Through these women, the novelist has raised questions on the status of women in contemporary society. Where marital, filial, social and communal relationships have almost lost their true sense there women are fated to live stunted lives. The title of the novel, *The Fire on the Mountain* is suggestive of the revolt of the new generation of women against the harsh, cruel, man-dominated world. Raka is the symbol of this new generation.

It is interesting here to note that while readers may tend to finalize the narrative by assuming the death of the protagonist, the author herself has denied closure and has left the text open to a plurality of the future possibilities. Nanda’s death and Ila’s rape-murder shows “the process of disintegration, social, economic, political, emotional, psychological, ethical, spiritual disintegration of woman suffers in a male-dominated society” (Pandey 22). If Nanda is not dead, there may yet be a chance for her to recover something from the ashes of the burnt out landscape of re-imagining, re-presenting, re-inscribing that space in a new configuration. Raka’s act of setting fire to the forest is symbolic of her revolt against the cruelty and violence of the revolt of the new generation of woman against the harsh, cruel man-dominated world. Raka is the symbol of this new generation.
The emergence of Indian women writers in the late nineteenth century draws the attention of the world towards Indian literature in English. At that time, women writers gave a realistic picture of India portraying its poverty, squalor and oppression of the human suffering ensuing from the evils of an unjust social system. They mainly focused on physical and psychological sufferings of the woman characters in different stages, their identity in the family and also in the society. Generally their themes were based on the women’s point of view. Women’s marginalization, insecurity and segregation have been effectively depicted by women writers in the Indo-Anglican tradition.

The woman is never allowed to be a subject in her own right. They have always been the object of male subjectivity. Kate Millett points out that “Patriarchy has already been established and the male has already set himself as the human norm, the subject and referent to which the female is ‘other’ or alien” (46). Women in the male-centered fiction are often portrayed in terms of the popularly available stereotypes of the suffering mother, the restive wife or the shrewish mistress and an easily dispensable appendage. Writers like Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai portray the realistic picture of women and their problems in a new dimension.
The works of these writers reflect the obstacles faced by women in the modern world, their expectation, their growth, their physical and mental struggle, belief in superstition and their trap in social maladies. Anita Desai excels in exploration of inner world of her characters. Her treatment of the psychological problems and inner sensibility of her characters makes her stand apart from other contemporary novelists.

Unlike other women novelists, Anita Desai concentrates on inner life and working with the mind of the female protagonists. The most prominent feature of her art is the delineation of characters. She is primarily interested in the portrayal of female protagonists as living in separate, closed, sequestered world of existential problems and passion. Each individual is portrayed as an unsolved mystery being hypersensitive, solitary and introspective. Pandey comments, “Man and wife do not, as a rule, live together; they only breakfast together, dine together, and sleep in the same room. In most cases, the woman knows nothing of the man’s working life and he knows nothing of her working life. But he calls it her home life” (10). The recurring themes in Anita Desai’s novels are based on psychological problems in the married life such as marital discord, alienation, lack of understanding, loneliness and unfulfilled expectations.

In her novels, Anita Desai concentrates on three important areas of her excellence, such as characterization, themes and plot structure. Her style is unique in her own way and it is suited to her need to blend her characters and themes under a compact pattern that each novel enters into the inner mind of the readers. In a psychological aspect, the inner entry of the protagonist’s mind is unfolded to the readers gradually with the
progress of the narration. Each aspect in the novel merges with the other to build up her characters into significant whole. Regarding her vision Desai says:

> All my writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things – next to this exploration of the underlying truth and discovery of a private mythology and philosophy is its style that interests me most – and by this I mean the conscious labour of uniting language and symbol and word and rhythm – one must find a way to unite the inner and outer rhythms, to obtain a certain integrity and to impose order on chaos. (Jena 81)

In her writings there is a combination of first person narration, third person narration and indirect and oblique view. ‘I’ narration technique is found only in two novels - *Cry, The Peacock* and *Voices in The City*. In the remaining works, she uses third person narrative. Anita Desai is able to evoke a strong feeling of closeness with the characters. This effect is achieved through the device of ‘free Indirect Discourse’ applied extensively throughout her works. The novel’s outlook on life presented by Anita Desai is due to the force of her expression and ideology.

Being the painter of the inner world of her characters, Desai uses images and symbols and a number of poetic devices like alliteration, similes and metaphors, assonance, onomatopoeia etc, to depict the exact emotional states and the layers of the psychic turmoil of her women. Sometimes she uses myths with all their religious and traditional meaning and psychological associations. For example, the myths associated
with Sita, Raman, Shiva and Kali reveal the psychological association with her female protagonists.

Structure implies a formal ordering of the content in time which may be indicated in the linear form or in the fugal form. Fugal form is the characteristic of the modern novelists. Desai, being one of the leading modern novelists makes a successful use of this form in almost all her novels. It produces the desired thematic and aesthetic effects. It also helps her to delineate the inner world of her women. Expressing her views on the structure of the novel, Anita Desai in her interview with Atma Ram says: “I prefer the word ‘pattern’ to plot as it sounds more natural and even better … one should have a pattern and then fit the characters, the setting, and scenes into it – each piece in keeping with the others and so forming a balanced whole” (Ram 101). This is true in most of her novels.

Anita Desai’s wizardry with words helps each novel presents a unique aspect of life, handled in the peculiar manner that the theme demanded. Mostly a psychological study, the narration is aimed at delineating character through the objective world. Her sensitivity, artistic vision, imaginative mind, keen observation, sharp awareness and competent craftsmanship are evident through her poetic prose. Through the use of poetic language, she delineates the inner world of her female protagonists most effectively. Their emotions and feelings compare with the buds, flowers, petals, birds, animals and insects around them. R.S. Singh, talking about the suitability of Desai’s images, says: “The images are quite appropriate to the mood of characters and quite congruent with
time when they are evoked through association of ideas” (Singh 171). Particularly, the bird images are supposed to be the symbol of freedom of will, thought and action. However, Desai uses them according to the need of the situation and nature of event in her novels. In her novels symbolism plays an important role and it delineates their inner world minutely. It is apt to quote Meenakshi Mukerjee: “her language is marked by three characteristics: sensuous richness, a high-strung sensitiveness, and a love of sound of words” (189). Thus her language becomes poetic on account of symbols and imagery.

The novels which have been chosen for study focuses on alienation of the sensitive individuals and their search for survival. However, the women characters are neurotic females, highly sensitive and sequestered in a world of dreams and imagination. They are alienated from their surroundings as a consequence of their unfulfilled expectations and also complete failure in their married life. They are not able not adjust with the reality. Hariprasanna states:

Anita Desai’s primary intention as a novelist is to
Depict the psycho-emotional and socio-psychic states
of the protagonist living in alien and cloistered world of
existential problems and passions. Alienation in her novels is
presented in the form of tension between self and society. (Patel 58)
Desai’s women protagonists do not lead a regular domestic life, rather, it is a trap where their individuality is endangered and thus complete lack of interest and dissonance in their relationship bring solitary confinements.

Desai’s fiction explores the various aspects of human experience bearing upon the central experience of psychic tensions of her characters. In her first novel *Cry, the Peacock*, Anita Desai focuses on enigmatic alienation of the neurotic protagonist, Maya and her complex relationship with her husband Gautama. The very beginning of the novel reveals the husband and wife alienation and Maya’s obsession with the idea of the death by unfolding Maya-Gautama relationship. They have strained relationships because of their marital incompatibility. Albeit Gautama is a faithful husband who loves and cares for his wife in his own way, yet Maya is never satisfied and happy. Maya is physically and emotionally starved and she expects the close attention of her husband. She is torn between inner and outer reality. But Gautama is very practical who is aware of the needs of Maya.

Sensitive Maya prefers romance, emotional and lives in the world of fantasy. The impact of this excruciating life on the somewhat abnormally sensitive wife is to make her hysterical and eventually mad. The loneliness and insanity in Maya are painted through several images like the wind, the dust storm, the snake and peacock. Generally, there is a constant interaction between the inner world of the protagonists and the outer world of nature. Using these images, Desai gradually designs her story in a new way.
Anita Desai gives really a very suitable title to her novels. Every title tells the story in a line. It sounds the tragic vision of her characters very effectively. In the first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* symbolizes Maya’s love and understanding in her loveless marriage with Gautama. Usually peacock refers to the male bird whereas in this novel it also refers to Maya’s husband Gautama. Here, the protagonist Maya cries to get the love and affection of her husband Gautama. Desai uses the beautiful image of peacock to capture the inner feelings of Maya in the title and also in the novel. The female bird Maya hungers to get the affection of her husband. She starves even at the night in her bed room. In the title, cry refers to the cry of the sensitive Sita to mingle physically and mentally with her husband (the peacock).

Maya is a childless woman. She feels alone even in her bedroom and so she could not get child even after three years of their marriage. In the crucial fourth year, she remembers albino’s words again and again. From the first day onwards in her husband’s house, she tries to understand her husband and other family members. She searches her identity as a wife and her dignity as a human being. But no one gives importance to her feelings never consider her as one of their family members. Marriage only gives her chance to remember her childhood days which is very enjoyable and happiest days in her life. After marriage, she asks herself what is her identity in the house. So, the loss of identity leads to alienation. Desai uses soliloquy and stream of conscious technique to picture the mental upheavals of Maya. There is no proper communication between husband and wife. She does not reveal her expectations at any place. It leads to her
mental disorder. Desai uses fictional element of unexpectedness in most of her novels. Here, Gautama’s murder is unexpected. Unknowingly, Maya pushes her husband from the balcony. Thus, the prophecy has come true. But soon, she is gripped with a guilty conscience which destroys her peace of mind. She suffers from permanent delirium. Consequently, she meets with her own violent death. She hopes that her cry would lead to positive results as with the peacocks. However, the discord in her life remains unresolved.

There is no attempt on her part for self-analysis to apprehend her demands. As a married woman, her motherly impulse remains unfulfilled. Since love is an over whelming powerful element of life in woman, it must get an instinctual outlet. The portrayal of Maya is projected in a sympathetic vein and needs the benefit of sympathy and undertaking from readers. The message of Anita Desai in this novel seems to be, that too much expectations in life results in disaster and thus gives an indirect warning to the readers!

In the second lyrical novel *Voices in the City*, Desai portrays the three alienated voices in the city of Calcutta. However, society appears as Calcutta city. The story presents the tragic fall of the three sensitive souls who become futile in the city of death and despair. The novel presents the filthy picture of a Bengali family in a state of disintegration. The feudal family of Kalimpong is dominated by the mother with an inferior father who is drunk. They have four children, Arun, Nirode, Monisha and Amla. The story starts with departure of Arun to England for higher studies. The other three
siblings enter into Calcutta with hope and aspirations. But, they get only failure and frustrations in their life in Calcutta.

The mother is the very important character in this novel. She is mystery who remains enigma to her children anywhere in the novel. The novel contains different mother figures- real mother, foster mother Calcutta and the archetypal mother Goddess Kali. The mother figure is used as symbol of the city. In this novel, Calcutta city remains in readers’ heart as Narayan’s Malgudi. Desai gives different names to the city such as the devil city, the monster city, the city of death and the city of Kali. She also gives colour of the city which is black.

The novel *Voices in the City* is a wonderful demonstration of “the terror of facing single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence”, said by Anita Desai in an interview with Dalmia. Desai portrays troubled voices in a big city through the irregular narrative mode in this novel. In the entire novel except part III, author narrates the story that is third person narrative. The third part is narrated in the first person point of view in terms of Monisha’s diary. Desai is an expert in dealing with existential themes. In this novel, one hears the different voices of a single family. They choose different directions to reach their destination. In their journey, they have so many obstacles and struggles. In short, the novel is about individual’s fight to search for freedom.

Among the four children in the Ray family, Arun’s choice is correct. Amla is very positive. When she hears the married life of her lover, she changes her opinion. She takes positive decision in her life. The portrayal of other two characters Nirode and Monisha is
very pathetic, aloof and lack of faith in life. Monisha’s death teaches lesson to other characters in the novel. In her married life, Monisha is a doll in the hands of her family members and she is physically and mentally tortured by them. Her escapism results in her death. Her husband Jiban in his part does not understand the feelings of his wife. The sound of these suffered voices is not only in Calcutta but also in all the cities.

The novel *Bye, Bye Blackbird* explores the problems of alienation, adjustment, rootlessness, self-identity and the final decision in the lives of the three major characters, Dev, Adit and Sarah. Fear, insecurity and the resultant withdrawal are the three major motifs of the novel. It incorporates the impact of an East-West marriage on the psyche of Sarah. Kher writes, “structurally, the novel begins with Dev’s ‘arrival’ in London, England, it progresses through Dev and his friend Adit’s ‘discovery and recognition’ of the true nature of their experience of being immigrants, and ends with Adit and his wife Sarah’s ‘departure’ to India” (2). Dev arrives in England for higher studies, stays with Adit and Sarah. He is perturbed when he finds Indian humiliated in both public and private places. In the second part Dev is changed. He begins to feel a charm for the country. In the third part, Adit develops homesickness for India and leaves for India. Dev stays on there. Desai develops the theme of cultural diversity through the Blackbirds. Adit and Dev, even Sarah has to suffer and face cultural diversity for getting married to an Indian. Adit and Sarah also face the crisis for identity.

Desai gives very suitable title to this novel. It seems to be analyzing in three dimensions. England says good bye to one blackbird-Adit and gives nest to other
blackbird-Dev. Sarah’s family and friends consider her as a blackbird after marriage and they say bye to her. Sarah is a realized character in this novel. She accepts her Indian life and come to India with her husband. She finds that her real identity is to live with her husband. Adit decides to leave England with his English wife. In the airport, they look at Dev and say good bye. They not only say bye to Dev but also English people whose skin colour is white but their mind is black. Here, Adit and Sarah say ‘Bye-Bye’ to black minded people. The title directly deals with the theme of the novel.

Anita Desai presents the sense of alienation very strongly in the novel *Where shall We Go This Summer?* It depicts the predicament of a lonely married woman who aspires to triumph over the chaos and suffering. The middle aged protagonist Sita is dissatisfied with her married life. She is too temperamental and introvert to compromise with her married life. She is a mother of four children and she also has a fifth in her womb. At the time, she wants to escape from the destructive land and enter into the peaceful land. So, she takes a spiritual voyage to her childhood place, Manori with her two children. She searches her identity as if she forgets her real identity. Her husband Raman in his part is blind to understand the feelings of his wife. He is a business man and he is also has a business attitude. He expects that his wife should be homely and good mother to her children and obey his commands. But he is unable to understand the expectations of his wife. It leads to marital discord between Raman and Sita. There is a lack of communication and misunderstanding between them.
Sita takes long journey to reach Manori. As a pregnant woman, she and her children face so many difficulties on their journey. She also has a foolish hope that she should give birth to her fifth child which should be remain in her womb. The feeling is absurd. It never be happen anyway. As a mother, Sita wants to save her child from the destructive world. But the island only her to recap her past life and does not give any solutions to her mental problems. According to our mythology, separation is a solution to understand Sita and Rama in Ramayana. In the novel, the protagonist’s separation paves way to understand her husband. But in the mythology, Rama needs the help of somebody to reunion with his Sita. In Where shall We Go this Summer, Raman behaves as a true husband to go to the island in person and take his wife and children back to the city life. He behaves as a true father too. He is interested in his daughter, Menaka’s higher education and so he takes her for admission. Here, Sita is selfish to consider her own feelings and decisions. At first he never shows any interest on her husband in the island but later she accepts to go with her husband.

The title Where shall We Go This Summer? is absurd. Today we live in the mechanical world and always depend on electronic machines to earn money. People always run after money. So, they don’t have time to spend their holidays peacefully. Everywhere we see violence, corruption, robbery and murder. People ask the question where shall we go this summer to enjoy the holidays. No one answers this question correctly. In the novel, Sita expects some miracle to happen in the island. She wants to get answer to her queries in some lonely atmosphere without any disturbance. But she
and her children struggle to reach their home in the island. She struggles physically and mentally. The magical island helps her to remember her past. It also gives her a chance to remember her husband and children. She is mentally ready to accept her present life. The short span of life in Manori changes the mind of the protagonist. She goes to Manori like a holiday trip in summer. Usually, people make arrangements to go to various places in summer to relax themselves from their regular work. In the novel, protagonist escapes from her regular work and takes a long journey for relaxation. At last, she understands the truth that her city life is better than the island. So, she goes back to Bombay for her regular work and becomes ready to give birth to her fifth child.

Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain* is highly a sensitive interpretation of the maladies of lonely individuals, women in particular. The story is of remote, solitary woman Nanda Kaul who lives as recluse in Kasauli. She craves for a blessed widowhood, the complete separation from the crowded house. She prefers seclusion to rest her painful psyche and her stagnated pulses. But Raka’s arrival at Kasauli disturbs her heavenly life. Her friend IlaDas’s visit also gives mental agony to Nanda Kaul. This novel is an extension of Desai’s conviction that everyone in this world is solitary and that involvement in human relationship invariably leads to disaster. The themes of solitude, alienation, the futility of human existence and struggle for survival form the major themes of the novel.

The story is a histrionic rendering of the woeful and unhappy death of Nanda Kaul, triggered by the distressing news of her friend IlaDas’s rape and murder. Raka’s act of setting fire to the forest is symbolic of her revolt against the cruelty and violence
rampant in our society. The title of the novel is highly suggestive of the revolt of the new generation of women against harsh, cruel man-dominated world. Raka is the symbolic of this new generation. In the title, Fire symbolizes the heart of the old lady and the exploration of her emotional world is the theme of the novel. She feels that she is independent at Carignano but gradually becomes emotionally dependent on Raka. She wishes to break up with the past, but the past continuously impinges on her privacy and distracts her vision.

Comparing with the other protagonists of Anita Desai, Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain* is the oldest one. She is longing for loneliness in the old age. Her choice of place is very important in the novel. Shyam Asnani remarks: “Anita Desai is perhaps the only Indo-English novelists who lays stress on the landscape and correlates it with the psychic state of her protagonists” (Asnani 86). It is true that Nanda prefers to live with nature. She has suffered a lot in her married life and she expects the freedom of air in the greenery of hills. She expects that no one disturb at the top. So, she chooses at high. The landscape reflects the mind of the protagonist that her expectation of loneliness, peace and her avoid of human relationships. Naturally or unnaturally, any kind of annihilation on the forest would collapse its peaceful atmosphere. The same thing happens to the protagonist. First, the arrival of the post man disturbs the mind of Nanda Kaul and the arrival of the other two characters, Raka and Ila Das totally spoil the peaceful psyche of the protagonist. It is symbolished by Raka who sets fire on the forest. Desai chooses very suitable title. The protagonist expects some lonely and peaceful life in her old age on the
hills which is interrupted by the human relationships. The fire burns not only in the mountain but also in the heart of the protagonist. In short, it is the story of fire of hearts. Each heart is suffered by particular kind of action. The young child, Raka’s heart aches for her separation from her parents. The social worker Ila’s heart burns when she looks at child marriage. She struggles and stops the marriage. But she is murdered by the village man. Her life symbolizes the universal tragedy of a woman in Indian society. The three women characters are embodiments of the existential predicament experienced by the individual in misunderstanding and even hostile universe.

Anita Desai introduces a modern psychological vein and she projects a sensibility which is not focused in the fiction of other Indo-Anglican writers. She is handling language, imagery and syntax in order to convey an intimate expression of the inner world of her characters. Different from other novelists, she insists on analyzing her characters. Her story reflects obsession of her characters. She makes each of her works, a haunting exploration of the psychic self. The readers’ first impression is one of brave originality and uniqueness. They enjoy three important areas of her novels: their excellence, characterization, theme and plot structure. Her style is unique in its own way. The characters and themes are neatly organized.

Protagonists in her novels resist the demands of society and turn out to be rebels. They do not find a proper channel of communication. They become alienated and start brooding on their lives. All their wanderings and reflections finally bring them into new vistas of understanding which they had formerly ignored and rejected. Desai entirely
different from other Indian English writers. Her themes are not political or sociological but are engaged in exposing the labyrinths of the human mind. She turns her track from other novelists. Each aspect or theme merges with the other and sometimes themes are woven together. She builds up her characters into significant whole. In a psychological aspect, the inner working of protagonist’s mind is unfolded to the readers gradually with the progress of the narrative.

Desai’s approach is different from the conventional fiction. Her greatest asset is her language and the novelty of approach is in her technique. Her poetic vision is manifested in every word and phrase that she selects. Every page of her works is representative of her penetrating vision justifying her claim as a lyrical novelist. The lyrical quality of the prose of Anita Desai is apparent to the most casual reader. Based on this impression, an attempt has been made to assess the four novels: *Cry, The Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* and *Fire on the Mountain* as lyrical novels. Some important images need to be mentioned here. Images based on light and flights are Desai’s favourites. Her *Cry, The Peacock*, directly depends on bird imagery, whereas birds are symbolically prominent in *Voices in The City* and *Fire on the Mountain*. Aerial activity is foregrounded by the description of the monsoon in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*

A large number of adverbs of time, place, direction and degree give her writing a palpable quality – The adverbs of manner – throw light on the personalities of the characters. A balanced use of transitive and intransitive verbs adds speed to the
progression of images, which are created in order to dramatize an inner conflict. The transitive verbs give the reader an impression of movement and activity and thus add liveliness to the description. Desai not only brings innovation in technique, but also makes use of the flash back and stream of consciousness technique. With a few exceptions like Raja Rao, no other Indian novelist in English has paid so much attention to technique of the novel as Desai has.

The protagonists in all the five novels live with some expectations. They try in different ways to fulfill their expectations. Unfortunately, their expectations are not fulfilled by their family members or society. It leads to their alienation either they live in alienation or lack of alienation. Naturally, their alienation paves way to search for their identity in their family and also in the society. They are in need to search for their true identity. It leads to their final disaster. Maya expects lovable husband but she is unable to convey to him. Monisha expects to be free from her duties and also expects loneliness. Sarah’s marriage with Indian pushes her to alienation. She expects that her identity should be proved in any one of the cultures. Sita expects her fifth child to remain in her womb and also expects to live out of the city life. Nanda expects to live in the lonely high hills without any human relationships. But their expectations would not be fulfilled at any moment. Among the five protagonists, Sita and Sarah are the most realized characters. They accept their life with their husbands. As for the other three, there is terrible in their lives, Maya murders her husband, Monisha sets fire on her. Nanda Kaul dies when hear the news of her friend.