CHAPTER - VI
MINOR THEMES
Minor Themes

Anita Desai's fiction is characterised by her treatment of various themes like existentialism, female psyche, marriage and urban life. These major themes are already analysed in the previous chapters. Except these themes there are some other themes like alienation, rootlessness, identity crisis, loneliness and spiritual quest and awakening, to be discussed in this penultimate chapter. Anita Desai is nevertheless a well-known, widely read and appreciated novelist whose contribution in Indian fiction in English is unforgettable. The themes like alienation and others are also very significant and considerable. While dealing the thematic analysis of these novels, one must bear in mind that her presentation of themes in her novels is full of variety. Her artistic exploration of themes proves to be a mark of genius. The themes in her novels are presented with a specialty and distinctiveness as she has always been on the alert during the exploration of these themes.

The novelist is also interested in dealing the theme of alienation, rootlessness and others with a unique delineation. A critical analysis of these themes also enables us to make our viewpoint clear and worthwhile. These themes stimulate the readers' interest to read her fiction with pleasure and a sense of involvement.

Each of these novels is considerable for variety of themes. Except inner realities and psychic reverberations of her characters, there are some other problematic issues, which are mentionable enough to analyse. These themes also impart a problematic and elusive nature of her writing. The theme of rootlessness is a part of that vital experience which is attracting the attention of many Indian writers. She traces a symbolic representation of the equality of status achieved by India after the independence. Based on the theme of alienation these novels have invited a good deal of literary comments. In the modern world countless people suffer from alienation and rootlessness. In this sense alienation is a modern malady and a recurrent crisis in human life, owing to his maladjustment and discontent with the changing society.
Anita explores alienated portrayals, suffering from the psychological intricacies. It provides an immense use to the readers of her. All the major characters in her novels are presented alienated. The existential absurdity in them combines lack of communication. Therefore these characters feel themselves alienated. Every novel of Desai is a drama of pressures and pulls. These alienated characters are in quest of their individual identity.

While exploring the theme of alienation, whenever she creates a typical situation she gives a perfect poetic treatment to every detail. Her characters are self conscious of the realities around them that they carry with them a sense of loneliness, alienation and pessimism. The theme of alienation is depicted in the novels like Cry, the Peacock, Voices in the City, Bye-Bye Blackbird, Where Shall We Go This Summer?, Fire on the Mountain, Clear Light of the Day, The Village by the Sea, Baumgartner's Bombay and etc. In her novels, the theme of alienation occupies the major part of her fiction. Most of her characters feel alienated and exiled even if they stay in crowd, yet they feel alone. The protagonists in her novels are those persons for whom alienation is the ultimate reality.

Being alienated these characters are fragile, introverts, longing for their existence. The novelist dives deeply, darkly, silently to workout the consistencies of modern life. Her portrayals find themselves in a trap and none of them live a happy life, nor is there anyone who lives an epicurean life. They are afflicted with the sense of loneliness, alienation, pessimism, dislocation in life and morbidity of temperament. In the reference of this delineation of the problems of alienated individuals R.S. Pathak rightly remarks:

"Anita Desai has thus delineated in the novels the problems and plights of alienated individuals, caught in the crisis of a changing society. She excels particularly in highlighting the miserable position of highly sensitive and emotional women, tortured by a humiliating sense of neglect, of loneliness and of desperation. The existential problem of the alienated self finally emerges to be the central theme of her novels."
The theme of alienation has been a dominating one in her fictional world. She conceives a large number of individual characters that are alienated from themselves, from others, from their society, from God and from nature. Each of her character is unique in a different way, suffering from his or her own individual problems, undergoing an intense anguish and striving for a meaningful relationship with others. She thus illuminates the problems of alienation and human relationship.

The term 'Alienation' is modern but the feeling or experience denoted by it is as old as the history of human consciousness. The earlier instances of the idea signified by alienation, a profound discontent with human lot and consequent disillusionment with life can be seen in the writings of Plato and Platinus in the Greek period. The Christian doctrine of man's fall because of original sin can also be viewed as one of the earliest expressions of alienation. Alienation at the interpersonal and intra-personal level is considerable in the Elizabethan tragedies, particularly those of Shakespeare and Marlowe.

Etymologically 'alienation' as a word is derived from the Latin word 'alienato' having 'aliener' as its verb means to snatch, to avoid, to remove, to make a thing of other etc. It is also related to the French word 'alienus' and the German words - 'Entfremdung' and 'Entausserung' which are transitive verbs, meaning snatching, separation, dispossession, mental imbalance etc. But in the present day literary world this term has acquired a very complex and multidimensional character. An eminent French writer and one of the architects of the French Revolution, Rousseau has used this term to denote man's detachment from his 'natural self' and 'natural form' owing to various external and internal pressures on his mind and heart. Similarly differentiating between man's ego and his phenomenal ego, in this reference the German dramatist Friedrich Schiller observes:

"This is the form of alienation where the self (soul) changing in a thing, separates from the root."
Two other words are used as synonyms of alienation, and these are 'anomie' and 'anomia', both of Greek origin. 'Anomie' is used in the context of alienation (estrangement) from society. About 'anomia', an American sociologist, G.A. Netter puts:

"Anomia is a personal disorganisation; alienation is a psychological state of an individual... and alienated person is one who has been estranged from, made unfriendly towards his society and the culture it carries."  

In the process of alienation, man passes from rationalization to irrationalization, from being a subject and then to a predicate. Although man is a social animal, but in alienation he finds himself entrapped by the society.

In the twentieth century particularly during the Second World War period, alienation was experienced intensely. Its experience was widespread at all levels of human activity both in the west and in the east. There are some other synonyms like 'isolation', 'estrangement', 'exile', 'distance' etc. The term 'alienation' has been invested with a variety of meanings. Inspite of semiotic ambiguities and variations coupled with apparent incongruities, frequent use of the term 'alienation', in the context of the modern literary discourse and theoretical and philosophical paradigms, has made it more or less a fetish word convening more feeling than denotation. Another social philosopher, J. Horton points out the difference between 'alienation' and 'anomie':

"Whatever the particular meanings, 'anomie' is the social state of normlessness or anarchy. The concept always focuses on the relationship between individuals and the constraining forces of social context. It is a problem of power defined as domination, a concept, conspicuously absent from the anomie perspective. Anomie concentrates on culture or culture transmitted in social organization; alienation (focuses) on the hierarchy of control in the organization itself. The critical focus on alienation is on whatever social conditions separate the individual from society as an
extension of self through self-activity, rather than as an abstract entity independent of individual selves."\(^4\)

Rousseau views development of civilization as a process inevitably estranging man from his original nature. If Hegel's philosophy takes a metaphysical view of alienation, Karl Marx's approach to it is of historical nature. According to Hegel, alienation is a circular process. Man who represents finite mind, is alienated from the infinite, absolute mind perhaps God, man's aspiration for salvation represents his efforts for de-alienation. Hegel thus takes a positive view of alienation and considers it as inevitable or natural in the development of man's self-consciousness. In a way as already stated, the feeling of alienation is as old as man's expulsion from the paradise.

The pervasive sense of alienation has accorded human life from various quarters. The modern man has shrunk in spirit languishing in confusion, frustration, disintegration, disillusionment and alienation. The modern man suffers from an acute sense of rootlessness. If alienation is a fundamental fact of human life, so is affirmation. If it is the process of alienation with the help of which the important problems of identity or the identity crisis is analysed, elucidated and contextualized; it is the process of the resolution of dilemmas and predicaments of the human condition. Regarding alienation a renowned psychologist Frank Johnson rightly observes:

"In its use of a general concept, scientific term, popular expression, and cultural motif, alienation has acquired a semantic richness (and confusion) attained by few words of corresponding significance in contemporary parlance."\(^5\)

The impact of alienation on the modern man has been corrosive. It can be seen today in its various manifestations, the most conspicuous being: generation gap, chopping of human relationship and concerns, personal crisis, culminating into disintegration of the usual consequences of being 'alienated' are the developing of tendencies of fear-psychosis, paranoia, disillusionment,
desperation, frustration, inferiority complex, suspicion, amnesia, dystopia, rootlessness etc. Alienation also results into the emergence of emotions of self-hate, self-deprecation, self-persecution, isolation and loneliness.

The modern age with its industrial and technical advancements has produced telling effects on the personality of man. As a result, he finds himself an 'alien', a stranger in this world and finds himself estranged from it despite the fact that he is engrossed in some activity. Alienation may spring from personal pathology of man, spiritual wilderness, psychological schism; tradition bound society, material advancement. According to Frank Johnson:

"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 himself as he 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 outside, productivity."\(^6\)

The theme of alienation and rootlessness is presented in the novels of Anita Desai. She generally begins her novels by presenting persons who are totally cut off from others and unable to find out proper channel of communication, and who become alienated, and start brooding their lives. As her fiction grapples with the morbid realities of life, she probes deeper into the human psyche to fathom its mysteries. Her preoccupation with the individual, highlighting the psychological motivation, frustration, sense of failure, and her keen awareness of the futility of existence radiates from each of her novels. Alienation is the most recurring theme in her fiction. In these novels the alienated protagonists are presented as Maya in her very first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*. This novel is really "Maya's effort to tell her story to herself, to discover some meaning in her life, and even to justify herself to herself."\(^7\)
In *Cry, the Peacock*, the novelist presents the alienated character of the female protagonist, Maya. She is the alienated character in this novel. This novel delineates the personal problems of this helpless and sensitive character, caught in the crisis of isolation and insecurity. Maya is an emotional, romantic, hyper sensitive and impulsive character, pitted against her husband Gautama, who is much older than her. Gautama is temperamentally a sober, serious and detached person. Due to her father, she is incapable of leading an independent existence. Her marriage with Gautama proves to be a disaster because he is totally different from Maya temperamentally. He never tries to understand her and a serious lack of communication obviously takes place between them. In fact, their married life is punctuated by Gautama's hardness. She fails to understand the lack of communication on the part of her husband.

She feels herself alienated in her husband's house. Being a married woman also Maya suffers from utter loneliness. Her marriage with Gautama, who is much senior to her, highlights her total involvement with her father. She suffers from father fixation. She finds Gautama nothing but a father substitute. She unconsciously searches her father in her husband. Helplessness and intense longing for love are the root causes of Maya's alienation. She remains utterly lonely throughout the day and also after Gautama's return from work. Maya passed a motherless childhood and therefore her father focuses all his attention and affection on her instead of letting her grow as an individual. He used to take her in his arms, wipe her tears and pacify her. Though she grows up physically, her father's over protective love prevents her from growing as an independent entity.

Due to her father's warm assurance and blind adoration, she never gets out of her childhood fantasies. His love was a manifestation of power, which blocked Maya's life. The world of fantasies and the world of realities clash and she is not able to adjust in both the worlds. She neither lives in the world of illusion nor that of actuality. The death of her pet dog Toto creates a sort of upheaval in her emotional life. Gautama is a practical and insensitive one for
whom Toto's death is nothing, but Maya suffers very much. This death increases Maya's alienation:

"... something that prodded me into admitting that it was not my pet's death alone that I mourned today, but another sorrow, unremembered, perhaps as yet not even experienced and filled me with this despair."\(^8\)

The most important cause of Maya's alienation is Gautama's strange and contrary attitude. She always remains helpless. She feels that her husband Gautama is a stranger. While living under the same roof, they are unknown to each other. According to her, companionship is not only physical closeness, but closeness of the mind also. She feels herself alienated and tortured by the horrors of those awesome revelations, which follow their physical union:

"Sometimes a moment of union, had taught me how hopeless, how important is sex-where not union but communion is concerned."\(^9\)

When Toto dies, Maya needs the assuring warmth of Gautama's company. Though he tries to help in such moments but Maya thinks that she is lonely and neglected, and nobody understands her. She blames Gautama that her loneliness is of Gautama's making. When Gautama hears this remark of Maya, he gets irritated. He calls her neurotic and a spoilt baby. He says that Maya's father is responsible for her conditions. Maya's typical condition is explored as an unfortunate person, who is alienated through and through.

Alienation of Maya is partially rooted in Gautama's philosophical detachment, his complete indifference to the beautiful yet tremendous beauty of the natural world and his gross unconcern for the basis of life. These are moments when Maya shows her anxiousness for sexual union with Gautama. On the contrary Gautama feels himself hesitate about physical nearness. Maya scolds Gautama for his coldness. She feels that Gautama knows nothing about her. She tries her level best to love him but Gautama never takes her seriously.
She complaints about Gautama's callousness, because he is unaware of her physical and psychological demands.

Maya's alienation can also be partially attributed to her sweet reminiscences of her tender and lovely childhood. She herself confesses to have been a wayward and high-strung child. A childhood incident is remembered in exaggerated and sinister colours. The grimy superstitions of the priest are an object of dread for her life. Maya longs for love and attachment of the spirit, which they perceive as the panacea of the ills of the world. She suffers intensely because of her futile attempt to find emotional contact, response and understanding.

Husband wife alienation is described in this novel. Gautama is so near to her yet so far. She feels herself as an alien and her condition rapidly deteriorates. Gautama and Maya possess two different temperaments. Their temperamental incompatibility results in a lack of communication and Maya feels alienated. In Maya's opinion, Gautama is cold and feelingless.

In Voices in the City, the theme of alienation is projected through three characters - Nirode, Monisha and Amla. In this novel Monisha is a withdrawn woman in her in-laws' house. When charged with theft, her neurotic pride is hurt and she sets fire to herself. But one thing is common in both the novels - the alienation of Maya and Monisha, to some extent arises due to their homely atmosphere and to some extent from their own inner conflicts. In present novel the theme of alienation is explored in terms of mother-children relationship. This is nothing but a consequence of dissonance in husband wife relationship. All the three major characters in the novel Nirode, Monisha and Amla feel themselves alienated. They revolt against the sordidness and brutality of physical world. In an interview with Yashodhara Dalmia, Anita Desai says that this novel deals with "the terror of facing single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence." When Monisha is charged of theft, she gets shocked and in a deep sense of desolation, finds life totally meaningless:
"What a waste, what a waste it had been, this life enclosed in a locked container, merely as an observer, and so imperfect, so handicapped an observer."\textsuperscript{11}

The problem of alienation in the modern Indian society, especially the young, is the main theme. Monisha is a victim of an arranged marriage into a bourgeois family. She is a slave to her husband and in-laws. Being alienated from her own kith and kins, Monisha finally commits suicide. Amla, her younger sister, begins her career as a commercial artist, but her initial enthusiasm for her work and city ends in desolate disillusionment. Their brother becomes alienated from the family and society and submerges himself in a life of squalor and dissipation.

Monisha is helpless character whose problems arise due to her passivity. Her psychic turmoil is recorded in her diary. She is married into a middle-class family. She is not able to adjust in her husband's house and pours out her agonies in her diary. But when her agonies become intolerable she ultimately commits suicide. In this reference it is worth to quote the words of B. Ramachandra Rao, who opines about Monisha that:

"She is very vaguely drawn and flits like a ghost in the consciousness of her brother and her younger sister."\textsuperscript{12}

Monisha and Maya, although both suffer from alienation due to their marital incompatibility, but are different from each other. Maya craves for contact and relationship with Gautama. But any contact or communication seems dangerous to Monisha. She feels herself as an alien in her husband's family. Even Jiban is unable to understand her feelings and emotions. Gradually she loses interest in her married life. Monisha even does not get any privacy to devote some time to her. Her in-laws always crowd even her own room. Always surrounded by this crowd also, Monisha suffers from loneliness and feels herself alienated:
"Alone I could work better and I should feel more whole. But less and less there is privacy... I wish they could leave me alone sometimes to read."\textsuperscript{13}

For Monisha, it is impossible to live in the traditional bindings of her in-laws. So she escapes in the world of fantasy. She teaches the concept of aloneness to her brother Nirode. Her married life is totally empty. Living in Jiban's family Monisha feels a little beyond and below everyone else in exile. Parental indifference is deep rooted in Monisha's life. Due to this reason also, she isolates herself from others and enjoys solitude. Her aloneness is her wisdom and she is satisfied with her silence. Reference to her silence is seen in her diary, where she writes that in her silence, she finds power over others. It suits her temperament and she wishes to live in it. In this reference it is worth to quote the words of Indira Bhatt:

"She is too silent for the family and the world disturbs her silence. She wants to be herself and not to compromise."\textsuperscript{14}

Nirode is another character, who has presented as an alienated one by the novelist. He is a rootless nihilist, a psychic outlaw, who wants to live in shadows and silence. His life remains a complete failure. He leads a meaningless life. He suffers from existentialism and identity crisis. As an anonymous and shabby clerk in a newspaper, Nirode calls himself a "journalist" out of inferiority complex. He develops an obsession with failure, because his several plans often fail.

Nirode is alienated even from his mother. Silence and solitude are the two most important things in his life. He is compared to a broken bird in an aviary. Nirode is on a restless, unbending but futile quest and wants to understand his identity. His credentials understood by the novelist are:

"He was proud to the point of being a fanatic, he was intense enough to be capable of whole-hearted dedication, yet he drifted a shadowy cipher, and his life consisted of one rejection following another."
He loathed the world that could offer him no crusade no pilgrimage, and he loathed himself for not having the true, unwavering spirit of either within him. There was only this endless wailing hollowed out by an intrinsic knowledge that there was nothing to wait for."

The dark motions of the city that has swallowed all the whiteness of his life overwhelm Nirode. He emerges as a self-aliencedindividual and the reverse journey of his life begins. He faces the dilemma in its stark reality. His inner conflict tears him into pieces. His own life is different from a simple desire to make a living. He shirks opportunities, which demand his help and solitude. He is dissatisfied with the world outside, with all its activities. He knows that he has failed in overcoming the absurdity but is also conscious of the fact that he lacks the will to get up. Even Nirode is alienated from himself for not having the unwavering spirit of either within him. About Nirode's alienated self Suresh Singhal rightly puts:

"His (Nirode's) tragedy emanates from the fact that he cannot resist the backward pull of postness and is not in a position to push himself into future possibilities of self-affirmation. The future promises nothing. He is standing on the edge of a precipice before which opens an abyss of void. He does not possess that will-power required to reject his past for future constructions."

Amla is another alienated portrayal in the novel. She is the younger sister and like Nirode and Monisha an incurable extrovert with an exceptionally sharp sensitivity. Unlike Monisha and Nirode, she decides to lead a happy life with the painter Dharma but her joy is short-lived and soon she begins to realise the hollowness and futility of her life. Conflict due to various reasons makes Amla an alienated character. She suffers due to this conflict produced by the inherent sense of the absurdity. She is torn between two kinds of mental situation hope and despair, nihilism and affirmation. Her personality shatters to pieces and she behaves like an outsider in the city of Calcutta. She cannot help feeling a dominant sense of loneliness, which is the outcome of her intra-
psychic conflicts. Amla is compelled to feel that she had not enjoyed herself so much since she came to Calcutta. She changes liking for the subjects of the portraits drawn by her. These portraits show her sense of alienation and meaninglessness. Instead of drawing human beings, she draws the insects, ants, grasshoppers, caterpillars and squirrels.

The novelist projects Amla’s alienated self. She attempts to naturalize her sense of alienation by associating herself with the world of nature. She remains isolated because her quest for creativity and love remains unfulfilled. To work with Dharma in his studio stands for her romantic aspirations, which are frustrated by the adverse conclusions. To maintain such a balance between dream and reality becomes a problem for Amla. In the process of fighting to overtop this balance, Amla gets alienated. Suresh Singhal observes the alienated self of Amla:

"... she broods over the human condition in the hostile world. Her sense of alienation and meaninglessness is quite visible throughout this phase of her existential dilemma. She feels alienated when she realises the futility of her dreams of living a happy life. The city where she comes with a romantic vision happens to be the wasteland of her dreams and she becomes a victim of the existentialist sense of boredom and absurdity of life."¹⁷

Bye-Bye Blackbird is also coloured by the theme of alienation and rootlessness. In the metropolitan milieu of London, Adit, Dev and Sarah suffer from alienation. In this novel, the novelist moves out of the familiar cities of Delhi and Calcutta. She vividly projects the prison-physical and psychological life of London in which a coloured immigrant in Britain, is caught and the novelist effectively conveys to us both the complexities of adjustment there and the difficulties of returning to India and living here. The alienated self acquires a new dimension in this novel. About this novel in an interview with Atma Ram, the novelist said:
"Bye-Bye Blackbird is the closest of all my books to actuality practically everything in it is drawn directly from my own experience of living with Indian immigrants in London."  

In this novel the characters face the dilemma of identity precisely because their background is rooted in the caste, society with group ascription by birth. The novel captures the confusions and conflicts of another set of alienated persons. Some critics regard this novel as a presentation of social isolation of Adit and Sarah.

This novel has three important characters viz. Dev, Adit and Sarah. Dev and Adit are Indian while Sarah is an English character. The novel is set in London, a city that attracts Dev and Adit. Dev arrives in England and stays with Adit who has an English wife, Sarah. On reaching England, Dev is disillusioned and feels alienated. He feels himself nostalgic. He is not able to bear the derogatory racial remarks of English people. Dev comes to feel the existential anguish in terms of sense of alienation, anxiety, nothingness, meaninglessness and mortality. His life involves conflict and suffering.

In the present novel adaptation of alien culture becomes very difficult for Adit and Dev. Dev arrives England to study in the prestigious London School of Economics. After reaching London he searches for a job, but being an Indian immigrant, he faces numerous problems in his task. He is insulted and humiliated by the English people. Dev feels himself alienated when he remarks:

"One of those eternal immigrants who can never accept their new home and continue to walk the stress like strangers in enemy territory, frozen, listless, but dutifully trying to be busy... unobtrusive and how ever superficiality, to belong."  

Dev is confronted with an initial problem of adjustment in a foreign land. The novelist has recorded accurately the absurdities of Dev's existence in England and its drab superficialities. Dev's longing for living with its variety
and multiplicity remains unsatisfied. The strange treatment of English people compels Dev to feel himself as an outsider. He feels nostalgic for Indian faces and sounds. He is frustrated due to the insulting behaviour of Britshers. They insult Indian immigrants openly so much that they are not allowed to use a lavatory meant for English people. He finds even a thickly populated place like London as a cold wasteland. He suffers from alienation and spiritual agony. Dev's alienated self has been pictured by the following passage:

"Dev ventures into the city. He descends, deeper and deeper, into the white tiled bowels of Clapham tube station... The menacing slither of escalators strikes panic into a speechless Dev as he is swept down with an awful sensation of being taken where he does not want to go down, down and farther down - like Alice falling, falling down the rabbit hole, like a Kafka stranger wandering through the dark labyrinth of a prison."\(^{20}\)

Another victim of alienation in this novel is Adit, who undergoes a profound change in his attitude towards England. Like Dev, he too suffers from a sense of being an outsider. He becomes a victim of racial and cultural prejudices. He wants to go back to India. In reminiscences, he is intensified and delighted if he saw typically Indian person or thing. To his in-laws also he remains an outsider, a stranger being a non-belonged. In England Adit is haunted by the black sensation of a stranger. Sarah's parents feel disappointment due to Sarah's marriage with an Indian immigrant. They consider Adit as an unwanted immigrant and an unwelcomed intruder with the psychological and emotional shock. Adit withdraws into a protective shell of privacy. Sarah's parents dislike Adit. All the time Adit accuses his English wife Sarah. Adit is fed up with the hypnotic charm of English education and wants to go back to his motherland. England had left Adit drop and fall away.

Adit marvels at the civic sense of the English people. Even the paper was thoughtfully done up on neat paper bundles and weighted down with stones. One could leave the money for the bread and milk in the letterbox. This could never be done in India, though he does not tell Sarah about this. The
social discrimination that immigrants face, the humiliations they have to accept and live with, becomes unbearable for Adit. He is very well acknowledged that his mother-in-law hates and despises him with all her heart and soul. It is the abundance and beauty of the English countryside, which fills him with a curious sorrow and anger. Adit's alienation ultimately results in his nostalgia.

Like Maya and Monisha, Sarah is also presented as an alienated portrayal. Although she does not suffer from the inner vacuity like them, but still she is alienated. Dev, Adit and Sarah, all these three protagonists suffer from a sense of alienation but with a difference. Dev and Adit suffer from alienation in a foreign country but Sarah becomes an alien in her own country. Having married an Indian immigrant, she herself becomes an alienated self. She becomes doubly alienated as her identity becomes suspect in the eyes of her English friends and relatives. She is presented as an isolated, alienated and helpless person. Sarah keeps to:

"The loneliest path, walking under the trees and drawing across her face a mask of secrecy. Those who glanced at her-made aware of her by the violence with which she turned away from them felt apprehensive, but since she was a stranger, gave it no thought."\(^21\)

Sarah, by marrying an Indian, has at one stroke, placed herself outside her own family and cultural scene. She has generated a concealed hostility among her colleagues in her marriage with an Indian. Having been married to Adit, she loses her identity as a woman in her own country. Sarah is very well aware of her miserable life:

"It was as though she had chosen to be cast out of her home, her background, and would not be drawn back to it, not even by her husband... She listened to the stream rush and an owl cry and felt herself cut loose from her moorings and began to drift, round and round, heavily and giddily, as though caught in a slow whirlpool of dark, deep water."\(^22\)
Sarah is commented and looked down by the British people. Even her parents never accept Adit as her husband by heart. Marital disharmony is another reason of Sarah's alienation. The cultural discrimination is the biggest cause of her marital dissonance. Like a typical Indian husband Adit shouts on her. She suffers from identity crisis and meaninglessness. The lack of understanding of the 'basics' of a socio-cultural ethos leads Sarah to isolation, alienation and rootlessness. She is destined to hang between the two worlds. Trapped in between two selves, Sarah wants to come out of them:

"When she briskly dealt with letters and bills in her room under the stairs, she felt an imposter but, equally, she was playing a part when she trapped her fingers to the sitar music on Adit's records or ground spices for a curry she did not care to eat."23

Gradually Sarah learns to separate herself from the world, from the society, with she can no longer associate herself. The sole cause of her alienation and withdrawal is her marriage to Adit. She feels empty and ineffectual, unable to channelise herself positively. Her dual estrangement emerges not from social transformation within her society but from a cross-cultural catalysis of her own choice. She vacillates between her two identities the public and the private.

In this novel the novelist presents the theme of frustration, rootlessness and alienation. The Indian immigrants feel themselves estranged and homesick outside their motherland. Anita Desai herself writes:

"I don't think anybody's exile from society can solve any problem. I think basically the problem is how to exist in society and yet maintain one's individuality rather than suffering from a lack of society and a lack of belonging, that is why exile has never been my theme."24

The theme of alienation is presented in Where Shall We Go This Summer?. In this novel the novelist projects the theme of alienation and incommunication in the married life of Sita and Raman. Although this is a short
novel but it has been welcomed as "an interesting addition to Anita Desai's achievement as an Indian novelist writing in English." The novelist presents a wrestling between two irreconcilable temperaments. Sita and her husband Raman are different in their temperaments. Sita's alienation springs from homely atmosphere. While living in her in-laws' house Sita feels herself a lonely person. Her husband, members of the family, her own children and other people add to her burden that clashes with her subjective attitude and her privacy.

Sita remains restless and disappointed with her settled and dull domestic life. She feels frustrated due to the violent activities around her in the external environment and in her own house. She sits alone smoking as if waiting for someone who never turns up. The metropolitan surroundings of Bombay with the unwanted life-style make Sita frustrated, bored and depressed. She is very much obsessed by the idea of her fifth pregnancy. Unable to get freedom, love and marital harmony, she gets so much baffled that she feels her inner being shattered. About Sita's alienation Suresh Singhal aptly remarks:

"Her alienation is the outcome of her subjective inability to accept the values and the attitudes of society which is traditional and hostile. Sita is a lady of very delicate susceptibility, which makes her shock at the usual rough and crude facet of life. She cannot face life with all the toughness that is required of her under the circumstances. She can only fall a victim to the vicissitudes of life as a visionary. Her extreme sensitiveness becomes one of the reasons for a deep breach in her inner subjective being. She is an introvert who likes to find her way on her own and with no outside help whatsoever... She is alienated because her subjective being has undergone certain distortions."

Being an alienated character, Sita struggles for re-establishment of her normal routine of life. But all her efforts fail and she finds herself in a state of disillusionment. She faces loneliness in all her roles of life—as a woman, a wife
and a mother. Sita suffers from meaninglessness and wants to find some meaning of her existence:

"Physically so resigned, she could not inwardly accept that this was all there was to life, that life would continue thus, inside this small, enclosed area with these few characters churning around and then part her, leaving her always in this early gray, dull lit, empty shell."^{27}

Sita suffers from alienation, rootlessness and identity crisis. She is alienated from her husband and children. Marital dissonance is one of the significant causes of her alienated self. Temperamental incompatibility between Raman and Sita is the apple of discord. Both Sita and Raman posses different attitudes towards life. Raman is unable to understand her problems and fails to make her happy. Sita is a woman unwanted and unloved. Feeling alienation, she escapes from her duties and responsibilities from order and routine. But now for her, it becomes very difficult to know what is authentic and what is not:

"How could she tell, how decide? Which half of her life was real and which unreal? Which of her selves was true, which false? All she knew was that there were two periods of her life, each in direct opposition to the other... She shook her head angrily at the confusion, the muddle of it all. Neither sea nor sky were separate or contained they rushed into each other in rush of light and shade, impossible to disentangle."^{28}

Sita is reluctant to deliver or to abort the fifth child. She wants to retain it in her womb, because she is afraid of exposing the child to the violence in the modern world. She goes to magic island, Manori. There on the island, her miracles fail and instead of finding peace, she becomes alienated. This island becomes a symbol of a way to escape from the violence and meaninglessness of the surrounding world:

"The everyday world had grown so insufferable to her that she could think of the magic island again as of release. If the sea was so dark,
Sita feels boredom, which creates tension and frustration in her life. She feels enslavement and hopelessness. Sita's appearance remains as an alien in her in-laws' house. She feels herself as an outsider. Brought up as a strange child, grown into an unusual milieu, Sita behaves and reacts in very strange manner:

"With calm eyes she had watched the surge and flow of such masses, listened to endless speeches on one subject, swaraj had her chin chucked, collected, discarded garlands and played with the tiniest till she fell asleep against the bolster and was carried away to someone's house to sleep always a different someone, it scarcely mattered with one. She belonged, if to this whole society that existed at that particular point in history like a laub does not to its flock and saw no reason who she should belong to one family alone."30

Fire on the Mountain is another novel, pervaded by an overpowering sense of loneliness, isolation, identity crisis and alienation. This novel is the story of three female characters - Nanda Kaul, her fragile recalcitrant great grand daughter Raka and Nanda Kaul's childhood friend Ila Das. All these three portrayals are projected alienated. They strive for their identity. They find no meaning of their life. They all live a cocoon like existence in the Shimla hills of Kasauli. Although they interact physically, but they live in their separate worlds of their own. They make feeble attempts to build bridges of understanding among them.

Nanda Kaul is the first isolated character. The novelist presents a reverberating and pathetic picture of Nanda Kaul's old age. She decides to come and stay alone at Carignano in perfect privacy and like a recluse, she selects her own choice. After fulfilling all her family duties and responsibilities, she longs for this solitary life. She is very well aware of
growing pain that none of her children had asked her to come and stay with them after the death of her husband. Being alone, she feels contented:

"Everything she wanted was here, at Carignano, in Kasauli.... it was the place, and the time of life, that she wanted and prepared for all her life only. Whatever else came or happened here would be an unwelcome intrusion and distraction." 31

Nanda Kaul's marital life remains a disaster. Her husband did not love her genuinely as was her due as a wife. Her husband treats her as a robot woman. She is nothing but a need of efficient running of her household. Her husband carries a life-long affair with Miss David, the Mathematics teacher. Due to this affair all her dreams of living a successful matrimonial life are shattered. She suffers from marital dissonance. She feels herself neglected, unwanted, unloved, lonely and alienated. Neither her husband nor her children love her. She does not like to live in her husband's house, but she is forced to do so. In this house Nanda Kaul is expected to perform all her duties. But nobody takes care of her.

Far from leading a happy married life, Nanda Kaul feels like an animal put into a cage. She feels happy in isolation. She fears that Raka's arrival would disturb her privacy. Raka's arrival breaks her dreams of peace, for her it is nauseating to follow the same old routine looking after a child, shouldering responsibilities. Her miserable life is exposed through the following passage:

"Hanging her head miserably, it seemed too much to her that she should now have to meet Raka, discover her as an individual and worse, as a relation, a dependent.... See her to bad at night and tie in the next room, wandering if the child slept, straining to catch the sound." 32

Raka is another alienated portrayal in the novel. She is too a recluse and resents any interference in her own privacy. She wants to be completely involved in the joys and raptures and peace that the world of nature can give her. Raka's alienation is reflected by her imaginary world from the disjoined
world of her parents. She is in the habit of never making a demand. Like her
great grandmother, she too likes and loves a life of loneliness:

"Raka was not like any other child she had known, not like any of
her own children or grand children. Amongst them she appeared a freak
by virtue of never making a demand. She appeared to have no needs. Like
an insect burrowing through the sandy loam and pine-needless of the hill
sides, like her own great grandmother, Raka wanted only one thing—to be
left alone and pursue her own secret life amongst rocks and pines of
Kasauli."33

One of the important reasons of Raka's alienation and rootlessness is her
childhood experience. Raka is a recluse neither by nature nor by instinct.
Raka's childhood memories are very haunting. The various schools of
psychology have accepted the significance of childhood experiences in the
growth of an individual's personality. In an interview with Jasbir Jain, Anita
Desai opines that... "I agree that the experiences of childhood are the most
vivid and lasting ones."34 Raka's sick, frustrated and unhappy mother Tara
was incapable of giving her love and affection.

Raka lives alone in the world of silence. The rich feast of nature appeals
Raka and she spends hours in the lap of natural surroundings. Her eyes seem
still and thoughtful as though she has visited strange lands and seen fantasies,
improbable things that lingered in her mind. Raka's parents' marital dissonance
has very unpleasant impact on her mind. Whenever Raka's father used to come
at night:

"...his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at
her mother with hammers and fists of abuse-harsh, filthy abuse that made
Raka cover under bed clothes and wet the mattress in fright, feeling the
stream of urine warm and weakening between her legs like a stream of
blood, and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes wept."35
Ila Das is also a frustrated character in the novel. She is a welfare officer in the Himalayan foothills. She is devoted and sincere to her profession. She finds herself alienated from the people and she has to struggle hard with the villagers. She tries her level best to enlight the villagers about the benefits of family planning above various diseases. Ila attempts to prevent them from practicing social evils and superstitions. She tries to relate with love and affection to Raka. She is very much alert to the sense of freedom, freedom from all the ills of society. But it is ironical that, the very person Preet Singh, to whom Ila had tried to educate about the foolishness and undesirability of child-marriage, waiting eagerly for the opportunity, assaults her, rapes and finally kills her. She is described as pathetic creature, like an old animal that has been made to run before hounds.

Although, Ila was born in a prosperous family, but after her father's death, her family was disintegrated. Nanda Kaul's husband kindly appointed her as a lecturer in a Home Science College. But after the Vice-Chancellor's death, Ila is denied justice and some junior lecturer is made the Principal. This interestingly hurts her and she resigns. She has "to go from pillar to post; trying to earn fifty rupees here and fifty there, with not a room to call my own most of the time, and its grown worse and worse."36

All the three portrayals Nanda, Raka and Ila are victims of emotional alienation. They crave for privacy, isolation and fantasy to escape from unpleasant reality of life. Ila claims invulnerability by endowing herself with superiority even in her loneliness.

Clear Light of the Day is unique in presenting before the readers that time is of paramount importance. Bim is the protagonist, who feels poignantly alienated owing to the desertion of all responsibilities and retiring to a life of comparative peace, comfort and prosperity. Anita Desai has expressed her own words about the novel to Sunil Sethi:
"I was trying to write a four dimensional piece on how a family moves backward and forward in a period of time."37

This novel depicts the life of people in one middle class Hindu family, confronting the problematic world. Two sisters, Bim and Tara are haunted by the memories of past. The theme of the effect of the remembrances of past on the chief protagonists is focused. To Tara, the memories are a 'Jubliee', a source of joy, but to Bim, they are like a 'Knell', of sorrow. Although Bim is the protagonist, but the primary focus is not on her. The novel is about the growth of four children of Das family in an absurd world.

Bim is presented as an alienated portrayal. After the death of her parents, marriage of Tara and the death of aunt Mira, Bim is left alone with her mentally retarded brother Baba. The house seems empty to Bim. Except Baba everybody has left her. She thinks that they will be alone forever. Bimla's parents are indifferent and disintegrated. She has to cope with a diabetic mother and a father who is nothing but a master of entrance and exit. Bim's parents never cared for their children. They are always busy in going to club and playing cards. Bim has the responsibility of tending to a young tubercular brother and an alcoholic old aunt. The main events in the novel are to focus the partition of 1947. The novelist shows in it:

"...discovering the final pattern of meaning that emerges out of the apparent meaninglessness of life in a small family."38

Bim is always worried about her past and wants to escape from it while Tara wants to live her past and enjoy it. Past delights Tara but it pains Bim. Bim does not want to think of her past, as it has been wholly unsavoury. Bim is mentally detached from her brothers and sisters. She lives alone with her painful memories and her mentally retarded brother Baba in an old house.

Bim feels alienated and frustrated because of her brother Raja. Actually she nursed him like a son. Raja does not take interest in his father's business and fascinated by the life represented by Hyder Ali. He marries Ali's daughter

246
Benazir. Like a landlord Raja assures Bim that she can stay in the house as long as she needs, and he would never increase the rent or ask her to vacate the house.

Bim loves Raja very much. Raja is her courage and strength. But he leaves for Hyderabad to live with their former neighbour Hyder Ali's daughter due to his marriage with her. It hurts Bim very much. She thinks that her trust on Raja was only an illusion. Bim always loves solitude. She dislikes crowd. She gets bored and irritated in the company of ladies. She sacrifices everything but her life acquires a heroic dimension. Being frustrated due to her past memories, Bim says to Tara:

"You wouldn't want to return to life as it used to be, would you?... All that dullness, boredom, waiting, would you care to live that over again? of course not. Do you know anyone who would secretly, sincerely in his innermost self really prefer to return to childhood?"

Because of her family circumstances, Bim is not able to marry. Her 'self' is hurt by the callousness of her parents and her brother. She sometimes compares her relations and their memories to mosquitoes:

"They had come like mosquitoes - Tara and Bakul, and behind them the Misras, and somewhere in the distance Raja and Benazir-only to torment her and mosquitoes - like sip her blood. All of them fet-it must have been good blood, sweet and nourishing. Now, when they were full, they rose in swarms, humming away, turning their backs upon her."

The themes of alienation, rootlessness, frustration, decay, degradation, violence and revolt, and the quest of the protagonist for her identity are presented. This novel is a mixture of things real, remembered, imaginative and even autobiographical. Through the flashback technique, Anita Desai makes the readers see the world from the perspectives of childhood. The tragic reality of Das household is seen through the eyes of children. How Das family is sandwiched between the Misras' and the Hyder Ali's.
The Village By the Sea is another novel, full of the theme of alienation and rootlessness. The novelist paints an Indian family life. Lila, the sister and Hari, the brother try to exist in the society. Hari leaves his sister to achieve his family bliss. He escapes to Bombay in search of employment. Hari suffers in Bombay and his sisters suffer silently the problems at home. These characters face the afflictions of alienation, rootlessness, loneliness, frustration, meaningfulness, drunkenness, poverty, starvation and illness. Every stage of human cycle from childhood to adulthood is projected very acutely. The theme of loneliness is presented through the character of Hari, who feels himself alone in Bombay. His family suffers from economic problems.

In this novel, Anita Desai has depicted the impact of modern technological development on a traditional community of fishermen. It also presents a heroic struggle, put up by Lila and Hari to save their family from starvation and other social problems. The female protagonists of Anita Desai battle with their traditional roles and with society's expectations of them. Lila is such a portrayal in the novel, which is trapped by the chains of housekeeping. She searches for identity with the spread of industrialization; people are compelled to leave their homes and run towards cities, resulting into disintegration of the families. Similar case is presented with Hari with the changed circumstances. He hopes to get employment in Bombay, but when he reaches to Bombay, he feels very much lonely. He finds himself alienated in Bombay city. He suffers from tiredness and starvation, without a soul to care for him. He longs for his family. Even in the crowd he feels alone:

"He stood watching the crowd fades away down the road. He felt deserted and friendless. None of his friends from village had come. They are the ones who were sitting happily at home waiting for fertilizer factory to come up and employ them. He had felt them to join the March in order to get away from Thul to get to Bombay, and he knew he did not belong to the March, he had no fields or fishing boats to fight for, nor did he knew
any of the marchers who were mainly farmers and fishermen, nor the sort of people who would know his landless, bootless, jobless father."

Hari feels everything strange and ominous. Separated from home and near and dear ones, Hari faces many problems in Bombay. In fact, she is too young to understand alienation. He works in Jugu's hotel and learns watch repairing from Mr. Panwallah in his free time. The outbreak of monsoon storming the city of Bombay and paralyzing the public life was a new experience for Hari. He comes to know that many boats and fishermen from his own village were also missing. This news disturbs him and reminds him of his village. He feels nostalgic and through Mr. Panwallah, he gets his bus ticket. He reaches home just before a day of Diwali.

The theme of alienation is explored with the social evils. The present novel is far from the psychic delineation of alienation and rootlessness. The themes of alienation and rootlessness are also presented in the other earlier novels of Anita Desai, with a difference of psychic presentation of the characters. With the reference of psychic presentation, the exploration of the theme of alienation and rootlessness in The Village by the Sea differs the earlier novels. It also shows the exploitation of the small children in the Indian society by their own parents. The sea that is so close and familiar to him in Thul appears strange and distant in Bombay. It was so because we see things in the light of our moods and mental states. Hari longs for the touch of his soil.

This novel contains more of physical than psychological action. It does not belong to the category of those novels, written so far dealing with young or mature lonely women, seeking their identity or meaning of life. Though the novel deals with the outer weather of its characters, yet the theme of loneliness and rootlessness can be traced here and there for a bit. Lila has a habit of becoming silent and finding consolation either in the company of the sea or in the grove of casuarina trees or in the field. If Lila's refuge is the sacred rock, Hari's refuge is this grove. Although, Hari and Lila are too small to think or feel except what is natural, then also like the typical Indian characters of Anita

249
Desai, the love of nature and solitude is available in both Lila and Hari, even at their tender age.

Another novel In Custody is full of alienation, rootlessness, identity crisis and helplessness. This novel is a story of the male protagonist, Deven, who is somewhat diffident and awkward hero. In this novel, Anita Desai enters a new phase in her creative career. Before this novel, her protagonists were highly-strung or intensely introspective women. In this novel, she explores a male protagonist, Deven Sharma, who feels himself as an alien. In the reference of this shift in Anita Desai's fictional world, Meenakshi Mukherjee points out:

"... the change is towards a widening of human concerns and of a willingness to integrate concrete historical and specific cultural dimensions in the creation of interior landscapes."\(^{42}\)

This novel also concentrates on the idea of mutuality, interdependence between the creator of poetry (art) and its receptor. The reason of Deven's alienation and identity crisis is his unfortunate experiences. Deven is an impoverished young man. He is a temporary lecturer in Hindi living in a small town, Mirpore. He lives with his wife Sarla and a small child, Monu. He leads an unhappy life due to financial crisis. In this novel, the novelist tells about the afflictions of Deven who is credulous and disingenuous. He wants to create a work of art in his life. But unfortunately, he fails to measure himself upto the demands of the situation to fulfill his ambition. He leads an unhappy life. The place where he lives provides no ray of happiness. This place seems a cruel trap, a prison from which there is no escape.

Deven's surroundings are not matched with his high aspirations. Deven, who lives in a moffusil town, is a great lover and admirer of poetry. When Deven's school chum Murad, now a journalist, asks him to interview Nur Shahjehanabadi, a renowned Urdu poet, he becomes ecstatic. The theme of loneliness is presented in this novel through Deven and Nur. Both are lonely
souls in their inner worlds, trying to seek expression and communication through each other. Deven is haunted by ambition while nostalgic for the past. He is easily tempted by hope, but lacks self-confidence. He is unable to act decisively and thus he becomes a victim more of himself, his dream and his passion for poetry than of the circumstances. To his utter dismay, he cannot enjoy the luxury of an imaginary world:

"...but then his congenital inability to satisfy himself with fantasy would apply a brake, the wild careening of his imagination crash to a halt, and he would be faced with that one truth again - how he had abandoned the poet in his agony, desecrated the paper on which he wrote his verse, and run." 43

The theme of alienation in this novel is associated with an analysis of the plight of vanishing Urdu poetry and great Urdu poet's life also. The glorious and sublime poetry of Nur is being contrasted with the decadant ways of life. Nur is seen as a hollowman, who is bound to end his life on a whimper. Agreeing to Murad's proposal, Deven falls into his well-knit trap, from which escape is impossible. Throughout the novel, Deven is confronted with failure and frustration at every step.

Several obstructions come in his way, and he does not know how to overcome them. He is befooled and cheated everywhere and by everyone, he comes in contact with. He wants to go back to his earlier life which was plain and eventless. He thinks that, there is no deed, done by him to redeem the situation:

"Every efforts he had made, had ended in defeat: most of the poems he had written and sent to Murad had been rejected; his monograph never published; his wife and son eyed him with blatant disappointment; nor had he won the regard of his colleagues and students." 44

The novel presents the shifts between failure and success, his enthusiasm and inhibitions and the final disaster. In this novel Anita Desai
creates different forces to help him, but ultimately he never knows, in which
direction he should run. Even the married life of Deven with his wife Sarla is
full of difficulties and problems. Due to his poor financial conditions, Deven is
not able to fulfill his wife's dreams. He feels himself alienated and defeated:

"He understood because, like her, he had been defeated too, like
her, he was a victim. Although each understood the secret truth about the
other, it did not bring about any closeness of spirit, any comradeship,
because they also sensed that two victims ought to avoid each other, not
yoke together their joint disappointments. A victim does not look to help
from another victim; he looks for a redeemer."45

Anita Desai's Baumgartner's Bombay is a significant milestone in her
literary career. It marks her as a gifted artist of great skill. The sense of
isolation is in an alien world is brilliantly painted with haunting pathos and
evocative images. This novel shows the individual in relation to society or to be
more accurate the individual as a product of society. Here in this novel, the
tension between the individual and the social forces is explored. This novel
also helps in understanding the lonely and exiled predicament of the
protagonist. The major action in the novel takes place in Bombay and Calcutta.

Anita Desai's Indo-German parentage is very remarkably fused in this
novel. Born in Mussorie, Anita Desai is the daughter of a German mother and a
Bengali father. She knew that one day it would be worked into a novel, but it
was not until her Baumgartner's Bombay, that she found a way into the story.
Now that it has appeared, it seems, it was inevitable that she should have
sought, at some point in her career to draw together in explicit ways the two
strands of her heritage, Indian or her father's side, German or her mother's.

Desai was asked to look at those letters to the real German who lived
and died in Bombay. She was intrigued, but she had never imagined that those
letters between strangers would unlock part of her own past and provide the
key to a novel, she would write. Paul West writes:
"The most important and inebriating relic in this novel happens to be post cards from his mother." 46

Desai's mother Tony Niame was a teacher in Berlin, thirty and unmarried, devoted to looking after her widowed mother. The central character in the novel Hugo's reverence from his native land echoes Tony Niame's decision to forsake her homeland for love. For while Hugo's flight in 1937, was that of a Jew feeling Nazi persecution, Tony Niame had left Germany for India a decade earlier for entirely romantic reasons. Tony was aware that her nationality was against her during the war.

This novel focuses the past and present of two isolated Germans estranged from family and country, Hugo, the protagonist is the central character, and Lotte, a female cabaret dancer. These two portrayals try to establish their identity in an alien land, but their quests end tragically in failure, frustration and disgust. The tragic isolation leads to Baumgartner's death.

Hugo leads a very solitary life in a very shabby home. His expectations remain unfulfilled in Bombay. In Bombay there is no one to look after him. The only company is that of cats he nurses and loves. People mockingly call him Billiwallah Pagal. Both Hugo Baumgartner and Lotte feel themselves alienated, because both of them sail in the same boat of isolation in an alien country. Hugo comes to India for starting a new business, but here he finds himself unacceptable everywhere. He is a man who is not welcomed anywhere. He keeps roaming from one place to another place. Hugo is a victim of the holocaust, which has uprooted him from his native soil. In Berlin, his father is made to suffer humiliation. Their house and business are taken. Hugo and his mother find their life in danger. Disowned by native people and rejected by his motherland, Hugo takes refuge in India. Hugo keeps his problems to himself and keeps aloof which intensifies his loneliness:

"...an isolated youth in an increasingly unsafe and threatening land and then of a solitary foreigner in India had made Baumgartner hold to
himself the fears he had about his mother... shedding whatever was burdensome; it seemed to him he shed nothing, that like a mournful turtle he carried everything with him, perhaps it was the only way he knew to remain himself."  

Besides Hugo and Lotte, there are a lot of personages, feel pathos due to their loneliness. They are trapped by circumstances. Pre-war conditions in Germany, the partition of India and Post-Independence degradation of values affect the psyche of these characters. They suffer, lose their footholds and become outsiders. Suffering from the sense of homelessness and the fear of insecurity, they are scared to face the reality of life and escape into a world of illusion and make believe situation. Lotte and Lyly forget themselves in a world of dances, drinks and other frivolities, and when reality comes, they become depressed. They suffer from identity crisis and estrangement. Hugo is too aloof of plunge into a relationship, too wary to get involved. He neither shares his problems nor feels interested in sharing other's problems. Hugo feels his life blur, turn grey. In this novel Anita Desai explores not only the human or sub-human condition of just an implication of deracination and estrangement for the modern man.

Hugo Baumgartner finds himself a stranger in the land of his birth. Jew by birth, he is forced to quit his country due to increasing hatred and violence. He does so leaving behind his mother and motherland, but in India, he remains alien and finds himself in a world which "the world of nightmare ....the world also of perverted or wasted work, ruins and cat combs; instruments of torture and monuments of folly."  

The silence and loneliness oppressed Hugo in camp also, because in between the whistles and sirens and the flurried activity, there were too much free time in which Hugo did not know what to do. Silence was Hugo's natural element. He never shared his afflictions and loneliness with anybody. His imprisonment had made Hugo totally unfit to communicate with the external world. Alienation in this world renders him useless to give any interaction with
people around. Repeatedly humiliated and insulted, Hugo feels mortified and retreats into his shell and remains there safely. Hugo Baumgartner always remains an outsider.

Hugo is not only unaccepted by people and countries, but also even by gods and temples. Before his final end, He had one more realisation of his unwantedness and being an outsider. Even God does not accept him. He visits a temple, and he is thrown out of it by some invisible power:

"Go, Baumgartner, out. He had not been found fit. Shabby, dirty man, Firanghi, unwanted. Raus, Baumgartner raus." 49

The novelist significantly presents the theme of alienation, rootlessness, loneliness and identity crisis. This novel is likely to be uncharacteristically controversial, Jewish friends of Anita Desai complain that it perpetuates the myth of the Jew going to his death. The sleeping Baumgartner does not resist his attacker, because Desai explains, that Hugo had a feeling of guilt of having not brought his mother to the safety to India. However the novelist defends strongly the fate of the drifters and losers.

The theme of voyage of spiritual awakening in Journey to Ithaca is in fact a significant one. The soul's journey to enlightenment and spiritual awakening is the leitmotif of this novel. The spiritual quest and awakening of Matteo and Laila are described in this quest novel. Three journeys are significantly projected in this novel. Matteo's journey from Italy to India, Sophie's journey to India and from India to Italy and back to India and her final quest for truth which begins from India. The third journey is of Laila, who through her quest for Krishna ultimately finds her lord in India. Journey is more important than the destination and the search is more meaningful than the object of search.

Matteo's spiritual quest and awakening form the core of the first part of the novel. Right from the start Matteo's aims are fixed. He knows that the heart of the matter is the mystic truth, the enigma of life's experience lies in India.
For him, his goal is clear. He has no dithering about the road not taken. He rejects Eurocentric zeitgeist of material attainment from his early childhood. He could not stand the school right from the first day to the last day. To a philosophic child like Matteo, the school was like a theorem set within a larger theorem. So this mathematical precision created in him a failure as a student at his early age. The readers are informed through prologue that the school life "baffled him like the geometry and algebra." His answers to the questions of his parents are sullen and monosyllabic. He attempts to keep clear of others reveal his desire to escape from real life. Like Arun Joshi's Som Bhaskar in The Last Labyrinth. Matteo is always in a hurry like a hare chased by unseen sounds. Matteo is not attached to either of his parents.

Taken out from the school, Matteo was entrusted to the guardianship of a tutor, Fabian, who was appointed to teach him English. He too has thrown European values to the wind. Fabian introduced him to a world outside the worldly and injected within him the spirit of a search. Matteo's sudden spring like motion on looking at the title of his tutor's book, The Journey to the East by Herman Hersse, is the turning point in his life. Fabian enters Matteo's life like a comet brightening his mind. When Matteo's mother opposes Matteo's reading this book, Matteo becomes sick of his parent's involvement in his present and future. Matteo's alienation and escape from his parents and community affect his matrimonial equation also. He does not find satisfaction and happiness with his wife Sophie. She is unable to understand Matteo's thinking, who rates the world of Gurus as more real and true than the world of Sophie or his parents. He tells Sophie what he has read in the Katha Upanishad:

"There is the path of joy and the path of pleasure... pondering on them the wise one chooses the path of joy, the fool takes the path of pleasure." 51

In this novel, the novelist accounts Matteo's nagging sense of alienation and his quest for spirituality. Like so many western youths, Matteo leaves his luxurious home and affluent family in search of something beyond his
In India he feels himself close to the supreme power. Like boards of other pilgrims, he comes across at various holy places. He tries to do what the sadhus do on the sand, banks of river. When he sees a sadhu swimming across the river, even when the river is in full spate, he feels that it needs Sadhna or a course of spiritual discipline. This novel describes Sophie and Matteo's experiences of kumbh mela at Allahabad, and their arrival in an ashram in Bihar. Matteo begins learning Sanskrit. He broods over the relationship of body and the soul. As a seeker after truth, he thinks of unveiling the mystery of life and death. When he meets Mother, he works on the advice of her as Sadhaka. He confesses the higher and nobler vision of 'Niskama Karma'. In mother's ashram, love is regarded as the nucleus for God realization. Matteo realises that by relating himself to the vision and insights of great sages, he can have the first hand knowledge of ultimate truth.

Matteo realises that faith and meditation are the two skills needed to have a vision of spiritual truth. His search for eternal truth makes him vulnerable. His quest becomes a quest for survival. He feels enlightened to hear what the Mother speaks. In Mother's presence Matteo feels divine force everywhere. He is over-powered by what the Mother speaks. Mother assigns duties to all the devotees:

"This effort, this endeavour, this exercise, it is Sadhana? If the artist performs this exercise, it is artistic. If the farmer performs it, it is spiritual and it all leads to achievement."52
Matteo's need of a guru of a Mother makes him lose his mental strength and confidence to face the world. Most of the times Matteo passes his time with Mother, which makes Sophie uneasy. As a devotee, he finds solace when he is blessed by the presence of divine Mother. But Mother's death brings an obstacle in Matteo's spiritual quest. His search for spirituality and ultimate truth of life remains unfulfilled.

Mother, whose real name is Laila, is another questing figure. In fact she became Mother from Laila, the dancer, daughter of Alma and Hameed. Being a Muslim, Laila rebels against the traditional code of her religion. She leaves her home in search of her spiritual existence. Laila reminds Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss, who also rebels against social norms. Laila is an Egyptian Muslim, presented as a seeker of spirituality in Hindu religion in India. But before this in the earlier part of her life, she understands that, bookish knowledge is meaningless for her. Her search is similar to that of Matteo. Studies put off her mind and she wants to be the mistress of her own thoughts and actions. She wants freedom in her life. She aspires for the freedom towards fulfillment of her conscious desire.

At the Al Azhar University, she injects courage in her fellow students to fight for freedom. Laila's revolutionary nature becomes a matter of affliction for her parents. She is sent away from home to further her academics. At Cairo, she pursues her studies only superficially. There, nobody knows that Laila might have a secret life. Even her friend Fatima is unaware of the upheaval going on in Laila's mind. She is not able to control her mind. Her sense is like unmanageable horses:

"For the truth was that she was drawn first in one direction, then another wherever she saw passion taken to its extreme, whether celebratory or ascetic." 53

In this reference Robin Barrow rightly opines:
"If we take being happy to mean to what you want to do, then it is obviously true and whenever we can, we can pursue happiness." 54

Then, Laila is sent to her uncle's house, in Paris. She finds this household disgusting as the glass windows are always screened with lace curtains. The rich surroundings of this house eclipse her vision of spirituality. Instead of reading Islamic or French study books, she reads the Aitreyaka Brahmanam of the Rig Veda:

Once, Laila sees the Krishna Lila performance and feels like leaping in ecstatic joy. She joins the troupe and takes dance lessons. She takes much interest in Indian dance to develop the spiritual side of dancing. She visits Paris, Venice, France, New York and other places with this troupe. Her sadhna does not lead her to spiritual enlightenment. After reaching India, Laila leaves the troupe and embarks upon her spiritual quest. The way to spiritual enlightenment was now here visible. When she visits the Mahalakshmi Temple in Bombay, she does not get any spiritual satisfaction:

" This is not where I will worship I cannot be made to worship what I do not believe. The truth is elsewhere. My search is not over. I must continue it. O where is my Lord whose calm face shines only with the pure light of truth."

Laila goes on a pilgrimage. At the ashram, Laila is known as the Mother. There she preaches about the path of selfless duty. Due to Laila's preachings, the devotees try to attain complete consciousness in one's inner spiritual life. For her self-realization is the ultimate truth of life. According to her, even an ordinary being can attain knowledge and eternal bliss by performing routine work. Talking about the beehive, she asserts:

"In the same way, if one wants to nourish one's soul it should be filled with spiritual nectar, I mean honey made from spiritual nectar, nectar to nourish your soul." 56
Laila in her spiritual quest, experiments with multiple cultures, practices and beliefs and finds that the truth was ever new. India, her Ithaca, could be a living santana. About her spiritual journey, B.L. Tripathi rightly observes:

"Laila's spiritual journey has nothing to do with religious rituals or institutionalized religion. She begins to discover that a personal realization of oneself can only come from one's inner consciousness. The many-sidedness of Indian religious tradition being dharmic is truly beyond the theist and atheist categories. Its polycentric nature congenially embraces the whole world and all its beings, where trees, rivers, animals and the stones in here the cosmic spirit. In this Indian world view everything charachara is a cosmic entity." 57

The theme of the voyage of spiritual awakening is rightly presented in the novel. The spiritual quest of Laila in the 1920s and Matteo in the 1970s is explored. This novel is a spiritual odyssey of Laila, who experiences Islamic, Christian and Hindu cultures during her voyage of spiritual enlightenment. She seeks for the ultimate truth and enlightenment. The voyage of discovery undertaken by Matteo and Laila caught in the opposition between 'what is' and 'what ought to be'. The journey to Ithaca is undertaken to discover the natural wholeness of being. The novelist does not aim to project Mother as a spiritual phenomenon. The novelist also tells the way to bring bhava parivartana (spiritual change).

Entrapments at home and abroad in Fasting, Feasting is another significant theme. Short-listed for the Booker Prize, this novel adds another laurel to the already established genius of Anita Desai. The title of this novel itself suggests that this novel projects a contrast between two cultures viz. Indian and American. In all Desai's earlier novels, the protagonists had single parent; the other parent being expired, ill, estranged or totally ineffective. But in the present novel, there is an influential presence of both the parents, MamaPapa. They are just MamaPapa or Papa-Mama, but remain nameless throughout the novel. They always remain together MamaPapa, as if they are
not separate entities but individual. The depiction of the discrimination against daughters loses much of its force because the parents are shown as absolute monsters. Divided into two parts the first part of this book deals with the Uma's entrapment at home. The second part deals with Arun, who comes to study in America. The entrapment of Uma at home and the entrapment of Arun in abroad are presented.

The parents of Uma and Arun play an important role in making them entrapped. The novelist is not bothered to give the parents a name. They are just mentioned as MamaPapa. The reason may be that they represent all mothers and fathers of the typical middle-class Indian society. At the time of Aruna's birth, a male child was expected, but when this did not happen, Arun was changed to Aruna. For the entrapment of Uma, the indifferent and irresponsible parents are responsible. The traditional outlook and irresponsibility of MamaPapa lead to their children's entrapment.

Uma is a simple, plain and obedient child, always eager to fulfill her parent's commands. As a small child, Uma is very fond of her school and her teachers in the convent school. But unfortunately, Uma never proves to be an intelligent child. More ever frequent offs from school due to busy routine at home never leaves sufficient time for studies. Uma's education suffers a serious set-back with the arrival of her baby-brother-Arun. After his birth, Mama becomes busy in looking after Arun and Uma has to do all the household works. She has to attend guests and to take care of the baby as well. MamaPapa even decide which of their children should have education and how much of it. Uma always goes early to the school and later finds some excuse to linger there for longer time. During dull weekends, Uma feels deprived:

"There were the wretched weekends when she was plucked back into the trivialities of her home, which seemed a denial, a negation of life as it ought to be, somber and splendid, and then the endless summer vacation when the heat reduced even that pointless existence to farther vacuity." 58
In spite of the failure in exams, Uma wants to continue her studies, but her Mama thinks otherwise:

"You know you failed your exams again, you're not being moved up. What is the use of going back to school? Stay at home and look after your baby brother." 59

Even as Uma shows disagreement, she is cajoled and finally threatened to accept her Mama's decision. Finally Uma's desire of going to school and getting education remains an unfulfilled dream, because she has to obey her parents command:

"But ayah can do this - ayah can do that -' Uma tried to protest when the orders began to come thick and fast. This made Mama look stern again. 'You know we can't leave the baby to the servant', she said severely. 'He needs proper attention'. When Uma pointed out that ayah had looked after her and Arun as babies, Mama's expression made it clear it was quite a different matter not, and she repeated threateningly: 'proper attention.' 60

Uma is really trapped at home, smothered by the overbearing parents and their traditions. Her parents never think to provide her a career. Instead of sending her to dance, painting, tailoring classes, she is kept back at home just to do the job of an attendant. When Uma's cousin brother Rama takes her to dinner, MamaPapa reacted typically like orthodox Indian family. Uma has to obey her parents' orders. Whatever MamaPapa want, they order their eldest daughter, Uma, to carry out them without delay. She is asked to inform the cook to prepare sweets for her father. She has to pack parcel of sweets to be sent to Arun in America. Uma is entrusted to write letter to their son. Living under the demanding rule of MamaPapa, Uma is repressed, suppressed, entrapped and imprisoned at home. She becomes a reluctant victim of entrapment at home:
"All morning MamaPapa have found things for Uma to do. It is as if Papa's retirement is to be spent in this manner - sitting on the red swing in the veranda with Mama, rocking, and finding ways to keep Uma occupied. As long as they can do that, they themselves feel busy and occupied." 61

Uma's dreams of a happy married life are shattered, when after her marriage, it is found that her husband Harish is already married. Due to this, Uma has to pass her life in her parents's home. She is not allowed for outings, but once, when she visits a park with MamaPapa, she can not dare to buy some eatables. MamaPapa's behaviour towards Uma is really unsympathetic. She is greatly thrilled when Dr. Dutta approaches MamaPapa with a job for her. But MamaPapa do not approve the idea of their daughter going out to earn her bread. They do not try to see and understand Uma's problems. Uma not only needs financial independence but also some degree of fulfillment in her life which she might have got from Dr. Dutta's job. All her please fall flat on deaf ears. Even her attempt to call Dr. Dutta for help stealthily, when MamaPapa were away, is found out when they find their telephone unlocked, Papa shouts angrily.

Uma is caught between two forces pulling in different directions, the power of patriarchal education and tradition, and the urge to get free from it. Her feelings are not paid any attention to within the family circle, at least not by her parents. She feels herself locked in a cage. When Uma receives an invitation for a coffee party from Mrs. O'Henry, MamaPapa refuse to send her to the party because of the comprehension that O'Henry might convert Uma into a Christian nun. Uma's life reduced to a baby-sitter and an unpaid servant for her self-centred parents. She finds no escape from her entrapment. She feels herself utterly friendless and alone, even when she is at home and surrounded by her MamaPapa. She has no friend to share her grief:

"She could write a letter to a friend - a private message of despair, dissatisfaction, yearning; she has a packet of notepaper, pale violet with a pink rose embossed in the corner - but who is the friend? Mrs. Joshi? But
since she lives next door, she would be surprised. Aruna? But Aruna 
would pay no attention; she is too busy cousin Ramu? Where was he? Had 
his farm swallowed him up? And Anamika - had marriage devoured her?"

Anamika also lives an entrapped life. She lives in a patriarchal society. 
She passes her final school exams excellently and wins a scholarship to 
Oxford. But her parents consider marriage more necessary than higher 
education for her. The scholarship is used in her Anamika's marriage. Her 
husband is much older, grim-faced and conscious of his own superiority. The 
moment, Anamika enters her in-laws' house; she starts another life of 
entrapment. Her husband is a typical Mama's boy, who remains only a silent 
worst to his mother's beating of his wife regularly. Anamika, who won 
scholarship to Oxford, spends her entire time in the kitchen in cooking for a 
very large family. Once, Anamika's mother's brutal beating to her results in her 
miscarriage. Finally, the family ties her up in a nylon saree, pours the kerosene 
over her, and burns her to death.

Arun is the male version of entrapment. When he was born, his parents 
were very excited. The arrival of Arun joined MamaPapa even more 
inextricably. His bringing-up is very well planned what will he eat and at what 
time etc. It is another matter that Arun feels himself suffocated due to this over 
indulgence. Papa insists on the best education for his son-there is tuition in 
Maths, in Physics, in Chemistry, Hindi and English. The ironical part of all this 
care is that, Arun feels himself overburdened and leads a mechanical existence. 
His individuality is crushed. Not only Uma and Anamika, but Arun also feels 
himself entrapped in his own house. Right from his birth, his father takes 
charge of Arun's life. Arun is never allowed to breathe freely. Although his 
examinations are over, Papa does not allow him to go to his sister's house in 
Bombay during holidays. His father always tries to impose the responsibility of 
his own unfulfilled dreams on Arun. When ultimately Arun's letter of 
acceptance of scholarship from Massachusetts arrives:
"Uma watched Arun too, when he read the fateful letter. She watched and searched for an expression, of relief, of joy, doubt, fear anything at all. But there was none.... There was nothing else - not the hint of a smile, frown, laugh or anything: these had been ground down till they had disappeared. This blank face now started at the letter and faced mother phase of his existence arranged for him by Papa."

Entrapment in abroad is presented through Arun's caged life in Massachusetts, where he is unable to manifest his identity as an individual. In Patton's house, the smell of the raw meat is loathsome for Aran. Mr. Patton is unable to understand Aran's habit of eating vegetable food only. When Mrs. Patton gives him vegetarian food items, he finds them detestable too. Mrs. Patton watches Aran eating with pride and complicity:

"Arun ate with an expression of woe and a sense of mistreatment. How was he to tell Mrs. Patton that these were not the foods that figured in his culture? That his digestive system did not know how to turn them into nourishment?"

Anita Desai has masterly presented the theme of entrapment at home and abroad. MamaPapa are the realistic examples of Indian typical parents. Uma's unattractiveness is not a reason of her entrapment, because her appealing sister Anamika too suffers from entrapment. Uma's lack of education has led to her entrapped situation. Anamika's entrapped situation is brought through her foreign scholarship. Aran, who leaves his home for a career, but feels the pangs of entrapment.

The theme of alienation, rootlessness, and identity crisis in Anita Desai's novels is projected excellently. Limited and individualised, her protagonists are conditioned by their past and their own peculiar nature. These protagonists come to feel the existential anguish in terms of sense of alienation, rootlessness, anxiety, nothingness, meaninglessness and mortality. The novelist has presented the stage of crisis faced by her protagonists, who experience a
gap between their earlier consciousness and immediate comprehension. Anita Desai's protagonists try to fulfill their dreams or expectations, but they face disillusionment when their dreams and illusions are shattered. They realize to absorb the situation, which is the bi-product of this clash. Conflict and suffering are the two consequences of their alienated situation.
References


6. Ibid, p.11.


20. Ibid, pp.63-64.


23. Ibid, p.34.


32. Ibid, p.35.


44. Ibid, p.128.

45. Ibid, p.68.


48. Ibid, p.49.

49. Ibid, p.190.


51. Ibid, p.32.

52. Ibid, p.102.


56. Ibid, p.118.


60. Ibid, p.31.

61. Ibid, p.133.


63. Ibid, p.121.

64. Ibid, pp.184-85.