CHAPTER TWO

ANATOMY IS DESTINY

Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. . . She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute - - she is the Other. . . .

[Simon de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, 1953, pp. xviii]

The assumption that persists is that women are fundamentally different from men and this has been the cause of the subordination of women. It is argued, then, that women’s differences from men, is the chief reason of women being oppressed, denied, exploited and dehumanized. It ought to be stressed that the fundamental fact of male domination over women is discernible in all societies.

Patriarchy is justified by the biological differences between men and women and is the causative factor of the universal oppression of women by men. This is termed as biological determinism. Freud argues it as Anatomy is destiny. In other words, by her very physiognomy the female cannot escape from being subordinate to the male.

It is her anatomy that compels the female to take the stance of a submissive, meek, sufferer at the hands of the male. Her dependent complex, inferiority complex and fear psychosis are traceable to her physiognomy and it is right to argue that her anatomy is her destiny. Tracing the major attributes of patriarchy Adrienne Rich writes [Of Mother Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution, 1976, p. 57]:
Patriarchy is the power of the fathers, a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men - by force direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education and the division of labour determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male. ... Under patriarchy, I may live in purdah or drive a truck. ...

Only with the approval of the male and to the extent patriarchy is willing to accede, a woman can enjoy anything of privilege or influence. This has led to the pessimistic depiction of women as the innocent, passive, and powerless victims of male violence. Kate Millet’s argument [Sexual Politics, 1971, p. 25] is to the point and it is quoted:

The social control of women in a free society such as the United States was not carried out through a rigid authoritarian system of force. Rather, it took place by means of the engineering of consent among women themselves. Instead of being openly coerced into accepting their secondary status, women were conditioned into embracing it by the process of sex-role stereotyping. ... From early childhood, women were trained to accept a system which divided society into male and female spheres, with appropriate roles for each, and which allocated public power exclusively to the male sphere.

At this point it becomes necessary to examine the differences that result in the biological trap in which a woman is entrapped. In the sexual act there is the animal like lack of self-restraint on the part of the male partner and there is the servility and larval vulnerability on the part of the female partner. Consequentially, the male partner
vicariously experiences a sense of power.

At the fundamental level of copulation there is assertion and dominance of the male and the feeble servility of the female. This is the biological conditioning for the female from time immemorial. Because of the body condition the male ego triumphs over the female ego. The male gloats over remarking that the female has a small juicy cunt, which fits him like a glove.

There is always the tendency to hurt and insult the female because of the biological inferiority. The history of patriarchy presents a variety of cruelties and barbarities: the suttee executions in India, the crippling deformity of foot binding in China, the lifelong ignominy of the veil in Islam, or the wide spread persecution of sequestration, the gynaecium, and purdah. Phenomenon such as clitoroidectomy, clitoral incision, the sale and enslavement of women under one guise or another, involuntary and child marriages, concubinage and prostitution still take place - - the first in Africa, the latter in the Near and Far East, the last generally.

The patriarchal mentality has concocted a whole series of rationales about women to justify their acts against women. It is argued that the woman’s biological condition and her biological inferiority sets her apart. The notion is that the female is essentially inferior. And as the human institutions grow out from deep and primal anxieties and are shaped by psychological mechanisms socially organized attitudes towards woman arise from basic tensions expressed by the male. To quote Kate Millet [Sexual Politics, 1971, p. 46]:

Under patriarchy the female did not herself develop the symbols by which she is described. As both the primitive and the civilized worlds are
male worlds, the ideas, which shaped culture in regard to the female were also of male design. The images of women as we know it is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs. These needs spring from a fear of the “otherness” of women. Yet this notion itself presupposes 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 the “other” or alien...

Whatever its origin, the function of the male’s sexual antipathy is to provide a means of control over a subordinate group and a rationale which justifies the inferior station of those in a lower order, “explaining” the oppression of their lives. . . .

There is the persistent and worldwide feeling that the biological and sexual functions of the woman are impure. One detects evidence of the biological condition of the female being considered impure in literature, and in myth. The vent of menstruation, for instance, is a largely clandestine affair, and the psychological effect of the stigma attached has a great effect on the female ego.

There is a large anthropological literature on menstrual taboo; the practice of isolating menstruating females in huts at the edge of the village occurs throughout the primitive world. Contemporary slang denominates menstruation as the curse. On this point, once again, it is quite relevant to quote Kate Millet [Sexual Politics, 1971, p. 46]:

There is considerable evidence that such discomfort as women suffer during this period [period of menstruation] is often likely to be psychosomatic, rather than physiological, cultural rather than biological,
in origin. That this also may be true to some extent of labour and delivery
is attested to be the recent experiment with “painless childbirth”.

Patriarchal circumstances and beliefs seem to have the effect of
poisoning the female’s own sense of physical self until it often truly
becomes the burden. . . .

It ought to be stressed, that in the primitive period the phenomenon of the
female’s genitals was explained in terms of a wound, sometimes reasoning that she was
visited by a bird or snake, and mutilated into her present condition. Once she was
wounded, now she bleeds. The female vagina is described in contemporary slang as
a gash. The Freudian description of the female genitals is in terms of a castrated
condition.

The uneasiness and disgust that the female genitals arouse in patriarchal societies
is attested through religious, cultural, and literary prescription. In preliterate groups fear
is also a factor, as in the belief in a castrating vagina dentate. The penis is the badge of
male’s superior status, and the biological condition of the female leaves her with
inferiority status and inferiority complex.

It ought to be noted that in all patriarchal societies the dominant male eats first or
eats better food, and even where the male and female eat together, and the female serves
the male. All patriarchs enforce taboos against women touching ritual objects [those of
war or religion] or food. It is because women are considered by their biological
condition unclean. Therefore, the women are not permitted to eat with men. Women eat
apart in many countries even at this point of time. Moreover, all patriarchs have hedged
virginity and defloration in elaborate rites and interdictions. Virginity presents an
interesting problem in ambience. On the one hand, it is a mysterious good because it is a sign of property received intact.

On the other hand it represents an unknown evil associated with the man of blood and terrifyingly “other”. Ernest Crawley makes a pertinent observation [The Mystic Rose, 1927, p. 29]:

So auspicious is the event of defloration that in many tribes the owner-groom is willing to relinquish breaking the seal of his new possession to a stronger or older personality who can neutralize the attendant dangers. Fears of defloration appear to originate in a fear of the alien sexuality of the female. . . .

It is the female who endures the attendant bodily pains and mental anguish in defloration. It ought to be noted that in the houses of men, boys have such low status that they are often called the wives of their initiators, the term wife implying both inferiority and the status of sexual object. The derogation of feminine status in lesser males is a patriarchal trait.

The psychoanalytic term for the generalized adolescent tone of the house culture of men is the phallic state. Men consider themselves as the citadels of virility. Therefore, men enforce the most saliently power-centred characteristics of patriarchy. Geza Roheim argues pointedly thus, [“Psychoanalysis of Primitive Cultural Types”, 1932, p. 39]:

The tone and ethos of men’s house culture is sadistic, power-oriented, and latently homosexual, frequently narcissistic in its energy and motives. The men’s house reference that the penis is a weapon, endlessly equated with other weapons, . . .
At this point of discussion, it is necessary to refer to the two leading myths of Western culture. They are the classical tale of Pandora’s Box and the Biblical story of the Fall. In both cases earlier man’s concepts of feminine evil have passed through a final literary phase to become highly influential ethical justifications of things as they are. Pandora was the origin of the damnable race of women -- a plague which men must live with. And when patriarchy wishes to exalt sexuality, it celebrates fertility through the phallus; when it wishes to denigrate sexuality it cites Pandora. Kate Millet’s observation throws more light on the stance [Sexual Politics, 1971, pp. 51-52]:

Patriarchal religion and ethics tend to lump the female and sex together as if the whole burden of the onus and stigma it attaches to sex were the fault of the female alone. Thereby sex, which is known to be unclean, sinful, and the debilitating, pertains to the female, and the male identity is preserved as a human, rather than a sexual one.

The myth of the Fall is a highly finished version of the same theme of the female being biologically unclean and sinful. It has an enormous power over the mind of the female even in a rationalist era. This mythic version of the female as the cause of human suffering, knowledge, and sin is still the foundation of sexual attitudes, for it represents the most crucial argument of the patriarchal tradition of the West. It ought to be stressed that everywhere in The Bible “knowing” is synonymous with sexuality, and clearly a product of contact with the phallus.

To blame the evils and sorrows of life on the female is in vogue from times past to times present. Therefore, it is the female who is tempted first and beguiled by the penis, transformed into something else, a snake. Once again, it is useful to quote Kate
Millet’s enlightening observation  [Sexual Politics, 1971,  pp. 53-54]

Eve is a mere sexual type and, according to tradition, either expendable or replaceable. And as the myth records the original sexual adventure, Adam was seduced by woman, who was seduced by a penis. “The woman whom thou gave to be with me, she gave me of the fruit and I did eat it” is the first man’s defence. Seduced by the phallic snake, Eve is convicted for Adam’s participation in sex. . . .

Louis Wirth [“Problems of Minority groups”, 1945, p. 345] argument is well in conjunction with the observation of Kate Millet and it runs thus:

As women in patriarchy are for the most part marginal citizens when they are citizens at all, their situation is like that of other minorities, here defined not as dependent upon numerical size of the group, but on its status. A minority group of people who because of their physical or cultural characteristics are singled out from others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment. . . .

But then, interestingly Freud pays chivalrous compliment to the female arguing that the woman is the most beautiful thing that the world can offer. And the woman is the ideal of womanhood. And nature has determined woman’s destiny through beauty, charm, and sweetness. And it is an acknowledged fact that women submitted willingly to the sexual and social subjection of pairing and then to monogamous marriage because, in fact, women find sexuality burdensome.

The women constantly longed for relief by the right of chastity. The notions of
sexual resistance, the defence of integrity with frigidity, or the preservation of independence through chastity are common themes in a male dominated society. And chastity, or even the negative attitudes toward coitus, which accompany frigidity, operated as patriarchal social and psychological stratagems to limit or prohibit woman’s pleasure in sexuality. But then they could also be transformed into protective feminine stratagems in a refusal to capitulate to patriarchal force -- physical, economic, or social.

It ought to be stressed that a frigid woman is not incapable of orgasms on her own. In fact, biologically, the female cycle is capable of multiple orgasms in quick succession, each of which is analogous to the detumescence, ejaculation, and loss of erection in the male. With proper stimulation, a woman is capable of multiple orgasms in quick succession. W. H. Masters, and Virginia Johnson make an elaborate record of the possibility of multiple female orgasms ["Orgasm, Anatomy of the Female," 1961, p. 292]:

If a female who is capable of having regular orgasms is properly stimulated within a short period after her first climax, she will, in most instances, be capable of having a second, third, fourth and even a fifth and sixth orgasm before she is fully satisfied. As contrasted with the male’s usual inability to have more than one orgasm in a short period, many females, especially when clitorally stimulated, can regularly have five or six full orgasms within a matter of minutes. . . .

While the male’s sexual potential is limited, the female’s sexual potential by her biological condition is nearly inexhaustible and apart from psychological considerations can continue until physical exhaustion interposes.
In view of the long-standing belief in the existence of a vaginal orgasm, it ought to be emphasized, that the clitoris is the organ specific to sexuality in the human female. And the vagina is an organ of reproduction as well as of sexuality, and possessing no erogenous tissue save in the lower third of the vaginal tract, the nerve endings in these cells are deriving from and centring in the clitoris. While there is no vaginal orgasm, of course, orgasm in vaginal coitus (and probably one of a different experiential characters than that produced by exclusively clitoral stimulation) just as on any occasion when the clitoris is properly stimulated. In heterosexual intercourse female orgasm is due to the friction of the penis upon the clitoral head or glands and labia minora of the clitoral area.

A distinction must be made between the locus of arousal and the locus of response. The seat of response is in the clitoris, which riggers other responses (the enlargement of the labia majora, the flow of the transude, vaginal spasms, etcetera). Sexual arousal has its source in the stimulation of body tissues, erogenous or otherwise, or in a purely physical excitation (thoughts, emotions, words, pictures, etcetera). The clitoris, one might point out, is the only human organ, which is specific to sexuality, and to sexual pleasure while the penis has other functions both in elimination and reproduction. In this context, the pointed observation of W. H. Masters [Quoted in Dr. Sherfey’s “The Evolution and Nature of Female Sexuality in Relation to Psychoanalytic Theory,” 1966, p. 792] is worth recording here

The average female with optimal arousal will usually be satisfied with three to five manually induced orgasms; whereas mechanical stimulation, as with the electric vibrator, is less tiring and induces her to go on to long simulative sessions of an hour or more during which she may have twenty to fifty consecutive orgasms. She will stop only when totally exhausted...
The observation of Dr. Sherfey [“The Evolution and Nature of Female Sexuality in Relation to Psychoanalytic Theory,” 1966, p. 792] is worth examining in conjunction with the statement of W. H. Masters:

No doubt the most far reaching hypothesis extrapolated from these biological data is the existence of a universal and physically normal condition of woman’s inability to ever reach complete sexual satiation in the presence of the most intense, repetitive orgasmic experience, no matter how produced. Theoretically, a woman could go on having orgasms indefinitely if physical exhaustion did not intervene. . . .

Despite an enormous biological orgasmic capacity, exhaustion can and does intervene in strict accordance with the amount of tension and energy expended; greater in the case of penis’s friction in coitus; lesser in the case of manual or mechanical stimulation. In that sense, in female, like that of in male, sexuality is limited. Moreover, biological capacity is hardly psychological need nor does it always correspond to psychic satisfaction. The effect of patriarchal social conditions upon women with regard to their sexual lives has had enormous and even anomalous results. One marvels at the proof of the power of socialization to culturally restrain women in all respects.

Patriarchy tends to convert woman into a sexual object. But she does not enjoy sexuality, which is agreed to be her fate. Instead, she is made to suffer for and be ashamed of her sexuality. And women have been confined to the cultural level of animal life providing the male with sexual outlet and exercising the animal functions of reproduction and care of the young.

Thus, the female has had sexuality visited upon her as a punishment in a way of
life, which, with few exceptions, and apart from maternity, did not encourage her to derive pleasure in sexuality and limited her to an existence otherwise comprised mainly of menial labour and domestic service. By and large, pregnancy and childbirth were continually referred to, in the patriarchal set up, as biological infirmities. Again, the entire burden of childcare and housework was left upon women, frequently alone, as paternal responsibility was so often neglected.

At this juncture the influence of Freud on the male psyche concerning woman deserves to be examined analytically, and at great length. In America the influence of Freud is incalculable. And America in many ways is the first centre of sexual revolution. And the male world of America relies on Freud for their assumptions and presumptions of the biological condition of woman. Analyzing the effect of Freud’s work on the relationship between sexes Kate Millet writes [*Sexual Politics*, 1971, p. 178]:

> Although generally accepted as a prototype of the liberal urge toward sexual freedom, and a signal contributor toward softening puritanical inhibitions upon sexuality, the effect of Freud’s work, that of his followers, and still more that of his popularizers, was to rationalize the invidious relationship between the sexes, to ratify traditional roles, and to validate temperamental differences. . . .

The argument of Viola Klein is so very pertinent and it reads well in conjunction with the observation of Kate Millet, and [*The Feminine Character: History of an Ideology*, 1946, p. 72]:

> It was expressed in inferiority feelings, in contempt for their own sex, in revolt against their passive role, in envy of man’s greater freedom, in the
ambition to equal man in intellectual or artistic achievements, in strivings for independence . . . and in all sorts of devices to make up for the social disadvantages of not being a man. . .

Through his clinical work Freud was able to observe women suffering from two causes: sexual inhibition (sometimes sufficiently great as to bring on severe symptoms, even hysteria), and a great discontentment with their social circumstances. In general, his tendency was to believe the second over dependent upon the first, and to recommend on female sexual fulfilment a panacea for what were substantial symptoms of social unrest within an oppressive culture.

Freud did not accept the female patients’ symptoms as evidence of a justified dissatisfaction with the limiting circumstances imposed on the women by society, but as symptomatic of an independent and universal feminine tendency. He named this tendency penis envy, traced its origin to childhood experience and based his theory of the psychology of women upon it, aligning what he took to be three corollaries of feminine psychology, passivity, masochism, and narcissism, so that each was dependent upon, or related to, penis envy.

As the Freudian understanding of female personality is based upon the idea of penis envy, it requires an elaborate, and often repetitious, exposition. Beginning with the theory of penis envy, the definition of the female is negative - - what she is , is the result of the fact that she is not a male and lacks a penis. Freud argued that the female’s discovery of her sex - - born female - - is, in and of itself, a catastrophe of such vast proportions that it haunts a woman all through life and accounts for most aspects of her temperament. Freud believed that women accepted the idea that to be born female is to
be born castrated. Freud argues thus, in this context [“Some Character Types Met With in Psycho-Analysis Work,” 1959, p. 323]:

As we learn from psycho-analytic work, women regard themselves as wronged from infancy, as undeservedly cut short and set back; and the embitterment of so many daughters against their mothers derives, in the last analysis, from the reproach against her having brought them into the world as women instead of as men.

Freud located the literal feminine castration in the female child’s discovery of the anatomical differentiation between the sexes. Freud believed he found the key to feminine experience - - in that moment when girls discover they are castrated - - a momentous discovery which little girls are destined to make. Freud’s argument, in this context [“Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinctions Between the Sexes,” 1925, p. 190] is:

They [the girls] notice the penis of a brother or a playmate, strikingly visible and of large proportions, at once recognize it as the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ, and from that time forward fall a victim to envy for the penis.

But one fails not to detect in the notion of Freud concerning penis or female castration complex a strong masculine bias or even rather of a gross male-supremacist bias.

Deutch refers to the clitoris as the inadequate substitute. Karl Abraham [“Manifestations of the Female Castration Complex,” 1922, p. 45”] refers to the poverty in external genitals in the female and concludes that even bearing children can be but a
poor substitute for biological and constitutional inadequacy. In this context, it ought to be stressed that Freud’s attitude here is phallus-centred. As such, the postulation is that females are but incomplete or imperfect males with the male being accepted as the norm and the female as the other.

Incidentally, the first things all children notice is that the mother has breasts while father has none. What is possibly the rather impressive effect of childbirth on young minds cannot be overlooked as well as the girl’s knowledge not only of her clitoris but her vagina as well.

For while the discovery of her castration is purported to be a universal experience in the female, her response to this fate is the criterion by which her health, her maturity and her future are determined through a rather elaborate series of stages. Freud’s further elaboration on this point is quite relevant here [“Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinctions Between the Sexes,” 1925, p. 192]:

After a woman has become aware of the wound to her narcissism, she develops like a scar, a sense of inferiority. When she has passed beyond her first attempt at explaining her lack of a penis as being a punishment personal to herself and has realized that sexual character is a universal one, she begins to share the contempt felt by men for a sex which is the lesser in so important a respect. The female first blames her mother who sent her into the world so insufficiently equipped, and who is always held responsible for her lack of a penis...

On this argument of Freud, Kate Millet offers a pertinent remark by way of refutation [Sexual Politics, 1971, p. 187;:
Confronted with so much concrete evidence of the male’s superior status, sensing on all sides the depreciation in which they are held, girls envy not the penis, but only what the penis gives one social pretensions to. Freud appears to have made a major and rather foolish confusion between biology and culture, anatomy and status. It is still more apparent that his audience found such confusion serviceable.

Convinced that the connection between the penis and intellectual life is unquestionably organic, Freud maintains that the intellectual superiority of the male, constitutionally linked with the penis is close to an ascertainable fact for Freud a rock bottom of remarkable comfort. Freud believed that two aspects of woman’s character are directly linked to penis envy; modesty and jealousy. It is herself despair over the defect of her castration, which gives rise to the well-known shame of women. Freud designated shame as a feminine characteristic, par excellence. Its purpose, in his view, is simply to conceal her hapless defect.

As among the primitives, so today, the woman hides her parts to hide her wound. When Freud suggests that modesty in women was originally designed for concealment of genital deficiency, he is willing to describe pubic hair as the response of nature herself to cover the female fault. As such in all these respects in the psychic field of a woman the biological factor is really the rock bottom.

It ought to be stressed that Freud’s doctrine of penis envy is in fact a superbly timed accusation, enabling masculine sentiment to take the offensive. The whole weight of responsibility and even of guilt is now placed upon any woman unwilling to stay in her place. The theory of penis envy shifts the blame of her suffering to the female for
daring to aspire to a biologically impossible state. Any hankering for a less humiliating and circumscribed existence is immediately ascribed to unnatural and unrealistic deviation from her genetic identity and therefore her fate.

A woman, who resists femininity, feminine temperament, status, and role, is thought to court neurosis, for femininity is her fate as anatomy is destiny. In so evading the only identity nature has granted her, she counts nothingness. Freud defined the libido as masculine regularly and lawfully of a masculine nature whether in the man or the woman. He argued that culture was inimical to sexuality. His argument was that if one were to devote oneself to higher pursuits, one must renounce, or sublimate sexuality. Since by Freud’s definition, women have very low libido, they cannot pursue civilization.

The male, whose higher libido equips him for reaching higher reaches, must shun the temptations afforded by the female and go on to loftier goals. Freud entrusted not only human culture but the preservation of the human race to the male. His argument runs thus [“Psychology of Women,” 1993, p. 131]:

Nature has paid less careful attention to the demands of female function than to those of masculinity . . . the achievement of the biological aim is entrusted to the aggressiveness of the male, and is to some extent independent of the cooperation of the female. . . .

The point that is made here is that the whole balance of male sexual aggression toward the female is hereby subsumed under a huge abstract force only concerned with the continuation of the species. This attitude gave rise to a whole battery of military diction which psychology has ever since employed to describe sexuality as surrender,
dominance, and mastery. Once again it is useful to quote Freud [“Psychology of Women,” 194, p. 131]:

The male pursues the female for the purpose of sexual union, seizes hold her and penetrates into her... by this you have precisely reduced the characteristic of masculinity to the factor of aggressiveness. . . .

The three most distinguishing traits of female personality were, in Freud’s view, passivity, masochism, and narcissism. Even here, one can see a certain merit in the Freudian paradigm taken as pure description. The position of women in patriarchy is such that they are expected to be passive, to suffer, and to be sexual objects. In fact the women are socialized into such roles. Freud, therefore, proceeded to define feminine as constitutional passivity, masochism, and narcissism. He also prescribed it as the norm not only of general development but also of healthy development. It is further argued that passivity and masochism are interrelated. Masochism is female; femininity is masochistic. In this context, it ought to be noted that the lust for pain is an expression of femininity, a concept, which can be supported on biological and constitutional grounds. Furthermore, it can be argued that this pain is the nature of a female sexual experience.

Sexual excitation arises as an accessory effect of a large series of internal processes as soon as the intensity of these processes has exceeded certain quantitative limits . . . an excitation of physical pain and feelings would surely have this effect. And narcissistic men improve upon their love object, narcissistic women persist in an inferior form of affection, not rising to the altruism of object love.

Narcissism is not only constitutionally female; it is also produced by penis envy. The effect of penis envy has a share, furthermore, in the physical vanity of women,
since they are bound to value their charms more highly in a late compensation for their original sexual inferiority. Even woman’s beauty is but another symptom of the need to be born with a penis.

It is in this context, feminist women writers, such as Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker, lift their banner of opposition. They are not prepared to accept all the Freudian concepts concerning feminine passivity, feminine masochism, and feminine narcissism, Anita Desai does not accept Freud’s argument that limits female life to one of sexual reproduction. She argues that women should evolve out of the low cultural level earmarked for them by the male dominated society. She does not allow much credit to the argument that identifies masculinity with force, cruelty, indifference, egotism, and property, and femininity with passivity, masochism, and narcissism.

Anita Desai maintains that coitus can scarcely be said to take place in a vacuum. Coitus is a biological and physical activity. It is set so deeply within the larger context of human affairs that it serves as a charged microcosm of the variety of attitudes and values in which culture subscribes. It is with such a background that one examines the *Oeuvres* of Anita Desai. She is conscious of the biological trap in which women are caught, but she argues that it is not the end of life. A sensible woman emerges fully empowered notwithstanding her biological entrapment.

The awareness of the female body condition of Anita Desai is acute and sharp. Her contention is that psychological, biological, social and economic factors are intertwined with sexism and violence on women.

Anita Desai is conscious of the denials, deprivations, the stresses and strains - - *Sturm-und-Drang* - - the tensions and anxieties - - *Angst* - - the pains and miseries,
sufferings and struggles, mental conflicts, exploitation and dehumanization passed through by women. Understandably then, Anita Desai employs the art of writing as the effective medium to voice their protest against the injustices perpetrated by the male chauvinists. Anita Desai wants to put an end to the male domination under the guise of the predominant male patriarchy.

Thus, the women have been relentlessly and meticulously brainwashed down the centuries into accepting their lowliness.

In the fiction, *Fire on the Mountain*, Anita Desai examines the theme of feminism in the light of Freud’s contention that anatomy of the female is her destiny. Anita Desai projects the truth how Nanda Kaul suffers because of her husband’s attitudes and approaches to life. In fact, *Fire on the Mountain* deals with the plights and predicaments experienced by Nanda Kaul because of her Vice Chancellor husband. Nanda Kaul suffers a life of dull routine because her Vice Chancellor husband imposes his life conditions on her. That is precisely why she alienates herself from her Vice Chancellor husband and leads a secluded life on the British conceived hill resort of Carignano.

Nanda Kaul psychically feels that her Vice Chancellor husband is unsympathetic, and un-understanding, and callous. As such Nanda Kaul turns her mind on appreciating the scenes and sights of nature and her interests disclose her neurosis caused by her Vice Chancellor husband [*Fire on the Mountain*, p. 23]:

[Nanda Kaul is interested in] a charred tree trunk in the forest, a broken pillar of marble in the desert, a lizard in a stone wall. . . .
These reflect the neurotic and psychic mind-set of Nanda Kaul. The main problem with Nanda Kaul is that she experiences the plights and predicaments with her life turning into one of continual struggle and continual suffering all because of her Vice Chancellor husband, who is totally absorbed in his academic routine, badminton parties with Miss. David, with recommending persons like Ila Das to teaching assignments and indulging in daily desk work. She reduces her life to one of misery and suffering.

In fact, Nanda Kaul passes through all these because of her submissive nature, which is the outcome of her biological condition. Nanda Kaul neurotically feels that she is forced by her husband to experience the existential predicaments of continual struggle and persistent suffering. Nanda Kaul considers that her husband has left her with her life in shambles and with little nerve in her to even a heave a sigh of relief now and then.


Anita Desai in her novels takes up many complex themes, ranging from the relationships between men and women, between children and parents, between men and society, sexual repression to psychological struggles of the characters [My Emphasis]. . . .

And it must be admitted that structurally and contextually, and technically and from the points of view of fictional elements Fire on the Mountain is a signal success for Anita Desai, the Indian woman writing in English. K. R. Srinivas Iyengar, the first accomplished critic on Indian Writing in English makes a pointed observation, [Indian Writing in English, 1985, p. 465]:
As we remain mesmerized by Anita Desai’s verbal artistry and her uncanny evocation of atmosphere, her tale unalteringly glides by and we force a rendition of the veil of happening of a memory to gain entry into the realm of personal experience and attain the desired finale of acceptance.

In Anita Desai’s fiction, *Cry, the Peacock*, the male character Gautama by his patriarchal attitudes of dominating over his wife and by his indifference to her feelings, thoughts, and experiences causes the sufferings and pains to his wife, Maya. She submissively undergoes all travails because of her biological determinism. And Maya suffers neurotically because Gautama ignores her and never bothers to understand her needs and wants. Gautama’s diagnosis of her neurosis is correct. For Gautama, Maya’s psychic trouble is too strong to be handled.

When Gautama points out to Maya that for a woman to become pregnant is a matter of joy and it should not draw tears of sadness from a pregnant woman, Maya flies into tantrums. This is a veiled reference to her anatomy serving as her destiny. In other words, by her physiognomic condition she cannot avoid becoming pregnant and become a mother. In other words, motherhood and child bearing and child rearing are determined biologically for a female. The textual passage makes interesting reading [*Cry the Peacock*, p. 57, and p. 58]:

I [Gautama] don’t even understand what you are working yourself up over... Like a foolish baby... around faced child in a white petticoat [you are crying]... You are a grown woman no, Maya, no light headed child. You mustn’t allow yourself to grow so upset...
But she does read any sense in his encouraging words. She is frantically trying to terminate her pregnancy and wanting to stay away from Gautama. Maya’s neurosis arises out of her need for Gautama’s concern for either her “soft willing boy or the lonely wanting mind that waited near his bed” [Cry, the Peacock, p. 8]: But Gautama is not bothered about either of these. He is practical, dynamic and pragmatic.

Gautama can express only his annoyance at Maya frequently slipping into sad or angry moods or hysterical states. Being a neurotic Maya with paranoid tendencies suffers because of the indifferent attitudes of Gautama. It is the domineering patriarchal attitude and his conviction that the female suffers because of her physiognomy that result in Maya’s sufferings and her neurosis. The significant cause for the maladjustment of the married life of Maya and Gautama is that they converse without communicating. Gautama does not in the least understand Maya’s internal trouble. She is vocal about it [Cry, the Peacock, p. 56]:

You [Gautama] were bored? . . . Didn’t you feel anything more? . . . You weren’t stifled in that house? You didn’t weep when you saw that pregnant woman. . . .

Similar is the strain in Where Shall We Go This Summer? Raman causes the sufferings to his wife Sita. It is because of the indifference and patriarchal approaches of Raman that Sita suffers and turns into a neurotic woman. Sita considers sex and food as fit only for animals and not for human beings and she wants to keep away from Raman because she feels that he has great animalism in him. She is fed up with the Metropolitan life in Bombay. She considers the life in Bombay as dreary and
monotonous. Unable to live in the strife-torn present Sita is in the throes of identifying herself with the past, represented by her childhood on Manori Island twenty years ago.

The past becomes a psychic residue in her personal unconscious, the backdrop of her life, and her obsessive preoccupation with it gives her a strength to leave her home, husband two children and the urbanized life of Bombay for Manori island, where she thinks she would be able to live under a magic spell [Where Shall We Go This Summer? 1982, p.101]:

She [Sita] saw that island illusion as a refuge, a protection. It would hold her baby safely unborn, by magic [for she is in her advance stage of pregnancy]. Then there would be the sea - - it would wash the frenzy out of her, drown it. Perhaps the tides would lull the children, too, into smoother, softer beings. The grove of trees would shade them and protect them. . . .

Neurotically, Sita suffers from Father-fixation. That is why she marries Raman much senior to her in age. Sita wants to avoid Raman and Bombay-life by withdrawing to the island home of her father in Manori Island. Sita’s desire to uphold traditional values of an integrated life in face of the chaotic values of modern city civilization is at the root of her unhappiness and loss of her identity. And it is because of Raman she is unable to adjust to the changed life conditions in Bombay in her father-in-law’s house. Sita experiences existential sufferings because she is left uncared for by her husband Raman. She has an un-understanding husband. She suffers neurotically because of her husband.
M. Mani Meitei makes a cryptic statement, [“Anita Desai’s Where Shall We Go This Summer? A Psychoanalytical Study,” in The Novels of Anita Desai: A Critical Study, 2000, p. 31]:

Sita’s problem seems to be due to maladjustment with her husband; the home life and surrounding atmosphere nauseating her. . . .

A close examination of the whole situation, however, will reveal that Sita’s is more of a psychological problem than being external, as resulting from unfulfilled wishes. . . .

It is underscored that Anita Desai is a born genius, But then through her power of observation, and herself study she has widened her intellectual horizon, and in the process streamlines her acquired scholarship. With a brilliant brain and brilliant soul, with Indian ingenuity and Western background, with writing capacities and real mastery over writing skills and Queen’s English she has created wonderful works of art.

With such writing skills, Anita Desai has subjected the major theme of feminism. It is with her feminist perspectives that Anita Desai argues how and who are governed by chauvinistic approaches and patriarchal designs subject women to suffer alienation. The indifferent and egoistic men force women to suffer. In fact the life of the hapless Indian women turns into suffering, struggle, fatalism, and debasement. And Anita Desai subjects these feminist ideas to excellent literary treatment. Finally, it is established that it is because of the un-understanding men, that women suffer, and therefore, impose alienation on themselves. The un-understanding men thrust all that they experience on their women. This is new valence given to appreciate the fiction of Anita Desai.
Anita Desai’s female characters Maya, Sita, Sophie, and Nanda Kaul, and Ila Das are the suffering and struggling individuals. They pass through anxieties and tension - - *Angst* - - and experience stresses and strains - - *Sturm-und-Drang* and confront several hardships. The life of these female characters gets reduced to one of endless suffering. The female characters experience continual struggle against forces of which in the case of some they are ignorant of their cause and effect factors, and in the case of others they are helplessly tossed about. They suffer from fear psychosis as to their present and their future.

Anita Desai’s Maya of *Cry, the Peacock*, Sita of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Sophie of *Journey to Ithaca*, and Nanda Kaul and Ila Das of *Fire on the Mountain*, are classic sufferers, whose freedom is not compatible with comfort, and they experience the fear psychosis.

Maya of *Cry, the Peacock*, Sita of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Nanda Kaul and Ila Das of *Fire on the Mountain*, and Sophie of *Journey to Ithaca* painfully experience *Angst* and anguish, because they suffer at the hands of their chauvinistic husbands.

The dominant experiences of Maya of *Cry, the Peacock*, Sita of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Nanda Kaul and Ila Das of *Fire on the Mountain*, and Sophie of *Journey to Ithaca* have been to confront the harsh actualities posed by an un-understanding men, and struggle with them and suffer.

Anita Desai’s *Journey to Ithaca* is a compassionate portrait of people struggling to find a spiritual home. It delineates Matteo as the self-centred individual, who is
totally unconcerned about the feelings, thoughts and experiences of his German wife, Sophie. As stated earlier her fiction is twice born, for it germinates in her native tongue and wears the local colour and then it is accommodated to fit into the stream of the best traditions of British English and British conventions and practices.

Matteo becomes a powerful example of an indifferent husband. He never bothers about the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of his wife Sophie. As a result Sophie suffers. She feels discarded, uncared for, and neglected by Matteo. She feels pushed to a state of loneness. In other words, Sophie suffers alienation because of her husband Matteo. But then she turns out to be a classic illustration of a human being’s ability to grow spiritually in the face of injustice, insult, and indignity.

In Anita Desai’s fiction, *Journey to Ithaca*, Derek Wright makes three pointed observations, which are stringed together, one another for they perceptively and comprehensively deal with the novel, and then on Laila, the Holy Mother, and finally the sufferer, Matteo.

The first one on the fiction proper reads thus, and it is quoted in *ex tenso* [“Voyage Than Destination: Anita Desai’s *Journey to Ithaca*”, *RJ* # 1 & 2 (1995), 103, and 104-105]:

The plot of *Journey to Ithaca* follows the path of Sophie, a German woman of the hippie generation who loses her callow, feckless Italian husband Matteo to Himalayan ashram and, dumping their two children on her Italian in laws, embarks on detective work to uncover the cloudy origins of the ashram’s enigmatic Holy Mother. The novel [*Journey to Ithaca*] . . . has the aura of a labour of love, a devotional rather than an
inspired work. Hence, its conclusion, in which Matteo’s young son back in Italy, has a vision of his father, naked and speaking a strange language, presumably at the moment of his death, is force and gratuitous. Like so much in the novel, one does not know quite how to take it or which stereotype one is in: the romantic-exotic, the squalid-horrific or the merely dull. Exactly what Ithacas mean is left imperfectly understood. . .

The second passage introduces and projects Laila, the Holy Mother with a touch of ambivalence [“Voyage Than Destination: Anita Desai’s Journey to Ithaca”, RJ # 1 & 2 (1995), 103]:

It transpires from Sophie’s travels and research (including a diary that comes miraculously into her possession) that the Mother was originally Laila, a Franco-Egyptian girl from Alexandria who was packed off to a French aunt in Paris in the 1920s for getting to involved in Islamic nationalism and who then deserted her European University studies to join a touring Indian dance troupe. She travelled with them, via Venice, Switzerland and America, to Bombay where, the troupe leader Krishna assured her, “her soul was born” and was “waiting for her” But the truth does not tell very much. Exactly what it was about India that charmed Laila is never made comprehensible to the wife’s rationalist Western worldview, and Laila’s recovered diary, which raves unintelligibly about love, truth, and beauty, does not explain how she became the Holy Mother. . . .

The third passage conclusively argues the root cause of Matteo’s sufferings thus and it is quoted in extenso [“Voyage Than Destination: Anita Desai’s Journey to Ithaca”, RJ # 1 & 2 (1995), 103-104]:
Neither is it explained how the hapless Matteo, fifty years on, is drawn under the same spell [as it has been the case with Laila, the Holy Mother]. The flashbacks to his childhood present a hare-brained, wimpish milksop, declared uneducable by a rain of tutors until a young Englishman introduces him to Hesse’s *The Journey to the East*. The inference seems to be that Matteo espouses oriental mysticism because he is insufficiently intelligent to make any use of the knowledge and learning offered by the West’s empirical rationalism, but in the East he fares no better continuing to be hopelessly uninformed, naïve, and irresponsible, his mental and emotional constitution no more adequate to the Indian than to the Italian experience (as with Baumgartner in the previous book, ignorance is still the western journeyers’ element). As often in Desai’s fiction, the mystic impulse and craving for spiritual enlightenment are vividly presented but being by far from pure, they are accompanied by a shrew, sceptical irony: . . .

The sufferings Maya of *Cry, the Peacock*, Sita of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Nanda Kaul and Ila Das of *Fire on the Mountain*, and Sophie of *Journey to Ithaca* begin from their childhood. They suffer as a result of the indifferent and self-centred attitudes and approaches of their father, fully concentrating on their own well being and not caring to fulfil the longings of their children.

The possessive nature of their fathers, their dull, mechanical routine, their animalism and their greed for wealth and pomp and show are great sources of the worry of the daughters.
Maya of *Cry, the Peacock*, Sita of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Nanda Kaul and Ila Das of *Fire on the Mountain*, and Sophie of *Journey to Ithaca* are forced to turn pensive, and this pensiveness lands them in a further state of misery. In fine, their childhood turn out to be quite an unenviable state of pain and misery, notwithstanding their fathers’ growing wealth.

Anita Desai in her fictions, *Cry, the Peacock*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, *Fire on the Mountain*, and *Journey to Ithaca* traces the several stages of sufferings encountered by Maya of *Cry, the Peacock*, Sita of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Nanda Kaul and Ila Das of *Fire on the Mountain*, and Sophie of *Journey to Ithaca*.

This life of suffering persist is in Maya of *Cry, the Peacock*, Sita of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Nanda Kaul and Ila Das of *Fire on the Mountain*, and Sophie of *Journey to Ithaca* even in their adulthood, and in their married lives. Their married lives prove to be another prison for them.

Turning the focus once again on *Journey to Ithaca*, it ought to be stressed that Sophie’s sufferings begin with her marriage to Matteo, the unsympathetic husband. With her marriage with Matteo begins another phase of Sophie’s sufferings. In the face of apparent agreement in their voyage to India, there are already signs of discord, disparity, and disharmony.

Sophie wants to deduct why and how Laila turned into the Holy Mother, and Matteo moves to India blindly based on superficial understanding of Herman Hesse’s book, *Journey to the East*. The textual passage makes interesting reading, and it is worth quoting here, [*Journey to Ithaca*, 1995, p. 31]:

> [Journey to Ithaca, 1995, p. 31]:
In the summer of 1975, Sophie and Matteo, having first married to pacify their tearful and lamenting parents, left for India, dressed in identical blue jeans and T-shirts and sports shoes, carrying identical rucksacks on their backs as did so many of their generation in Europe. Only Sophie still her hair very short and Matteo was growing his long. They left on foot. In Matteo’s pocket was the copy Fabian had left him of Hesse’s *The Journey to the East*. . . .

Matteo comes across Hermann Hesse’s *The Journey to the East* quite unexpectedly. It is worth quoting the textual passage here, [*Journey to Ithaca*, 1995, p. 21]:

Matteo craned forward to read the title: *The Journey to the East* by Hermann Hesse. Matteo was confused - - what was it, a geography text? Papa bellowed, “is it in English? The boy must read English. English is what you must read with him”.

“I will, and we will read it together”, the young man lightly replied, and took a cream, horn from the plate on the table and bit into it without any self-consciousness. Over its ridged crust he gave the watching Matteo a cream-flecked smile. . . .

Sophie’s sufferings never end because her husband visits India without a deep knowledge of what India is and what its scriptures, Vedanta and religions represent.

Thus, Anita Desai maintains that Maya of *Cry, the Peacock*, suffers because of her indifferent and unsympathetic husband Gautama, and Sita of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, because of the self-centred, selfish, and un-understanding husband
Raman, and Nanda Kaul of *Fire on the Mountain*, suffers because of her Vice Chancellor husband who flirts with Miss David, and one who imposes his dull life conditions on Nanda Kaul, and Ila Das of *Fire on the Mountain*, who suffers sexual assault in the form of a rape by Preet Singh, and Sophie of *Journey to Ithaca*, suffers because of an un-understanding husband, Matteo.

But the male characters involved in Anita Desai’s fictions attribute the sufferings of their female counterparts to their physiognomic condition thereby attesting to the fact that it is their anatomy that causes their suffering and not anything else. They are not prepared to take the blame on themselves for the sufferings of the women. They are unprepared to accept that it is their un-understanding nature and attitudes and their male chauvinism that result in the sufferings of women.

But then, Anita Desai refutes Freud’s contention that the anatomy of the female is her destiny and the cause of her sufferings. Anita Desai maintains a sustained focus on the truth that it is the patriarchal approach that causes the miseries for women.