Appendix-II

Text of the Passages From FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN (1977)

1 (PP. 17-19)

Looking down over all those years she had survived and borne, she saw them, not bare and shining as the plains below, but like the gorge, cluttered, choked and blackened with the heads of children and grandchildren, servants and guests, all restlessly surging, clamouring about her. (1,46)

She thought of the veranda of their house in the small university town in Punjab, the Vice-Chancellor's house over which she had presided with such an air as to strike awe into visitors who came to call and leave them slightly gaping. (2,42) She had had her cane chair there, too, and she had sat there, not still and emptily, but mending clothes, sewing on strings and buttons and letting out hems, at her feet a small charcoal brazier on which a pot of kheer bubbled, snipping threads and instructing the servant girl to stir, stir, don't stop stirring or it'll burn, and then someone had to be called to hold the smallest child from falling into the bubbling pot and carry it away, screaming worse than if it were scalded. (3,88) Into this din, a tonga had driven up and disgorged a flurry of guests in their visiting saris, all to flap their palm-leaf hand-fans as they sat in a ring about her - the wives and daughters of the lecturers and professors over whom her husband ruled. (4,46) She thought of that hubbub and of how she had managed and how everyone had said, pretending to think she couldn't hear but really wanting her to, 'Isn't she splendid? (5,30) Isn't she like a queen? (6,5) Really, Vice-Chancellor is lucky to have a wife who can run everything as she does,' and her eyes had flashed when she heard, like a pair of black blades, wanting to cut them, despising them, crawling grey bugs about her fastidious feet. (7,42) That was the look no one had dared catch or return. (8,11)

Looking down at her knuckles, two rows of yellow bones on the railing, she thought of her sons and daughters, of her confinements, some in great discomfort at home and others at the small filthy missionary-run hospital in the bazaar, and the different nurses and doctors who had wanted to help her but never could, and the slovenly, neurotic ayahs she had had to have because there was such a deal of washing and ironing to do and Mr. Kaul had wanted her always in silk,
Mentally she stalked through the rooms of that house — his house, never hers — very carefully closing the wire-screen doors behind her to keep out the flies, looking sharply to see if the dark furniture, all rosewood, had been polished and the doors of the gigantic cupboards properly shut. (10,48) She sniffed to make sure the cook was not smoking biris in the kitchen and to verify that all the metalware smelt freshly of Brasso. (11,25)

She seemed to hear poignant shrieks from the canna beds in the garden — a child had tumbled off the swing, another had been stung by a wasp, a third slapped by the fourth — and gone out on the veranda to see them come wailing up the steps with cut lips, bruised knees, broken teeth and tears, and bent over them with that still, ironic bow to duty that no one had noticed or defined. (12,74)

Now, to bow again, to let that noose slip once more round her neck that she had thought was freed fully, finally. (13,22) Now to have those wails and bawls shatter and rip her still house to pieces, to clutter the bare rooms and the cool tiles with the mountainous paraphernalia that each child seems to require or anyway demand. (14,37) Now to converse again when it was silence she wished, to question and follow up and make sure of another's life and comfort and order, to involve oneself, to involve another. (15,31)

It seemed hard, it seemed unfair, when all she wanted was the sound of the cicadas and the pines, the sight of this gorge plunging, blood-red, down to the silver plain. (16,31)

An eagle swept over it, far below her, a thousand feet below, its wings outspread, gliding on currents of air without once moving its great muscular wings which remained in repose, in control. (17,33) She had wished, it occurred to her, to imitate that eagle — gliding, with eyes closed. (18,15)

The old house, the full house, of that period of her life when she was the Vice-Chancellor’s wife and at the hub of a small but intense and busy world, had not pleased her. (1,34) Its crowding had stifled her. (2,5)
There had been too many trees in the garden - dark, dusty guava and mango trees, full of too many marauding parrots and squirrels and children that raided them for fruit and either over-ate or fell from the tops. (3,38)

There had been too many servants in the long low row of whitewashed huts behind the kitchen, so that the drains often choked and overflowed, and the nights were loud with the sounds of festive drumming, of drunken singing and brawling, of bathing and washing and wailing children. (4,48)

There had been too many guests coming and going, tongas and rickshaws piled up under the eucalyptus trees and the bougainvilleas, their drivers asleep on the seats with their feet hanging over the bars. (5,34) The many rooms of the house had always been full, extra beds would have had to be made up, often in not very private corners of the hall or veranda, so that there was a shortage of privacy that vexed her. (6,41) Too many trays of tea would have to be made and carried to her husband's study, to her mother-in-law's bedroom, to the veranda that was the gathering-place for all, at all times of the day. (7,35) Too many meals, too many dishes on the table, too much to wash up after. (8,15)

They had had so many children, they had gone to so many different schools and colleges at different times of the day, and had so many tutors - one for mathematics who was harsh and slapped the unruly boys, one for drawing who was lazy and smiled and did nothing, and others equally incompetent and irritating. (9,55) Then there had been their friends, all of different ages and sizes and families. (10,14)

She had suffered from the nimiety, the disorder, the fluctuating and unpredictable excess. (11,13)

She had been so glad when it was over. (12,9) 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. (13,30)

Would Raka's coming mean the opening of that old, troublesome ledger again? (14,12)

Sighing, she went off to bed, dragging one foot uncharacteristically. (15,10)

Discharge me, she groaned. (16,4) I've discharged all my duties. (17,5) Discharge. (18,1)
Raka would come to tea. (1, 5) Where was Raka? (2, 3) Fretfully, she looked out over the still, empty garden in which cicadas audibly sizzled as though the sun were frying them in its great golden pan. (3, 26) The child was not there, was never there. (4, 8) She did not like being in Carignano. (5, 7) Perhaps she would not leave her the house after all. (6, 10) Why should she? (7, 3) Raka no more needed, or wanted, a house than a jackal did, or a cicada. (8, 15) She was a wild creature - wild, wild, wild, thought Nanda Kaul. (9, 11)

Perhaps she ought to have refused to have her. (10, 9) Perhaps she ought to leave the house to Tara who needed shelter, a cave to crawl into and die. (11, 19) Perhaps, perhaps...the alternatives were as many and as bothersome as flies. (12, 12) Nanda Kaul brushed them aside. (13, 5)

She looked over the dazed, hazy hilltops to Sanawar that lay as trim and neat as ever in its green treetops. (14, 21) Closer to her, the hoopoe promenaded under the apricot trees, smartly furling and unfurling the striped fan on top of its head. (15, 22) Its young had flown and it appeared to be celebrating, even flaunting its independence, its new youth and freedom. (16, 19) It pounced upon a grasshopper and stabbed it to death with its victorious beak. (17, 14)

Nanda Kaul sank lower upon her cane chair. (18, 8) Her heart still bumped inside her as though a string were jerking it. (19, 13) She thought it would be better to have the telephone removed than risk another shock. (20, 15) Strip the house, clear out the telephone, its looped black wires and unforgivable shrieks. (21, 14) Clear, the house, leave it bare, silent and restful, thought Nanda Kaul. (22, 12)

A pulse beat in her temple, purple and bulbous. (23, 9) She thought of how she had filled, not this house but the other, earlier ones, for Raka’s amusement - with furniture, treasures, trophies, even, dear God, with a zoo. (24, 28) She shivered up in her chair with horror at the thought and relaxed only when she recalled, with dignity, that she had not done that to Carignano. (25, 27) Even when at her most desperate to beguile Raka, she had not used, or misused, Carignano, for that shameful purpose. (26, 20) Carignano she had kept clean, true, open for the wind to blow through. (27, 13)
Her eyelids drooped. Through her lashes she saw the pine-needles glisten in the sunlight, glisten and glimmer on top of the knoll, shimmer and scintillate over the garden gate.