CHAPTER - III

IDENTITY CRISIS
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Identity is concerned with an individual's self-esteem and self-image. It gives a meaning to one's existence and defines one's role in social scenario. It refers to a quality or trait in a person that distinguishes her/him from others. Who am I, what am I...? The answer to such questions lies in pursuing and possessing an identity. The identity is seen both at personal as well as social level. Human personality is analyzed within the context of multiplicities of life.

Identity at personal basis lies in self-acceptance and realization of one's inner self. It lends value to one's existence. Devoid of this individual trait makes one alienated from oneself and social environment. People caught in the web of materialism and utilitarianism have no time to think about the basis facts of life which are the real essence of one's being. Their lies immense boredom and trauma behind the respectable facades of civilized life. Contemporariness of the age has made human act like a machine:

Who acts and feels like an automaton, who never experiences himself entirely as person he thinks he is supposed to be, artificial smile has replaced genuine laughter, whose meaningless chatter has replaced communicative speech, whose dulled despair has taken the place of genuine pain.¹

Today, the conscious effort of an individual is the desire to make a

standing in this ever changing world of flux. Everyone wants to have an authentic existence to be valued by others, as individual and society are inseperable. As:

Belongingness... means a subjective feeling of one's personal involvement to the extent that one feels himself to be an integral and indispensible part of the system.²

One gets torn between their quest for identity and limitations of human situation which do not allow them to realize their real-selves. Conflict arises from lack of understanding on the part of their relationships with ideas, people and things around. In the words of Bernard Bergonzi:

The change arising from the decline of religious and metaphysical certainties, the influence of modern psychology, and the public crimes and traumas of the twentieth century are responsible for the appearance of fragmented personalities.³

Human predicament forms the warp and woof of modern age. The absurdity of human existence results in psychic tensions which is dangerous to human peace and happiness.

Literature being the mirror of life projected various aspects related to identity problems and its adverse affects on the lives of these existential sufferers. Sartre believed that; "man, through his free obedience to his conscience and his call, can attain to wholeness and authentic selfhood".⁴ The failure to achieve that sense of individuality

² S.S. Anant, "Conflict Resolution through Belongingness", Manas, 26, Nos, 1-2 (1979), PP. 63-64.
self-fulfilment leads to the state of identity-crisis.

Anita Desai, being one of the major novelists, has been among the first few to view life from an existentialist concern. As:

The problems of existentialism... are, in a narrower sense, expressive of the present crisis of man and, in a broader sense, of the enduring human condition.⁵

Her writing excellence caught the attention of psychological stresses, anxieties and pain undergone by sensitive sufferers in this world of uncertain values. Feeling of dissatisfaction, loneliness and rejection adds to the miseries of such problems. Hitherto, literary pages have been filled with such narrations on the dilemma of modern predicament of human beings, projecting male protagonists with their perceptions of identity and chaos of lives.

Little attention has been paid to predicament of women in literature as they have always been seen in relation to men. The traits of sacrifice, devotion and unconditional care is the whole and sole role of woman as portrayed by literary genius. Before marriage, she is known by her father's name, later on, by Husband's and then totally dependent on son for her survival. In all these confined roles, where is the real woman..? What does she stands for.. and does she hold any identity...? This query on woman's existence is the main thematic concern of Anita Desai works.

Like any other individual, a woman also possesses the right

to question about the meaning of her existence. A girl needs family support and encouragement to pursue a dream and then transform it into reality. The indifference on the part of family hinders her growth as an individual and mars the development of a thinking mind which could decide. The fact of being a woman acts as an imposing psycho-biological factor and keeps haunting her mind throughout. The failure to achieve and add some value to their existence further drags her into the darkness of alienation. About this traumatic condition, which one suffers, Erich Fromm opined:

By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which a person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the centre of his world, as creator of his own acts... The alienated person is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, is experienced as things are experienced, without being related to oneself and the world and the world outside, productively.6

Absence of relationships, lack of proper communication and rejection of social norms results in the feeling of loneliness. This theme acquires a wide range of meaning in the novels of Anita Desai. The fiction of Anita Desai opens up a landscape of 'being' and 'nothingness' of life. The emotional disequilibrium emerging from confusing states and circumstances of life is the sumumbonum of her fictional work.

One cannot remain separated from the business of living and society. The thought processes and personality of one is shaped up and nurtured by the surrounding he/she lives in. The distance

between the two results in psychic troubles and one feels torn between the outer and inner forces. The remarks made by David Mc Reynolds explains the estrangement of individual from society:

The individual is never able to feel that he is an important part of some meaningful whole. Our hearts ache with loneliness but we do not know how to talk to one another.\(^7\)

The problem lies in inaccessibility of an individual, and the inability to give words to his/her perception, to make people understand about problem of living a meaningless existence; "The feeling of being isolated and helpless in a world conceived as potentially hostile."\(^8\) The society where woman is subjected to male-dominated normative structure is indifferent to her existence. She is treated as a non-entity. The monster-like uncertainty sorrounds the lives of such individuals, who finds then difficult to face and handle the ferocious assaults of existence. Erich Fromm has clarified the reasons for such frustration among individuals:

Life has inner dynamism of its own it tends to grow, to be expressed, to be lived. When this tendency is thwarted, the energy directed towards life undergoes a process of decomposi-

tion and changes into energies directed towards destruction.\(^9\)

The growth of a woman as an individual is suppressed by the patriarchal structures. That pushes her into sense of aloofness,

\(^7\) David Mc Reynolds, "Hispters Unleashed", in Seymour Krim, ed., The Beats (Greenwich : Fawcett, 1960), P. 204.


bitterness in the human environment she lives in. Such detached feelings:

more likely to occur in those who are unsure of themselves, they are doubtful of their non-ability to achieve and to cope; they magnify their own failures, worries, tensions and apprehensions.\textsuperscript{10}

This chaotic situation is the outcome of neglection and wimportance they suffer at the hands of their families and society at large.

Anita Desai’s female protagonists suffer from a nagging sense of ungratifying realtionships, unfulfilled dreams and unrealised aspirations. Their inability to choose a life for themselves make their existence an enigma from where there is no escape. Such characters:

accept the terms of death, to live with death as immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society; to exist without roots, to get out on that unchartered journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self.\textsuperscript{11}

Their sense of identity varies from person to person, depending on their family, relatives and friends. The kind of atmosphere one needs to breathe feely is missing in their lives. If one character see her identity in being a mother, the other wants luxuries of life. Their perception of identity differs according to distinct circumstances.

The failure to achieve their sense of meaning from lives creates an emotional vacuum; \textit{‘an inner emptiness, a sense of total and ultimate meaninglessness of... life’}.\textsuperscript{12} Dreadful emotions of self-hate


\textbf{(12)} John C. Ecles, \textit{The Human Psyche} (Heidelberg, Springer International 1980), P. 204.
and self-persecution rules their mind and hearts. By unravelling the sensibilities of woman within changing values of human relationships, Anita Desai has given voice to such repressed beings. About such beings, Sorokin stated:

The experiences of such characters lead to the destruction of the network of socio-cultural relationships, resulting in demoralization of the individual or an increase in his psycho-social isolation.\(^{(13)}\)

Their lives become devoid of any constant equilibrium. The external disjunction from the outside world is seen as a way to realise one's own self. But on this, a critic has aptly stated:

The means of preserving one's self and identity does not lie in getting alienated from the milieu and waging a perpetual rebellion against it, nor does it lie in discontent and restlessness, but in adjustment, accommodation and acclimatisation.\(^{(14)}\)

In some of the novels, one witnesses an attempt on the part of the woman sufferer adjusting in hostile-environment. Woman neither want to destroy her relation with community, nor family. All she looks for is to attain an individuality of her own.

In some cases, it happens that woman starts feeling secure in her worthlessness, thinking that it will bring all that affection she craved for. But the reality is not such. Horney observed such characters and said:


he cannot simply like or dislike, trust or distrust, express his wishes or protest against those of others, but has automatically to devise ways to cope with people and to manipulate them with minimum damage to himself.  

Such individual can not live in an ivory tower and wait things to happen themselves. The person has to face the situation and should start self-questioning of the pros and cons of life. It is important to interact to unify various aspects of fragmented self. That is what characters of Desai's novels attempted and are expected to do. Loosing one's own self in the midst of identity-crisis is not something to live with. One should strive to come out of this entangled web of fears and apprehensions.

Anita Desai has probed the inner most depths of psyche and achieved the sense of reality of existence. Anita Desai being well aware of the existential predicaments also believed in the childhood experiences becoming the determining factors in the growth of an individual. Here it is worth mentioning the thoughts of William Walsh:

The child's consciousness, which is partial and successive, does not include a sense of past or the future. It has to be discovered, and the provocation to learn it, is love. Affection is the seed of time. It is love-intensifying the delight in the present and correspondingly bringing discomfort in absence- which introduces an element of permanence into the child's experience.

Most of her novels reveals how traumatic experiences of childhood

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hinders the growth of an individual. She has highlighted the suppression of basic psychological survival needs of her characters which ultimately leads them suffer from a sense of identity-crisis. She has unravelled the complex realities that lie behind women's inexplicable reactions and rigidities. The characters of Anita Desai somehow loose their real life during their journey passing different phases of life. The novelist has provided distinct dimensions of identity-crisis in her works.

The very first novel of Anita Desai, *Cry, The Peacock* is a tragedy of young, sensitive, and beautiful Maya, who fails to come out of over protective shadow of her childhood. She always long for love, which becomes the root-cause of all her troubles, as her in-laws were contrary to what Maya expected them to be. They are more practical-minded people, always engrossed in their busy worlds.

For Maya, love is everything and she sees her identity, her real-self in only being loved and taken care of. When she is not loved as she wanted, Maya suffers from identity-crisis. She feels rejected by everyone close. Maya's father showed her only the sunnier aspects of life, and so she started seeing herself as a complete person only in the world of love and care.

Maya wants to keep her childhood memories always with her as her identity rests in that. She saw herself through her father's eyes, a treasure to be always looked after. But the realities were not sweet as she thought it to be. In Maya's own words:
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. From childhood experience, I knew this to be sweetly exhausting. It was exhausting still, but no longer sweetly so.\textsuperscript{17}

The love and affection what she received in childhood separates her from physical reality around her, and this creates problem in connecting with her in-laws family. She always waited for tenderness in her relationship with husband, but was left with an empty heart: Contact, relationship, communion... I let these warm, tender sensations bathe me in their lambency, soothe me till the disturbed murmurs of my agitation grew calmer, and I could step out of the painful seclusion of my feelings into an evening world where the lawn had just been trimmed, the flower beds just watered.\textsuperscript{18}

Maya is very much inclined towards nature. She could identify her feelings with the natural things around her. She felt no life in nature. Once while having a walk in the lawn, certain feelings were aroused in her:

I was drawn away from pain into a world that knew no pain. To draw as close as possible to the heart of that mystery was to draw close to its lovely solution. I bent over them, inhaling the mist of sad, maidenly scent, feeling mood merge into mood, sensation into sensation, till there was nothing left but that mist.\textsuperscript{19}

To establish her self-importance, Maya created a world around her which comprised of flowers, trees and their fragrance. She wanted

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Anita Desai, Cry, The Peacock, (New Delhi : Orient Paperbacks) 1980, P. 9.}

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid., P. 18.}

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid., P. 21.}
Gautama to share with her the thoughts on natural surroundings, but a sense of alienation she felt with him as he was not interested in all these discussions.

Maya feels neglected and unwanted, and it gives birth to the sense of insecurity and unbelongingness in her. She found herself lost in the absence of love in her life. Her conception of idealised romantic love was broken by the intellectual approach extolled by Gautama. He finds her emotions debilitating and asks her to exclude this sentimentalism from her life. For Maya, this sensitiveness of hers was the essence of its being.

Gautama's advocacy of detachment to involvement always frustrated Maya. She argues with him:

But how can you tell which facts matter? I mean, how can you dictate? On Gautama, pets mightn't mean anything to you and yet they mean the world to me.²⁰

On the death of their pet dog, Toto, Maya is broken. Being a childless woman, she was very much attached to Toto. After Toto passed way, she feels alone and used to brood over it again and again. Another dreary thought which made her life a hell, was the prediction that one of the couple would die in the fourth year of marriage in an unnatural way. This prophecy made by an albino astrologer haunted her mind throughout and descends her into hideous well of loneliness.

Lack of communication between the two was disorienting to Maya. She felt that Gautama does not care for her existence and so

condemn him for his attitude. Maya got completely exhausted, full of self-accusation and guilt for leading such a life. She looked for an escape out of this dead-end of existence; "I cried to myself—what is the use? I am alone". Slowly, she progressed on the verge of insanity out of deep sense of aloofness. She was suffering through internal pressure which suffocated her from within. Maya feels:

All order is gone out of my life, all formality. There is no plan, no peace, nothing to keep me within the pattern of familiar, everyday living and doing that becomes those whom God means to live on earth. Thoughts come, incidents occur, then they are scattered, and disappear. Past, present, future. Truth and Truth. They shuttle back and forth, a shifting chiaroscuro of light and shade; of blood and ashes. And I am tired of it.

She feels helpless and can not express her rage openly. Her aggressiveness, and frustrations are hidden and that leads her to process of self-humanizing with each passing day. She is torn by conflicting turmoil going on within and without. She could not resist anything now:

My body can no longer bear it my mind has already given way. See, I am grown thin, worn. My blouses hang on me, my rings slips off my fingers. Those are no longer my eyes, nor this my mouth. I cannot bear the heaving and wearing and pounding of the frantic tide that draws itself up to me, laps me more fiercely each day.

Maya lost her real-self completely. She is lamenting on the broken

image of Maya she knew and who was immensely blessed by the love of her father. Her glorified image was shattered and now Maya is someone who is neglected, unloved and uncared. Her real self was banished and that led to the depersonalization of herself. She feels; 'Maya- my very name means nothing, is nothing but an illusion.'

The reason for the pathetic state of Maya is that when her perception of idealised love was destructed by the intellectuality of Gautama, she feels utterly disgusted not only with the outside world, but from herself. The process of self-hate developed in Maya, that dragged her into darkness of alienation. In this shrinking process of her own personality, she was made to think that she loved Gautama all her life, but in return, got only coldness. Maya introspected; 'But how long could one stand with ones eyes shut waiting?' Gautama always considered her love as an attachment, which is deconstructive in every way. He asks her not to get too much involve with life and people.

Gautama imposed more of 'shoulds' in her life that she should follow. Maya's real self was lost in admist of all this and gave birth to severe conflicts within herself. She used to think; 'The world is like a toy specially made for me, painted in my favourite colours, set moving to my favourite tunes.' When life and things did not happen as the thought, she considered it as a failure. The reaction to defeat is anger and frustration. Her restlessness needed to explode

(24) Ibid., P. 172.
(25) Ibid., P. 182.
(26) Ibid., P. 36.
now and it did. Maya thought Gautama to be an obstacle in her quest of real-self as he always favoured the detachment from emotions. For Maya:

... the ultimate, the final vision of the final fate that had to appear now- had to appear now. I had waited too long- another day would be one too many.²⁷

Nothing was being planned in her mind. But the predication of albino astrologer and her hatred for Gautama compelled her to think that if he does not love life, then he should not live now. She started looking at the brightness of life around her now; "It revolved around me, about me, it was mine, mine, this life was mine."²⁸ Maya saw life waiting to embrace her. One evening, as usual, Gautama came and had his tea. Maya was very calm and at ease with herself, as she is usually not. Maya was so much used to his indifference, that now; '...the alienation, the strain of remaining aloof, did not hurt.'²⁹ Maya did not reacted, neither cried nor got irritated, and this was a strange behaviour for Gautama as he was used to see her in always demanding manner and complaining about life. For Maya:

It had only underlined an unawareness, a half-deadness to the living world, which helped and strengthened me by justifying my unspoken decision.³⁰

Everything was so clear before her. She felt sorry for Gautama who has lived all his life in work. Now, he should rest, so that Maya could

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²⁷ Ibid., P. 184-185.
²⁸ Ibid., P. 188.
²⁹ Ibid., P. 194.
³⁰ Ibid., P. 195.
breathe. In order to subdue her inner turmoil, she kills Gautama in a rage. Maya was then taken by her mother-in-law back to her father's place. Watching her being lost in her childhood memories and behaving like a child, Gautama's mother decides to send her into an asylum. But suddenly, Maya's life had a tragic end to it, as she was last seen jumping from her balcony in her vindicative insanity.

Maya was unable to compromise with her own notions of happiness, she rebels against passive acceptance. Her way to attain self-fulfillment might be a destructive one, but it gave a heroic stature to her character. The clash between her desire for fulfilling duties as a wife and the desire not to lose her own identity created conflicting turmoils in her life. If Maya had been made aware of the crude realities of life much earlier, she would not have suffered to such an extent. Her predicament echoed by many other protagonists in other novels. Meena Balliappa hailed Maya as a; "pioneer heroine of future female protagonists." Hypersensivity of Maya resulted in her self-alienation. Anita Desai has excellently handled the character of Maya to expose the psychological problem of a woman alone in the midst of her own people. It is a powerful exploration of a tormented psyche of a woman.

The second novel *Voices in the City* by Anita Desai talks about Monisha, a will-less passive woman being married to a prosaically dull husband, Jiban. She is unable to adjust with his family.

because of their indifferent attitude for hers. Monisha feels completely detached from everything around her. Her predicament symbolises the plight of an educated urban woman, conscious of her identity, yet restricted within traditional domestic boundaries. Her incapability in interacting with people stems from the ungratifying childhood. Monisha has been a victim of a broken home, parental indifference and familial disorder.

She sees herself as a lonely creature and with Jiban she shared; 'loneliness and a desperate urge to succeed.'\(^\text{32}\) She considers herself different to other women as she was lonely and cold, while others were not. Right from her childhood, she has been quite a silent one. Her parents got her married to Jiban, who was very much different from her thinking and attitude. Her life in the family of Jiban revolved around kitchen, washing and serving chapatis. She hated it all, but was silent. Monisha had been forced to live such a life which she never wanted. She loved privacy, but here she did not even had a room of her own. Amla, her sister was amazed to see her like this. According to Amla:

Monisha she saw as seated upright and mute in one corner, her gaze on some mysterious point as though it were a secret window opening on to darkness, gazing and gazing, with not a word to say of what she saw.\(^\text{33}\)

It seemed Monisha has no will to accept the challenges of life. Her conscience seems dead now.

\(^{32}\) Anita Desai, *Voices in the City*, (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks) 1965, P. 133.

Monisha had only wish to stay solitary to be just herself, but she is trapped in familial duties. When she is accused of theft, her hitherto glorified self is shattered, "I am willing to accept this status then, and to live here, a little beyond and below everyone else, in exile."³⁴ She used to read books and be herself, with herself in a locked room. The psychological tussle she suffers through do not allow her to breathe freely and also the fear of aggressiveness from her in-laws always haunted her. In her own words:

The family here, and their surroundings, tell me such a life cannot be lived- a life dedicated to nothing- that this husk is a protection from death. Ah yes, yes, then it is a choice between death and mean existence, and that, surely, is not a difficult choice.³⁵

Being terrified by the emotional vacuum in her life she starts feeling that her life had been a waste. She does not wish to surrender and accept the trivialities of life. She lost her faith and hope for a better life. Her pathetic condition as conceived by the novelist is very well stated here:

I grow smaller everything, shrink and lose more and more of my weight, my appurtenances, the symbols of my existence that used to establish me in the eyes of this world. I am already too small to be regarded much by anyone. I will be invisible yet.³⁶

She suffers through incapability of sharing feelings, that adds to her miseries day by day. Her self-image was crumbling down. She felt unbelonginess to the Jiban's household, which was indeed a

(34) Ibid., P. 36.
(35) Ibid., P. 122.
(36) Ibid., P. 139.
disastrous thought. She was living a detached life. She confesses:

    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 amount to non-existent, please?\textsuperscript{37}

Monisha was consciously aware of her condition, deterioratating day by day, physically as well as mentally. One moment in her life enabled her to see her real self which was disintegrating and crushing in its encounter with her glorified-self:

    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. Why do I stand here, watching and listening, unable to understand a single word or gesture, each one of which moves my companions nearly to tears?\textsuperscript{38}

Being one of the ordnances of a stage performance, Monisha could not react to anyone of its act. She was dumb, having no facial expression as others had. While watching some of rustic-dancers, in an aggressive gestures, she got afraid and felt; "that a glance of those enormous and brilliant black eyes would dissolve and disintegrate her into a meaningless shadow."\textsuperscript{39} She saw her real self was flashing in the eyes of dancer. She wanted to kill her, but could not. Her self-hate proved self-destructive. She commits suicide out of her failure of experiencing life. Monisha refused to live the ordinariness of life. Leading a monotonous life with an absence of any kind of creative activity, and

\textsuperscript{(37) Ibid., P. 140.}
\textsuperscript{(38) Ibid., P. 240.}
\textsuperscript{(39) Ibid., P. 237.}
in Monisha's words:

Is this what life is then, my life? Only a conundrum that I shall
brood over forever with passion and pain, never to arrive at a
solution? Only a conundrum– is that, then, life?40

The frustration of doing nothing behind mundane household chores
leads to her tragic end. If Monisha had shown guts in speaking her
mind out, then life would have been quite different for her.

The next novel of Anita Desai, *Bye-Bye Blackbird* pervert
socio-communal biases making an individual life not less than a
hell. Here an English girl Sarah, out of love gets married to a
brown-skinned Indian Adit settled in England. Life for woman is not
the same after marriage, as then she got to adjust with new people
and surroundings. For Sarah, it became more difficult because of their
diverse cultural backgrounds. Yet she tries her best to match up with
Adit’s Indian style. In admist of all this, she loses her own self. Her
reticence is now transformed into loneliness.

Her bewilderment and frustration is the outcome of her
cross-cultural marriage. She dwindles now between two roles, to be
the real Sarah, or Mrs. Sen, Adit’s wife. She is a working lady. Her
colleagues too took perverse delight in putting up questions about her
husband that embarrasses her. As:

...to display her letters from India, to discuss her Indian husband,
would have forced her to parade like an imposter, to make claims
to a life, an identity that she did not herself feel to be her own.41


(41) *Anita Desai, Bye-Bye Blackbird*, (New Delhi, Orient Paperbacks) 1985,
P.37.
Sarah feels reluctant to talk about her confusions, as she feels homeless even in her own country like a stranger at her native place and among her own people. Neither she could fully adjust into husband's culture, nor she can adapt herself to her own place. She shows will to follow Indian culture, but found it difficult to assimilate.

Sarah's real self was lost in the strains of her inter-racial marriage. Her identity got vassillated between her public and private selves. She faces identity-crisis in the effort to connect her two selves, which she could not. Her bewilderment was perceptible in her routine life too. Going for shopping, she opts to go to big stores where no one can recognize her. Her hesitation is well explicated by the novelist here:

...inside the sparkling halls of the super market where walls of soap and cornflakes hid her from stranger's eyes, she could be as eccentric, as individual she could be as eccentric, as individual as she pleased without being noticed by even a mouse.42

She just want to run away from public places so that none could stop and starts questioning about her being married to an Indian. She tried to accommodate with the present situation. And then:

She walked out into the soft, muzzling rain with her packages, reassured to find herself an unidentifiable, unnoticed and therefore free person again.43

Sarah becomes a victim of major identity-crisis, as it is clear from the above and previous mentioned instances from the novel. She is fed up

(42) Ibid., P. 39.
(43) Ibid., P. 39.
of putting on faces, and the questions of her real belonging now nags her.

Sarah is extremely troubled at the fear of losing her own existence. Even Adit once felt:

An anguish, it seemed to him, of loneliness and it became absurd to call her by his own name to call her by any name: She had become nameless, she had shed her ancestry and identity and she sat there staring, as thought she watched them disappear.\(^\text{44}\)

She suffers from loss of identity because of her internalised cultural conditioning which do not allow her to be at her own. She is stuck with duality and uncertainties that led her to the state of self-alienation.

The character of Sarah appears before the readers as a woman being entrapped within socio-cultural milieu, loosing her own definite identity and then suffering loneliness. Her conjugal life was not bitter, but it fragmented her inner psyche and made her to face the hollowness of life. Sarah becomes well aware of the absence of her real self in her visible presence:

who was she—Mrs. Sen who had been married in a red and gold banaras brocade sari one burning, bronzed day in September, or Mrs. Sen, the Head’s Secretary, who sent out the bills and took in the cheques, 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.\(^\text{45}\)

\(^{44}\) Ibid., P. 31.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., P. 34.
Sarah performs all her duties with all sincerity, as a wife and as Head's secretary. But she lost her happiness and remained an alien in the familial as well as social circle. To save her marriage, she had to be a considerate wife and professionally, she had to give her best. But for Sarah:

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? Staring out of the window at the chimney pots and the clouds, she wondered if Sarah had any existence at all, and then she wondered, with great sadness, if she would ever be allowed to step off the stage, leave the theatre and enter the real world- whether English or Indian, she did not care, she wanted only its sincerity, its truth.46

The problem of Sarah is very much human. She is entangled within the web of cultural clashes loosing her own identity in the midst of it. Her sense of loneliness is very much different from other female characters portrayed by Anita Desai.

Solitariness has been a part of nature in most of them, but in Sarah's case it is deliberately chosen by her by having an inter-racial marriage, which eventually created a drift and distance with her own native people and even parents of hers. Sarah is an efficient working lady, a supportive colleague, a caring wife, and a good host to Adit's friends. She tries her best to assimilate herself to Indian style of living and thinking, but is unable to strike a balance between her inner and outer selves.

(46) Ibid., P. 35.
Sarah suffers from Schizophrenia which alienates her from everyone around. Her two selves gets intermingled:

if only she were allowed to keep her one role apart from the other, one play from the other, she would not feel so cut and slashed into living, bleeding pieces. Apart, apart. The enviable, cool, clear, quiet state of apartness.⁴⁷

The conditions around her were such that dragged her into the piteous state of identity-loss. She is made to jettisoned all her past associations and relations, even her due promotion for the sake of saving her marriage, as suddenly one day, Adit being nostalgic about his home town, decided to leave England forever. Sarah agreed and sacrificed her dreams and desires for Adit.

Sarah opts withdrawl from her native place and got ready to move with Adit to India in the hope of getting her real self, whatever it may be. Sarah's sense of individuality is crushed at the hands of socio-familial ties which do not allowed a woman, Sarah to be her real self. Her identity was annihilated at the altar of marriage. Leaving all her memories behind and to face new challenges of life, she leaves England. At the time of departure:

Her body, with its rules and wants, kept slipping out of her own hold, acting strangely and irresponsibly, shrinking and threatening to disappear. Even the smile she felt lingering behind in the English fog was strained smile, slipping- like her mind- from a brightly tinted dream into a shadowy, opaque nightmare, and back again.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid., P. 37.
⁴⁸ Ibid., P. 226.
Sarah saw her survival now in withdrawing from her native land. The fact remains that Sarah is a creature shuffling between her real self which was lost, and her projected self that was the wife of a brown-skinned Indian. She knew:

It was her English self that was receding and fading and dying, she knew, it was her English self to which she must say goodbye.49

Sarah sacrificed her belongingness, parents, and identity for the sake of her husband. Her identity was crushed and lost in being Mrs. Sen. She, like a typical wife immolate anything to save her marriage which demanded the submission of her real-self. One wonders whether she would be able to meet her real self in a new atmosphere, which may be hostile to her...? If she achieves inner stability which is prerequisite for belonging, then may be she is at peace.

Anita Desai had beautifully expressed the dilemma of Sarah, a victim of identity crisis at the cost of her marriage. She left her parents, home, job and motherland for Adit, but what she got in return...? a nameless existence or yet another sacrifice from her. This is the predicament of millions of women living all over, who lost their real-selves, under the imposed shadow of relations, customs and society. Their sense of individuality is crushed and they get loneliness. One could feel the pangs of Sarah with all its anxieties and apprehensions and also the beginning of a quest of her real self at Adit's place. The phrase 'Every dark cloud has a silver living', is true

(49) Ibid., P. 221.
in her case, as Anita Desai has shown that crisis faced by Sarah is not irreducible. She hopes to find her ownself with constructive thoughts in her mind and also with the wiseful support of Adit.

The character of Sarah is considered by Meenakshi Mukherjee, the most successful one of all characters. The psyche of Sarah is explicitly revealed by the skilled novelist. The fragmented psyche of a woman splitted within two incompatible culture is aestethically carved out within the framework of the novel.

Another novel Where Shall We Go This Summer? revolves around the character of Sita and her feelings of boredom and experience of meaningless existence. Being a motherless child, Sita was deprived of love and affection. After the demise of her father she got married to Raman, a prosperous businessman. He was the son of one of the closest acquaintances of Sita's father. So, out of obligation he decided to give Sita social as well as psychological security. Raman was too much engrossed in his work that hardly he could give time to her. She becomes emotional deprived and frustrated about her routine life. Though she is a mother of four and was pregnant again, yet she had not experience the real maternal satisfaction and happiness.

Relationships were mechanical to her and people in Sita's words; "They are nothing- nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matter. Animals."\(^50\) The temperaments of Sita and

\(^{50}\) Anita Desai, Where Shall We Go This Summer? (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks), 1982. P. 47.
Raman are poles apart. Where on one hand, the arrival of visitors and guests gives him pleasure, it causes pain to Sita. She is disgusted with everyone around her and blamed them for being materialistic. Even when she was with her in-laws, there also, out of her aloofness and irritation:

She behaved provocatively—it was there that she started smoking, a thing that had never been done in their household by any woman and even by men only in secret— and being to speak in sudden rushes of emotion, as though flinging darts at their smooth, unscarred faces.\(^{51}\)

Sita is disillusioned by her perception of trivial context of life. Her inner conflict takes the form of two opposite forces clashing between conformity and rebellion. Her heart is filled with intangible longings but do not know where to go.

Sita craved for love and tenderness in and around her life, but could not find. The emotional crisis she suffers through is the root cause of her miserable existence. Sita; '...was turned a living monument to waiting.'\(^{52}\) She behaved like a wanderer in search of affection and love, but the emotional vaccum blocks her possibility for spontaneity. Being nostalgic about her past also troubles her married life. She wants to escape to Manon' island, where she spend her childhood. She is disgusted at the humdrum of life in Bombay. On her pregnancy, she felt:

\(^{51}\) Ibid., P. 48.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., P. 55.
More and more she lost all feminine, all maternal belief in childbirth, all faith in it, and began to fear it as yet one more act of violence and murder in a world that had more of them in it than she could take.\(^{53}\)

Sita got panicky on her fifth pregnancy. She did not wanted to pass her loneliness to her unborn child as according to her love holds no place in the lives of people. People do not value attachments nay more.

Sita's children were more attached to Raman, which also made her feel more alienated. Her attitude, gestures, and dull appearance substantiates her whimsical approach. Her endless smoking presents a gloomy picture of her before children and Raman. Yet no one tried to understand her frustration that made her do all this. If no one cared, them what was she...? Why she exist...? Such questions tormented her psyche. She feels:

\[
\text{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.}\(^{54}\)
\]

Sita is unable to identify her own self. She finds it difficult to relate herself with the surroundings. She had not been able to acquire the competencies required for a healthy interaction in marriage, parenthood and socialising. Little incidents of life disturbs her inwardly. A sense of insecurity encompassed her life and she is torn within. The novelist has introspectively stated Sita's confused psyche

\(^{(53)}\) Ibid., P. 56.

\(^{(54)}\) Ibid., P. 153.
in these words; "How could she tell, how decide? Which half of her life was real and which unreal? Which of her selves was true, which false." She could not find any meaning of her existence. Even when she comes to manori, she is surrounded by sense of pain and loneliness. When Raman comes over there to take children back home, she says to him; 'Perhaps I am only like the jellyfish washed up by the waves, stranded there on the sand-bar.' A life without any form and definite identity. Sita thinks her life as a shapeless existence. Sita had been inclined towards art not science, as once she was trying to explain Menaka about art, knowing that her daughter has no interest in her talks. Sita’s daughter, Menaka aspire to become a scientist, whereas Sita expresses her repressive desire in this way:

...if only I could paint, or sing, or play the Sitar well, really well, I should have grown into a sensible woman. Instead of being what I am... I should have known how to channel my thoughts and feelings, how to put them to use. I should have given my life some shape then, some meaning. At least, it would have had some for me- even if no one else had cared.

It indicates that Sita is not a will-less person. She thought of art as an outlet for all her feelings and desires. But she did not possessed the talent to do so. This shows her positive attitude, may be for a temporal time.

Sita’s problems gives a panoramic view of absurdity of human condition. The disparity between thinking and action, unusual

(55) Ibid., P. 153.
(56) Ibid., P. 149.
(57) Ibid., P. 117.
childhood has affected her psyche to the extent that made her loose all the faith in goodness and relations. The core of Sita's existential dilemma is best expressed in Becker's lines, which says; 'The most difficult realization for man is the possibility that life has no meaning.'  

58 In brief, Sita's character exhibits this very problem which results in her querulous behaviour that made hers and family lives miserable. Her rebellious attitude towards the vegetable existence and her own fury frightens her. The feeling of unbecomingness simultaneously leads to her loss of identity.

Sita is a depressed creature, but the saving grace of her being is that she possessed a will to live. Instead, she felt; 'Life had no periods, no stretches. It simply swirled around, muddling and confusing, leading no-where.'  

59 After so much anguish, pain and intra-psychic conflict she compromises with life. She accepted the life as it is, as she had no other option.

Sita's character unravels the hidden mystery of life that it is better to face the challenges of life boldly rather than running from it. In this sense, her character appears most real and identifiable. Sita accepts the reality with all its boredom and hypocrisy. Anita Desai here brings home the point that it is better to learn through experience, rather than refusing reality. She realizes that escapism adds to one's misery instead of lending answers to life's problems. As


(59) Anita Desai, Where Shall We Go This Summer? (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks), 1982. P. 155.
suggested by Alan W. Watt; "Waiting to get out of pain is pain. When you discover this, the desire to escape "merges" in the pain itself and vanishes." Sita found it safer to go back to the accepted norms and laws of society. Her refusal to lead a life of chaos made her shift to Manori and the realization that untroubled existence is just an illusion pushes her back to reality which she avoided.

Anita Desai's highly acclaimed novel, *Fire On the Mountain* explores distinct facets of identity crisis in the form of solitude through her female characters. The centre stage has been occupied by Nanda Kaul, female protagonist of the novel. Having discharged all her duties unfailingly, as a wife and a mother, she now wishes to withdraw herself from the embittered domesticity to the solitary place at Carignano in Kasauli. She appears as a woman whose emotions and feelings have never been given importance. Her husband and children never had the time to share her thoughts. She is forcibly withdrawn into a shell of her own. With her lips sealed; "She groaned with self-pity and pain, certain that she was alone and no one would hear." Nanda Kaul was deprived of a meaningful existence. She was used as a necessity to meet the demands of her family.

As a wife, she provided sexual gratification to her husband Mr. Kaul who had a life-long affair with another woman. As a mother, she looked after the children, who, after settling down compelled their mother to move to Carignano. She was lonely at heart, mind and spirit.


No one understood her desire to be respected and valued for what she is. The acquaintances of her husband eyed her with admiration and used to say that; "Vice-chancellor is lucky to have a wife who can run everything as she does."\(^{62}\) The pain hidden behind the surface artificial smile was unknown to all.

Playing the gracious hostess all the time and then becoming mother, grandmother and great grandmother of many unwanted children. There had been no privacy left for her. She reminisces:

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. Its crowding had stifled her.\(^{63}\)

Lots of guests to entertain, lots of children to look after, lots of servants to give instructions to and Nanda Kaul is a lonely creature in this crowd. In her case; "She had suffered from the nimity, the disorder, the fluctuating and unpredictable excess."\(^{64}\) In this busy world, she lost herself. She got so much engrossed in the liabilities of a housewife that it turns her into a frustrating creature. Despite knowing her husband's illicit relationship with other woman, she kept the congealed smile on her face. As a matter of fact; "Mentally, she stalked through the rooms of that house— his house, never hers"\(^{65}\). Nanda Kaul was utterly disappointed with her life, and it produced the feeling of detachment in her from everyone around. She began to see self-fulfillment in

\(^{62}\) Ibid., P. 18.
\(^{63}\) Ibid., P. 29.
\(^{64}\) Ibid., P. 30.
\(^{65}\) Ibid., P. 18.
seclusion. Now:

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.66

She preferred solitude not because she wished for it but to rest her tormented psyche and fragmented identity. She wanted to stay away from all the harshness of outside world and allowed no one to intrude again in her life. In a puzzled mood, she asks herself:

Have I not done enough and had enough? I want no more. I want nothing. Can I not be left with nothing? But there was no answer and of course she expected none.67

Nanda Kaul was reduced to a state of loneliness. She felt rejection at the hands of her family and the most from her husband. After his demise, she had to leave for Carignano. Her emotional coldness is deliberately cultivated by her to show the world that now she is a detached creature without any felling.

But her secluded life at Carignano is interrupted by the arrival of her great granddaughter Raka. She resents Raka's coming because her intrusion will awake all the past memories of family and responsibilities which Nanda Kaul wishes to forget. Nanda Kaul considers her aloofness as; "a moment of private triumph, cold and proud."68 The fact is that she is never proud or felt as a winner because she is forced to embrace her solitude, which is

(66) Ibid., P. 17.
(67) Ibid., P. 17.
(68) Ibid., P. 26.
a kind of escape from the bitter realities of life. She feels a release from bondage of responsibilities.

Looking after Raka was a repetition of all those fruitless deeds she performed all her life. The ice between the two is never broken and again the fear of neglection by Raka makes her restless. Nanda Kaul is a resigned individual who gets attracted by Raka's nature inclined inclination for solitariness. From Raka she feels an urge to get care and love she waited all her life. But she is left with an empty heart.

Nanda Kaul also told false tales of her happy married life to Raka, but that was of no interest to her. The reality was that she was a woman unloved, discarded and rejected all her life. Always in the hubbub of a busy social whirl, she lost herself. Another intruder in her life at Carignano is Ila Das, a college friend of Nanda Kaul. She tries to avoid Ila every now and then and suddenly, the news of her tragic death shatters Nanda's inner world. The shock breaks her faith in life and she could not bear the pain and dies. Nanda's life was silently annihilated by the traumatic experiences she comes across. Her unsuccessful venture to live in solitude ultimately ended in a crisis.

Another character suffering from neglection is Raka, Nanda Kaul's great-granddaughter. She is a victimized child of a broken home. She is a uncared daughter of a drunkard father and suffering mother. She is deprived of a healthy familial childhood. She becomes alienated from everything around her as a result of indifferent parental attitude. She holds no faith in the goodness of life. She therefore needs
no one to accompany her. She loved her solitariness. In a way, Raka rejected the care offered to her by Nanda Kaul. In fact:

She was the only child Nanda Kaul had ever known who preferred to stand apart and go off and disappear to being loved, cared for and made the centre of attention.\(^{69}\)

The bitterness and violence which Raka had experience in her parents makes her a recluse. Raka is not a simple child and she does not possess any innocence now. Her childhood is shattered by the traumas and pain she saw in her home.

The identity of child lies in its innocence which Raka has lost. Anita Desai has excelled in creating such character in the frame work of her fiction. Raka is used to alienation and enjoys that. The novelist have beautifully drawn her state of mind in these words:

Watching her wandering amongst the rocks and agaves of the ravine, losing a horse chestnut rhythmically from hand to hand, Nanda Kaul wondered if she at all realized how solitary she was.\(^{70}\)

Raka did not care whether her parents wants to see her or not. She was least interested in having an emotional interaction with anyone. Her ungratifying childhood experience has taken away all her happiness. She is a dark gloomy embodiment of privations. She found it better to be in the company of rocks and thorny bushes rather than people.

Raka neither demands nor asks for anything as any normal child would do. In both the mentioned characters, Anita Desai has

\(^{(69)}\) Ibid., P. 79-80.

\(^{(70)}\) Ibid., P. 79.
shown distinct aspects of alienation as a result of loss of identity:

If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, her great-granddaughter 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.\(^{71}\)

Raka is a product of a crushed personality. She seeks refuge among the mountains and in her solitary rambles. Her rebellious attitude asserts itself with a cataclysmic force when she sets forest on fire. In Raka’s own words; "I’m shipwrecked and alone."\(^{72}\) Raka gave voice to the silent bursting of Nanda’s self and set the hill-side to fire. She fights against the set norms and shows her disapproval of accepting the general rules. Raka is a solitary creature, a rebel and even a victim.

Another female character to mention would be Ila Das, Nanda Kaul’s friend. She is discharging her duties efficiently as a welfare officer. In a meeting with Nanda, She says; "I am always alone. I am never afraid"\(^{73}\). Her identity is crushed at the hands of male, as she was brutally raped and murdered by one of the villager only because she tried to stop the marriage of his underage daughter. She meets a tragic death and bear such terrible consequence; "Crushed back, crushed down into the earth, she lay raped, broken, still and finished."\(^{74}\) Ila Das appears a pathetic figure to the readers. She tried to live life but was suppressed in a brutal manner.

Anita Desai, through these three different female characters

\(^{71}\) Ibid., P. 48.
\(^{72}\) Ibid., P. 61-62.
\(^{73}\) Ibid., P. 138.
\(^{74}\) Ibid., P. 143.
explored their distinct psyche and facts of experiences. They all suffered from loss of identity in their own way. As perceived by a noted critic; "Nanda suffers from the psychological shock of rape and feels, like Ila Das, that her womanhood too is defiled and selfhood insulted." The plight of two different women has been explicitly drawn by the novelist to unveil their anguish and pain. They both suffered at the hands of patriarchal system. As stated by critic:

Ila’s rape enhances Nanda’s sense of guilt as Nanda could have helped Ila but did not. The shocking realisation that she had become a party to the oppression of woman by her indifference and selfishness overwhelm her and Nanda Dies under the weight of her guilt.

As Nanda herself was suffering from alienation and rejection, she did not showed any welcome or happiness when Ila came to meet her. She offered her nothing. Nanda feels guilty and thinks that if she were a little concerned to Ila then she might had stayed with her and the tragedy would have been avoided. But the harsh reality took their lives away. Mentioned above three characters are victims of misfortune, social inequities and injustices done by patriarchal system.

Anita Desai excels in portraying their oppressions and suffering of loneliness, solitude and alienation. If their respective identities were not suppressed, their stories would have been different. Little ray of hope appears in the end of the novel in the form of Raka


(76) Ibid., P. 67.
who indicates revolt of new feminine sensibility against bestial, cruel male-dominated world.

The next novel, Clear Light of Day, highlights the fact that proper understanding of real self and a deliberate effort on the part of individual can lead to self-fulfilment. The importance of time in one's life has been given primary importance in the novel. Here one witnesses the transition of self in the character of Bim, the female protagonist of the novel. She keeps on dwindling between alienation and affirmation, losing her own self in the admist of it but finally achieves wholeness through conscious effort.

Bim is an aging spinster, rotting in a decadent old house, looking after her mentally retarded brother. She does not like to brood on past and preferred closing all chapters of childhood and considered them as periods of; "dullness, boredom and waiting". Her concept of glorified self-image in that of an achiever in life against all odds. The character of Bim emerges before readers as an instance of Anita Desai's conceptualization of new woman of the contemporary society. She desired to be emotionally and economically independent as she considers that dependence makes one weak and submissive. She was made to opt for such role as she had to look after her family. Her brother, Raja, deserted her faith and ran away from all responsibilities and got married to Nawab's daughter for the sake of her property.

Raja's shunning all the liabilities of the family makes Bim angry and frustrated. She sacrificed her desires for the sake of family

and when the time came for Raja to take over, he runs away, which burdened her beyond redemption. She resents everything around her and stops all interaction with the outer world. Consequently, she finds herself surrounded by loneliness. Her sacrifice was not valued and her care had been taken granted for. Bim is utterly confused about what she really wants. She says to Tara:

How my students would laugh at me. I'm always trying to teach them, ...to be a new kind of woman from you or me- and if they knew how badly handicapped I still am, how I myself haven't been able to manage on my own- they'd laugh, wouldn't they?

They'd despise me.\(^\text{78}\)

Sometimes she just wishes to run away from everything. She finds loneliness hovering upon her. Bim is shattered by Raja's inclination and desperation for materialistic things. She keeps on stifling her own emotional needs. As Tara observes her now that; "She's simply lost all control', 'So angry and unhappy and upset".\(^\text{79}\) It was all because of the festering break with Raja. A kind of hostile behaviour is generated in Bim. She is moving on to the path of self-destruction. In the due course, she also turn down the marriage proposal of Dr. Biswas, on which he says:

Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated your life to others- to your sick brother and your aged aunt and your little brother who will be dependent on you all his life. You have sacrificed your own life for them.\(^\text{80}\)

\(^\text{78}\) Ibid., P. 155.
\(^\text{79}\) Ibid., P. 158.
\(^\text{80}\) Ibid., P. 97.
Bim was living a will-less existence. Gradually, her perception undergoes a change and she feels liberated from her confused predicament. Her character appears more balanced in the sense that with the passage of time she understands the importance of human relationships. She sacrificed her own life for the sake of family, so now all she wanted was to bring all members together.

Bim also forgives Raja and asks Tara to send him a message to come and see her. One see her journey from darkness to light, from self-alienation to self-realization. The novelist has explicitly drawn Bim’s emotions in these words:

...she saw how she loved him, loved Raja and Tara and all of them who had lived in this house with her. There could be no love more deep and full and wide than this one, she knew... They were really parts of her, inseparable, so many aspects of her as she was of them, so that the anger or the disappointment she felt in them was only the anger and disappointment she felt at herself. Whatever hurt they felt, she felt. Whatever diminished them, diminished her. What attacked them, attacked her. Nor was there anyone else on earth who she was willing to forgive more readily or completely or defend more instinctively and instantly.81

The feeling of love invested her life with delight and she became a more relaxed and tolerant person. She rises above personal biases and asserted an objective understanding regarding life and relations.

Here Anita Desai has not stressed upon marriage of a woman as a contributory factor in her self-fulfilment. Bim realised that she has

(81) Ibid., P. 165.
to give self-less love in order to gain her sense of security and peace.

The character of Bim helps in substantiating the humanistic belief that an individual's active participation is important in constructing a world of its own. Sometimes one has to find own self within the context of familial relationships.

The other novel to focus on another aspect of identity-crisis is *Fasting, Feasting*. Here Uma, the female protagonist of the novel had to suffer and accept humiliations without making any resistance. She is neither assertive nor demanding, neither a psychic case nor a rebel. She is a human being whose feelings and existence is crushed within the framework of familial context. Uma is deprived of proper education and so is totally dependent on her family. Everything in life goes wrong for her. Her dull appearance makes her suffer from inferiority complex. She even faces a disastrous experience of marriage and life turns more worse for her.

Uma is living a non-existent life. She even has fits problem. She also develops problem in her eyes but she is not paid attention. Sometimes she used to think; *'A Career. Leaving home. Living alone. These troubling secret possibilities now entered Uma's mind'.* But she was too domesticised and caged to fly away. She suffers throughout from the pangs of loneliness. One of the acquaintances of the family, Dr. Dutt approaches Uma with a job so that she could make something out of her life. But her parents refused and did not allow her to pursue a career.

Uma's identity, her existence was completely crushed at the altar of family which left no stone unturned in suppressing her individuality. Anita Desai has added a different dimension of identity crisis suffered by a woman in a patriarchal framework. Another character to mention would be Anamika, a brilliant student who won a scholarship to Oxford University. But her identity was not allowed to blossom as her parents decided to get her married. They did not allowed their bright daughter to stand at her own. All her medals, scholarship, distinction fell flat after her marriage. She was regularly beaten up by her mother-in-law. She became an isolated, lonesome woman without any kind of support from her husband. Finally, she meets a tragic end and dies. Here one feels constant urge of woman to have their own individuality.

The constant denial of an independent life to the fair sex by their families is shown here by the novelist. Her life has been put in disgrace. A woman's right to live has been snatched by her own people. She has been kept engaged in household work with no life of her own and always subjected at male-domination. Women's identity is crushed and thwarted by the traditional patriarchal scenario. Even if female characters are aware here of the injustice done to them, they do not have the guts to speak their minds. The novel highlights the hypocrisy of educated families who do not allow their daughter to pursue a career and make a life of their own. If the mentioned two women, Uma and Anamika had been given opportunities to breathe in their own space, life would have been
much different for them.

The next novel to deal with the theme of quest for individuality is *Journey to Ithaca*. Laila, the female protagonist of the novel appears as a questing figure, quite different from what Anita Desai had been portraying till now. Right from her childhood, she had been a headstrong girl. She aspired to achieve something beyond ordinary comprehension. She hated bookish knowledge and scorned materialistic life. Her aspirations is revealed in these words; 'I want— I want to dance... Not sit here, reading, reading, reading'. The four walls of the house was a prison for her and she wanted to get out of it. She saw her freedom in dancing and expressing herself. Laila was then sent for further academics to Paris. But she was not happy at all as according to her the time came to realize her real self and to do what her conscience says.

She behaves very badly at her Aunt's house out of her desperation to escape from materialistic pursuits of life. Then, she abandoned her French studies and was seen sway and twirl around in her nightgown in the bedroom. That gave her sense of happiness. She felt her real self was being crushed in the worldly affairs. Laila's dwindling and shuttling between faith and doubt came to an end when she got an opportunity to watch a Krishna Lila performance. She was thrilled and felt ecstatic joy while the show was going on. She wanted to rush up to stage and dance with the dance


(127)
troupe. As; 'This, she knew, was what she had sought so long and missed'. Laila expressed her wish to join the dance troupe. The male dancer who performed the role of Krishna was not ready to take her until Laila's parents give him permission. She convinced him to talk to her aunt and he agreed to do so.

He tried to explain the talent possibilities Laila had and also the importance of Indian dance for spiritual attainment what Laila aspired for. But Aunt was not ready to send her. Now Laila used to spend most of her time in reading Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*, *Bhagavad Gita* and Tagore's *Gitanjali*, which all had some reference to Krishna and Radha. She had sleepless nights, paying no attention to her health.

Laila's cousins were scared at such behaviour of hers. She used to narrate them strange stories and otherwise remain silent. They used to watch her performing gestures and posing in the room. At one such instance:

Whey they hissed at her in fright, she jumped into her bed and pulled the covers over her head. Next morning she claimed to have no memory of the incident.\(^{(85)}\)

This kind of behaviour in the outcome of suppression of her desires. She was not allowed to do what she always wanted. Suddenly, one fine day she got to meet Krishna and the whole troop again. For the time being, she moved and then stayed with them in Venice. Laila used to watch their rehearsals and copied them exactly. Then Krishna


asked one of the female lead dancers to make Laila learn those dances. Krishna himself performed with her and helped her in learning steps. Their developed an amorous relationship between the two. All the female dancers envied Laila for being so close to Krishna.

While giving performances, she began to realise that the dances has nothing to do with spirituality which she wanted to attain. Dancing took the form of profession and a source of financial profits. Laila got tired of performing like a puppet with no inner satisfaction. Laila becomes a sufferer of obsession neurosis where one's intense desire dominates the consciousness and causes great pain and anguish if not gratified. She felt uneasy as her mind and heart were disturbed and those repressed inner urges drags her to the stage of melancholic depression. He says to Krishna; 'You know the thing that is wrong. These headaches- I cannot sleep'.\(^{86}\) While giving another performance, she broke down at the stage.

Then she came out at the street and reached the railway station. Feeling scared that anyone could caught her there, she started appealing a person there to give her some work. The man was amazed and said that how can it is possible as she was a dancer. Laila replied; 'No dancer, no artist. I am alone. I need work'.\(^{87}\) The man tried to make her sit and offered her some ice-cream. Then again took her back to Krishna who eventually agreed to leave for India with Laila. Then Laila fell sick and then tries to initiates her spiritual quest asking

\(^{(86)}\) Ibid., P. 264.
\(^{(87)}\) Ibid., P. 267.
God:

O Lord what have I done that I am cast out without refuge or haven? An I to perish alone in the darkness? Why this punishment, Lord? \(^{88}\)

She longs for a serene atmosphere. The world seems to her a disgusting place to live in. She could not breathe in such polluted environment. She asks forgiveness from God for her indulgence in materialistic affairs.

She was sinking day by day. She confesses; "Till I find the Supreme Being, my own being remains unfulfilled and incomplete". \(^{89}\)

She urges almighty to lead her out of the world of delusion and take her in to the paradise of devotion and love. Krishna again asks her to get ready for a tour of South. But how Laila was reluctant to do anything which her soul did not allowed. Vijaya, one of the female dancers of the group helped Laila to get out of all this and advised her to move to an Ashram in Himalayas.

India, for Laila was a land of eternity and a place where she can seek its bliss. She reaches near the mountains with Vijaya's family. At night, watching an evening star, she felt an ecstasy within heart and began to dance with delight. Then she returned to the small crowded room where all were staying. There she did all her packing and moved on to the temple situated near the riverside. She feels; "The river flows and carries my past away and leaves me pure and joyous

\(^{88}\) Ibid., P. 289.

\(^{89}\) Ibid., P. 289.
as the new-born, fit to meet with the divine.\textsuperscript{90} At the temple, she offered flowers to the feet of some Sage seated upon a carpet and seeked his blessings. She obediently sat before him and listened to his voice which appeared to her more sweeter than the ringing of bells; 'He spoke of Divine Love and love filled my every limb with its nectar and I was Radha who beheld, at last, the true Krishna'.\textsuperscript{91} Without stirring, she remained there whole day even after the Sage left. She stayed alone in the temple. Thundering started leading to rain which made her little scared.

She was completely drenched. Suddenly, she felt the presence of that Divine power before her:

Seeing Him, I cried: O, you have come to save me! He said no word but placed his arm about my shoulders and, drawing me to him, led me out.\textsuperscript{92}

They together, crossed the courtyard and moved to his ashram. After reaching there, she utters:

Here I dwell now where I was always meant to dwell and where I resolve to live, never leaving this side, His true Devotee and Lover.\textsuperscript{93}

She rose above earthly pains, sorrows and desires. She was able to differentiate between Krishna, the dancer who took her into the world of materialism and Krishna, the Lord, who showed the path of divinity and enlightenment.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., P. 300.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., P. 300.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., P. 302.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., P. 302.
The quest of Laila portrayed by the novelist reflects the predicament of modern man caught in the web of utilitarianism and materialistic affairs. The entanglement of human beings in the contemporariness of life shuffling between 'what is' and 'what ought to be' has been explicitly projected by Anita Desai through her characters. It deals with the reasons of fragmented personality and minds and also offers a solution and way to recover the integrated being. The realisation of wholeness comes spontaneously to one when he/she is able to understand the process of self-construction.

This novel deals with the theme of spiritual reawakening through the character of Laila, who is a quester all her life and ultimately realises her way to attainment of bliss and faith. Anita Desai has emphasised on the need for assertion and insisted on the flexibility of perceptions with the situations and time. She has laid importance on the individual activity and his/her interaction with the society as a pre-requisite for recognizing the empathy between self and the world.

Anita Desai, in her novels, has not rejected present to glorify past or to plan for future. Instead she has stressed the need to make one's present existence meaningful. She has explored various dimensions related to identity-crisis in her novels. Probing on the question of individuality, she has unveiled a world where:

The bedrock is no longer made up of the old orthodoxies of religion, caste and family; everywhere, there are fissures, explosions, shatterings.  

(94) Anita Desai, "Indian Fiction Today", Daedalus, Fall, 1989, P. 208.
The conflict between inner demands and outer-realities creates problem in maintaining one's own identity. Non-verbal communication and lack of proper understanding between the individual and people around is responsible for major identity-crisis.

The framework of Anita Desai's novels offers a wide spectrum and formulation of human predicament of contemporary age. She has delineated aesthetically the problem of inaccessibility of the individuals of the modern social scenario. The novelist's characters are consciously and unconsciously concerned to pursue a particular identity of their own. The tragedy in their lives stems from the inability to reconcile their ambivalent feelings with compromising situations of life. Their intra-psychic forces gives birth to existentialist problems. Such characters, then, feels alienated when their demands are not understood by others. Feelings of detachment emerges and the person starts living in an ivory tower created by ownself. Characters "should" be as they visualise themselves to be. This 'should' start making claim on them.

Such claims are difficult to live upto. Anita Desai has excelled in elaborating the conflicts one goes thorough in his/her quest for fulfilment. Their tensions, tribulations, feeling of aloofness and solitude are perfectly woven into the world of her novels and the stage of identity-crisis has been offered distinct dimensions by the novelist.