between Nanda and Raka, Desai says:

If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, her great-grand daughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct. She had not arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice - she was born to it, simply. (Fire on the Mountain 48)
It is true that Raka has not reached the stage of living like a hermit by her sacrifice, but to say that she is a recluse by nature is quite an exaggeration. She is inevitably converted into one due to her adverse familial factors. Raka's temperament which is closely akin to that of Nanda and her incomprehensible behaviour gradually change Nanda to feel a little admiration for Raka. Nanda's temptation to talk to Raka tortures her, but she "did not want to be drawn into a child's world again -- real or imaginary, it was bound to betray" (Fire on the Mountain 45). Since Nanda feels constantly attracted by Raka, at one stage, her determination to avoid the latter fades away.

Though Nanda considers Raka as "an intruder, an outsider, a mosquito flown up from the plains to tease and worry" (Fire on the Mountain 40) she is moved by the fact that Raka is very solitary. Deeply perturbed that Raka prefers disappearing to being loved, she is goaded by her inner force to help her: "Habit would rear its head inside her, make her prepare to follow, tell her to tuck the child in, read her a story and lead her safely into sleep" (Fire on the Mountain 80). But her pride does not allow her to do so. Later she goes to the extent of thinking of making a will to give Carignano to Raka but Nanda does not pursue this matter further. As Bande rightly observes: "She vacillates between two contradictory forces: withdrawal and involvement, detachment and attachment..." (90).
Inspite of her mental conflict whether to love Raka or not, Nanda, whose maternal love keeps surging within her, is poised to love her. Giving the reasons for this positive change in the attitude of Nanda towards Raka, Pathania observes:

All her life she has tried to feel wanted and loved. Consciously or unconsciously, her efforts have been to get a positive response from her family for her devotion but all in vain. Now she directs all her energies, to win Raka. She longs desperately for love, and realizes that if she is discarded, she will be crushed by self-hate. Therefore, inspite of all the betrayals and disappointments she received from the faithless husband and selfish children, she feels irresistibly drawn towards Raka. (115)

The strategies including the imaginary stories that Nanda desperately employs with the sole purpose of developing a good rapport with Raka miserably fail to break newgrounds in their relationship. Abandoning even the tenacity with which she jealously guards her isolation that "stands for an emotional staticity, a kind of psychic frigidity that refuses to take note of any movement around" (R.S.Sharma 118) Nanda begins to love Raka but the response from the latter is disappointing. Raka non-chalantly continues to indulge in her escapist tendency which highlights the magnitude of her alienation.
Ila Das, an unforgettable character of Desai, is a pathetic victim of "all sorts of oppressions and injustices and deprivations in her own parental family" (Tripathi 87). Like Nanda, she has an unfulfilled life and unlike Nanda, she, with a ridiculous physical appearance, has to face economic problems perennially. What is painful is that she is faced with problems only because she wants to lead an honest life. As Paul and Padmanabhan Nair rightly point out: "Most of her problems are due to her honesty, conscientiousness, self-respect and service-mindedness" (227). Inspite of her goodness and noble qualities, she does not have a sense of adjustment that dearly costs her happiness in life. Failing to realise the cruel realities of existence and the bitter fact that honesty does not pay, she resigns her job as a college lecturer to save her honour when she is not appointed as Principal. Had she shown a sense of adjustment she would not have suffered so much. Tormented by her economic problems she regrets having failed to exhibit a sense of accommodation:

I wish I had stayed there, Nanda. How often I go back to that time and think it over again, and I know now -- I know now -- I should not have been so hotheaded. Ooh, in my position, a little humility would have been much, much better. . . Nanda -- it was the only honourable thing to do, wasn't it? But Ooh, the flesh is weak, and you know how things have gone for me since then, Nanda. You know how 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 and worse. (Fire on the Mountain 124-125)

The plight of Ila Das, who has become a welfare officer and has completely plunged herself in enlightening the poor villagers in order to escape from her cruel past and overcome her sense of insecurity and loneliness, deeply touches her friend, Nanda. Though she is tempted to invite Ila Das to stay with her, her view that Ila Das reminds her of her unhappy past prevents her from doing so. The false glorification of the gloomy past of Nanda by Ila Das just to cheer Raka up makes Nanda uncomfortable and "the entire weight of the over loaded past seemed to pour onto her like liquid cement that immediately set solid, incarcerating her in its stiff gloom" (Fire on the Mountain 117). On the catalytic role of the presence of Ila Das in Carignano, F.Krishna observes:

Just as the fancy dress ball in the club is the catalyst which reveals the reality of the violent relationship between her parents to Raka, Ila Das revives the truth to Nanda about the falsity of her marriage and her life as the wife of the Vice-chancellor who was in actuality carrying on an affair with one of the university lecturers. (162)
Had Nanda invited Ila Das to stay with her she would have averted the rape and murder of Ila by Preet Singh. There are only two noble characters in the novels of Desai, who inspite of their very poor economic condition, feel ashamed of themselves when they think that they are better off than the poor around them. The one is Hugo in Baumgartner's Bombay and the other is Ila Das. Hugo is heartlessly stabbed to death by Kurt whom he tries to help and Ila Das is cruelly raped and murdered by Preet Singh whom she dissuades from marrying his seven year-old daughter off to an old man, who has six children.

The shocking news of the violent death of Ila Das jolts Nanda, who is overwhelmed with a sense of guilt which unfortunately proves fatal. A life-long friend of Ila Das, Nanda should have taken the responsibility of giving her protection by asking her to stay with her in Carignano. Though Nanda feels that "she ought to protect her" (Fire on the Mountain 133) and "she ought to fight some of her battles" (Fire on the Mountain 133) she does not do anything. Despite her lurking fear that Ila might face some danger on her way, her selfishness makes her ignore it. Commenting on the unforgivable lapse on the part of Nanda, U.Patil observes:

... Nanda had ignored this sense of responsibility, and had placed her self-interest higher than this moral demand, her self-preservation had seemed far
more important than moral heroism and true self-respect. Her self-love and the consequent self-deception had blinded her.... Nanda could have helped but she had not, what was worse -- Ila had been raped, humiliated and degraded. Nanda had indirectly participated in this defilement of womanhood, in this provocative insult to woman's selfhood. The rape enhances Nanda's sense of guilt. Nanda had become a party to this oppression of woman, by abdicating her moral understanding, and by her attitude of irresponsible indifference, which was almost apathy. This shocking realization overwhelms Nanda, and she dies under the weight of her guilt. (67)

Both the extreme withdrawal of Nanda and the complete involvement of Ila Das have unexpectedly paved the way for their tragic death that forcefully proves the fact that too much of anything is good for nothing. Their tragedy portrays the absurdity and futility of human existence in the meaningless world. What has happened to Nanda and Ila explicates the basic truths of human existence prominently underlined by Jaspers, a philosopher:

It is a series of inescapable situations -- each one fraught with its own problems; it is never safe and ever at the mercy of chance; it is full of
suffering, of one variety or another; it is full of
conflict; it is rooted in guilt; and it can not
escape from the final situation of death. (qtd. in
B.Gupta 185)

Raka, who is adamant in her indifference to the world of
reality, is unhappy with the hostile universe. She externalises
her unhappiness by setting the forest on fire that obviously
reflects her angry reaction to the alien world. Her action has
a symbolic significance: "It is expressive of Raka's resolve to
destroy a world where a woman can not hope to be happy without
being unnatural" (R.S.Sharma 127). Since there is no sign of a
positive change in the attitude of Raka towards life, her
problems will surely get multiplied because her escape into
loneliness is not a solution to her problems. On the whole,
Fire on the Mountain clearly underlines the significance and
truth of what Macbeth says in Macbeth:

Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (5.5. 24-28)

The characters discussed in this chapter do not have a
strong sense of accommodation. Lacking the qualities of
patience and understanding they allow themselves to be consumed
with irritation, agony and uncertainties and in the process they lose their peace of mind. Unlike these characters, there are a group of characters of Desai who weather many a crisis in their turbulent existence with an iron will, remarkable endurance and great understanding. These characters are discussed in the next chapter.