Chapter-II

Recurring Themes in the Novels of Anita Desai

Anita Desai is one of those few Indian novelists in English who have tried to understand closely the predicament of their female characters. She herself contributes psychic novels, which she narrates as "purely subjective." She rightly analyses her psychological feelings in the following:

It has been my personal luck that my temperament and circumstances have combined to give me the shelter, privacy and solitude required for the writing of such novels, there by avoiding problems a more objective writer has to deal with since he depends upon observation rather than a private vision.¹

Her forte is the quest of sensibility and her writing expose inner realities and psychic echoes of her characters. The most recurrent themes in all her novels are "the hazards and complexities of man-woman relationships, the founding and nurturing of individuality and the establishing of individualism"² of her characters. She is interested in peculiar and eccentric characters rather than everyday, average ones. She presents the plight of introspective, hypersensitive women in her novels. Her each work as an
accelerating exploration of the psychics self.

Mrs. Desai discovers its principles suitable to her themes. "Aspects of Existentialism" are in evidence in the total framework of her stories. It lays stress on the alienation of man from an absurd world, his following estrangement from normal society, and his recognition of the world as negative and meaningless — presents the sensitive, individual, fragmented and spirituality destroyed by the particular social conditions of life, a life complex enough to make him obsessed. This particular aspect of Existentialism — the one alone, the man has no record, this kind of characters are appears to be a favorite subject of Desai.

The 20th century has been rightly called "The Age of Alienation". It is not something unique, but is indeed a characteristic of the society of our time. These days many persons feel alone. They are not capable of communicating with others. This problem of an individual who feels emotionally and spiritually alone forms the backbone of Desai's themes in each of her novels. According to Madhumalti Adhikari:

In her novels, the moral values of women are conveniently altered to suit the demands of men who treat them as
their "objects", "possession" to be ruled and controlled by psychological insecurity nurtured in them through myths, customs and social discourse."³

In this chapter, I have presented the predicament of sensitive women characters, who find it very difficult to adjust in the present mechanical and urbanized set up. The novelist’s recurring themes reveal the meaningful correlations between the psychic conditions of the characters. Mrs. Desai is primarily concerned with the fate of married woman in Indian society today. In her novels women become victims of the traditional modes of existence without a strong terra firma, which makes them intensely conscious of their lack of identity. Their protest mostly turns into frustration, for as an Indian girl a woman is brought up to be passive, meek and obedient. In contrast to the agonized women characters Purnima Mehta has remarked that:

The male characters are shown as free moving but their movement is always on the periphery. If they are placed within the female space they are shown as threatening presence.⁴

Thus, the principle male characters in her some novels play a negative role in the relations with female.
The fictional world of Anita Desai is located in the corridor of human consciousness. She is almost obsessively concerned with the dark, uncannily oppressive inner world of her intensely introvert characters on the merge of psychological breakdown. They are alienated from the world, the society and the family around them because they fail to meet the challenges of life. Their inability to face life forces them to regress to their childhood world of fantasy. Modern women identify with the heroines because they find themselves in a similar situation, facing the same problem of identity, loss of values and meaninglessness in life. Anita Desai seriously examines, with the consciousness of woman, the effect of the accepted social norms in the life and position of a woman, who is considered merely a drawing-room decoration piece or domesticated animal. The search for understanding and sympathy with the woman, whose life without the support of man means loosing safety, happiness, comfort and dignity. And that is the central point in Anita Desai’s fictional world.

Cry, the Peacock (1963) expresses Maya's desire to live life to its full but as soon as she moves away from the protection of her father, the harsh realities of life bewilder her. The novel is a psychological study of this hypersensitive, childless young woman, highly strung,
suffering from a father-fixation. She is obsessed by a childhood prophesy of disaster, kills her husband in a frenzy, goes mad and finally commits suicide. There is something in the theme of the novel which connects it with the subliminal aspects of Indian life and reality.

Maya's relationship with reality passes through three phases: the first is that of her childhood where she is cosseted within a limited world; the second is of her life with Gautama when she makes abortive attempts to recede into her past and equally abortive attempts to reach out to others; the third and final phase is her total surrender to the world of her fears and insanity. Meenakshi Mukherjee comments on this point:

Maya's slow advance towards insanity is the theme of the novel, and the main pattern is the contrast between woman's response to the world through her senses, and her husband's response through his intellect.5

Maya was brought up tenderly by a doting father's house was "a bliss of solitude" and her present becomes a burden which she has to carry. The memories of her past are always acting as a comforting balm to her wounded psyche. She has been so sheltered and loved that her husband later on accuses her of living her life as a fairytale, and not being
above to deal with the harsh realities of life.

Maya fails to grow out of childhood. Virtually the whole of her neurotic life is in perceptibly linked with her father's individual attention and affection and is incapable of leading an independent existence. That she suffers from father-fixation is apparent from many incidents in the novel. Her thoughts are repeatedly and solely satisfied by her father. They are first fixed on her father and later on his image, as Gautama her husband feels. R.S. Sharma has opines:

Maya's tragedy psychologically lies in this inadequate transference from the father to the husband.  

While the transfer from father to his image, Gautama is total, it blocks her encounter with reality. No one is more aware of this than Gautama who realizes that it was her obsession with her father which made her to marry with him, a man much older than her. Maya's father is a benevolent despot under whose shadow she grows. Her father's over protective love does not allow her any independence to think and grow as an entity. Maya's prominent wish is never to displease her father, the perfectionist, like her brother, Arjuna, who has lost his father's love and affection by wriggling out of the grip of the
Excessive father-daughter love is the sole cause of Maya's tragedy and depression. Maya's father could give her attention and protection but not real love. No wonder that Maya's childhood world of fantasies and adult world of realities clash, producing more imbalances in life. Her tragedy is that she wants to perpetuate the "fairy-tale" atmosphere and, at the same time, she is aware of the demands of a mature world of a woman. The novel opens with the death of her pet dog, "Toto" where we have a glimpse of her irreparably shaken sensitivity. Since she is a childless woman she loves her pet just like a mother. To alleviate her suffering, she needs the assuring warmth of Gautama's company which she does not get. She rushes to the garden tap to wash the vision from her eyes. This hysterical and whimsical response is in total contract to the Gautama's casual attitude. Such incidents showing the lack of communication between the two characters and references to the steadily recurrent theme of incompatible relations between Maya and Gautama, a prosperous practitioner of Law, are repeated many times in the novel.

Gautama fails to respond to the poetry of Maya's young heart and to remove her father-fixation. Maya's
tendency to depend on her father and then on her husband in a clinging relationship shows that she constantly needs a psychological prop. Her intense longing for contact, relationship, and communion expresses her spiritual need which remains unfulfilled most of the time. As Sudhakar Ratnakar has declared:

Emotional alienation is the central problem of the novel. Her childlessness is one reason why Maya cares so much for her dog and Anita Desai explores the occasion of the dog's death to point out their singularities, the warm and cold-blooded responses to the world about them and within them.⁷

As a grown-up woman, Maya is unable to face the realities of married life because her, inner demands and outer realities create a conflicting situation. In Gautama's family, the atmosphere is heavily charged with intellectual, social and political discussions. They were not sentimental and their conversation centered on discussion in parliament, of cases of bribery and corruption, of political treaties and of distant resolutions. They had innumerable subjects to speak on, and they spoke incessantly. Maya cannot participate in these discussions and they knew it. With her they discussed babies, shopping, meals and marriage for they feel that she was too immature. Maya
tries to find some solution to recover her dwindling sense of significance. When she feels inferior to society her strongest desire is to raise herself above others; if she could have a sense of belonging, she would not have felt so inferior to others. But living in a competitive society, and feeling isolated and hostile, she developed an urgent need to lift herself above others. But Maya, because of her own nature and upbringing, cannot be one with her in-laws. Gautama feels that she is neurotic, a small pampered child, so spoilt that she can never hear anything against her. The devitalizing love she received in childhood separates her consciousness from physical reality around, which finally destabilizes her real life.

In order to establish her own identity, Maya builds around herself a bower of Bougainvillea and Jasmine buds. Anyone who does not fit into it is inferior. Gautama, his family, his relations are all lesser mortals, lacking finer sensibilities. Maya alienates herself from Leila and Pom just because they accepted life as it is. When she visits Leila and her sick husband; Leila says:

... pay no attention to me today' she said, softening her hoarse voice deliberately. I don't know why Irave: she lifted one had to her face, and with fore fingers, touched the centre of her
forehead. It was all written in my fate long ago she said. On the other hand Pom's attitude is rather unpleasant to Maya.

Mrs. Lal and other women at the party do not measure up to her expectations. The sight of prostitutes horrifies her because they do not see the truth in living. Her separate identity does not give her sufficient security and her real self is pushed in the background.

Gradually when Gautama devotes more and more time to his work, Maya becomes a complete introvert. Her consciousness takes her back to the time spent her father's house. The novel consists, almost entirely of Maya's interior monologue in which her obsession with her father and her hyper-sensitively sensuous reaction to experience are dramatized in poetic and highly charged in metaphorical prose.

Anita Desai analyses Maya's psyche from different angles. We have an overall view of Maya's consciousness from the narrator a distant view from Gautama's self and still more focused personalized view from Maya's own lips. She was always bored, wanted to be alone and, did not feel anything. Maya and Gautama belong to separate worlds
but she is unable to grow out of the confines of her own world in order to merge with the larger whole According to Jasbir Jain:

Maya clings to fantasy because she is unable to relate to reality.⁹

The collapse of reason is the natural consequence of the clash between the fantastic and the real and the clash becomes unavoidable when the boundary lines between the two refuse to shift. Very small incidents, as the bear dance or the scene of the caged monkeys seem intolerable to Maya and show that she is not ready to accept the world as it is. She wants to escape from reality whereas Gautama desires to live in it. She considers Gautama's theory of detachment as the negation of life, feels miserable and is therefore pushed to the limits of her emotional teacher by an actively cruel environment and is perpetually wallowing in self-pity.

The various stages of Maya's insanity are sequentially presented by the novelist with remarkable insight. Maya's sexual demands are highlighted with the help of two powerful symbols: the peacock's voluptuous dance and the mating calls of the pigeons. She compares herself to the peacocks that mate only after fighting "living
they are aware of death. Dying, they are in love with life." Their cries assimilate in Maya’s mind with her own anguish. She weeps for them as well as for herself. Like the peacocks she loves intensely and her love is unreciprocated. The peacocks are creatures of an exotic world and will not rest till they had danced the dance of death. B. Ramchandra Rao has rightly commented:

The psychological significance of any rhythm or dance may be gauged by the fact that the title of the book refers to the dance of peacocks the dance is a symbol which changes its symbolic significance as the heroine undergoes a change. In the initial stages the dance is symbol of something fixed, but the Nataraja glimpsed at the end becomes a symbol of liberation.  

The Nataraja reinforces Maya's love for life and gives her a greater justification to live. She has a hunger for the real, the close, the living. But her husband, being a practical man, is unable to notice fine things e.g. the smell of limes or to count stars as they come out one by one.

An astrologer had predicted that one of them would die after four years of marriage; Maya was haunted by the prophecy and also by the myth of peacocks. As she broods over her inner despair, she wonders if she was growing insane. Purvi N. Upadhyay has remarked:
Maya is always haunted by the deadly nightmares of imagery apprehensions conjured up by her flawed nature and in the process disintegrate herself gradually.\(^{11}\)

Maya’s transformation of a desire for life into a death wish is also communicated through the symbolism of the moon. In all her moments of crisis she reverts to the moon which has lewd associations in her mind and symbolically becomes a demonic pursuance, love. The transformation of the moon into a demonic presence suggests a conversion of Maya’s finer sensibilities into homicidal tendencies.

Maya’s moods, obsessions, and agonizing abnormality, depict her disturbed mind and fast disintegrating personality; the image of the albino astrologer, the train rushing through the dark countryside reveal Maya’s world of utter loneliness and agony. Apart from this the suffering of caged monkeys at the railway platform staring out with glazed eyes of tragedy; at the horrible vision of hell before them also reveal Maya’s solitude. When Maya’s mental tension increases slowly, images of creeping, crawling creatures succeed one another. Striking images rapidly gaining in violence, orchestrate the portentous dance of the weird shadows accompanied by the defeating drum beats, haunting Maya
beyond the boundaries of sanity and her defences crumble:

Am I going insane? father! brother! husband! who is my saviour? I am in need of one. I am in love with loving. . . . There is no rest anymore - only death and waiting.¹²

By a series of coincidences, she finds that there is no one to share her anguish or support in her extreme need. It is Maya's neurosis and her expectations from life that impart a shape and structure to the novel. While dealing with Maya's neurosis, Desai goes deep into the sources of conjugal incompatibility and marital disharmony. She depicts with great sensitivity the dissolution of a feminine sensibility under the stress of father-fixation, unfulfilled womanhood, debilitated husband, over-ridden death phobia and her marriage that finally destroys her being.

Maya suffers from the impact of summer and feels sick mainly because she has nothing to do. Her idleness and uselessness makes her sister-in-law, Nita, irritable for she feels that Maya should be in young company mother than being locked up in a room alone. It is Maya's solitude that makes her laugh like a manias in the storm, kill Gautama and later commit suicide by jumping out of the
Anita Desai projects a moving picture of the life of yet another depressed, married woman, Monisha, the sister of Nirode in *Voices in the City*, (1965). Like Maya, Monisha also suffers from feelings of emptiness within as well as without, but unlike Maya, she has learned to suppress her emotions. Maya pushes Gautama off the roof so as to protect her world of sensuous abundance but Monisha sets herself afire to reach the core of intense feeling. She is married against her wishes in a middle class family so grossly unsuited to that her sister, Anita finds herself wondering if fathers were so callous that they were indifferent to their daughter's feelings. This unsuitable alliance is evocative of the stifling atmosphere in which Monisha lives for neither her husband nor her in-laws try to sympathize with her. Monisha's arrival to Calcutta reveals the pangs of her unfulfilled motherhood. She sees her big house shrunken drawn together like a boil about to burst, symbolic of hollowness and callousness of human relationships. Her relationship with her husband is characterized only by loneliness and lack of communication. Monisha finds her life a virtual imprisonment. She is always haunted by a feeling that her life is totally meaningless.
She alternates between hope and despair in the Kafkaesque world of her husband's joint family, which greets people with formality rather than smiling faces. Monisha's plight and psychic life intimately shows the women like female birds in the cages. As Indira Bhatt has rightly said:

She is too silent for the family and the world distrusts her silence. She wants to be herself and not to compromise.\(^{13}\)

She is received by this alien family which appears hostile towards her. Her in-laws talk about the reasons why she cannot have a child and she feels as if her ovaries, her tubes, all her recesses moist with and washed with blood, are laid open to their scrutiny. Here Meena Shriwadkar has assigns,

Monisha’s suffering to her childless state. She laments further that the generative cycle of life for a woman ends on a note of indignity as she is unable to assert herself before others, in society and in the interpersonal relationship based on individual whims.\(^{14}\)

Monisha suffers from what Andrew Crowcraft terms "cultural schizophrenia" which arises due to:
Our general setting, made up of the traditions and values of the community we live in.\footnote{15}

Monisha’s marriage, instead of incorporating her whole self into it, triggers off emotional shocks and conflicts.

Jiban, Monisha’s husband is the prisoner of a conventional culture in which a woman’s most important roles are, beside childbearing, cooking, cutting vegetables, serving food and brushing small children’s hair, under the authority of stern mother-in-law. He clearly favours the static and stable social structure in any circumstances and considers his wife worthless in consequence. Monisha basically craves for solitude that she should be life alone so that she could perform better. Even Nikhil, her, nephew, is exasperated by this "bad system" as he terms it, as it is so detrimental to individual growth and freedom. She builds a wall of fantasy around herself and, therefore, loses the ability to live in the moment. Her obsession is to live a secluded life so that no one has the power to hunt her. Shanti Acharya has rightly comments:

One of the salient features of Anita Desai’s work is the supreme privacy of the self. What one constantly encounters is the violation of this sacred place of the self.\footnote{16}
Here we see that, she here as Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, is imprisoned in her loneliness Monisha is desperate for some moments for herself. In Jasbir Jain's words:

Monisha’s stillness is not steadiness or detachment; it is not even have a feeling of suffering - it is death like stillness.\(^{17}\)

Monisha hates the mereticiousness, the rapacity, and an uneasy lassitude of conscience of the city of Calcutta and feel nostalgic about her mother's place in Kalimpong. She desperately desires to connect herself to Nirode for whose health and welfare she feels anxious. She considers Nirode to be "an unshelled snail" and "a broken wingled bird" more vulnerable and lonely than herself when he desperately tries to kill himself by starvation. Monisha pleads with him silently during his delirium in the hospital:

Accept . . . accept defeat, accept insignificance, accept solitude, a truer gift than any communication, any art, any faith or delusion in the world can offer you. If he accepts, he wills survive.\(^{18}\)

Ironically enough, it is Mohisha who becomes "an unshelled snail" when she is unjustly accused of theft by her mother in law and others.
She voids live because it implies a sense of duty. Hence she remains in 'exile' in both her families, and seeks, her true identity in the deepest darkness of the space which is one unlit waste, a desert to which her heart truly belongs. Realizing that there is no escape from it she becomes a sleep walker, ghost, and some unknown and dreaded entity:

If I had religious faith, I could easily renounce all this but I have no faith, no alternative to my confused despair, there is nothing I can give myself to, and so I must stay. The family here and their surrounding & tell me such a life cannot be lived - a life dedicated to nothing - that it is just in a protection from death.¹⁹

Amla's reported arrival does not make any difference to her notion of the ultimate wisdom' of being traceless, meaningless and uninvolved - a condition of non-existence and she does not take long to decide on her course of action. She dies, first a spiritual death, and then a physical death by suicide. One is forced by Monisha's act of committing suicide, to conclude that she is a silent volcano which fiercely at the end. In this choice lies a combination of acquiescence and renunciation, as she confesses in her diary. Since Monisha in her life, time could not rejuvenate her ossified conscience; she tries to achieve
it by ending her existence. Amla, the incurable extrovert is also haunted by a sense of hollowness and futility in the vicinity of her strange brother and ghostly sister. Determined to communicate with Monisha, Amla had once invaded the joint family house but only to encounter critical attention and innumerable personal questions. The barren and destructive nature of human relationships in the city and their impact on the human psyche is fully manifested in Monisha's death that does not have an illusion of being active or involved.

We see that Maya and Monisha are two prominent characters in the gallery of alienated individuals suffering in their own isolated worlds. However, Sarah, Adit Sen's English wife in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, wants sincerity and emotional equilibrium in life, refuses to meet her English friends and runs away from any reminder of her past life. Sarah shuns social life and avoids meeting with acquaintances. Here she differs with her counterparts, Maya of *Cry, the Peacock* who rejects the present to live in the past. She seeks to root her life in the present and alienates herself with the past and tries for a harmony between what has been and what is. Sarah is meek and submissive; whatever boldness she might have had was shown before we meet her in the story. She revolted against
parental authority and married an Indian seemingly unreasonably submits to the will of her husband. We never find her participating in the decision making. She is the typical Indian, timid wife and tortures her own self for adjustment in life.

Sarah is fascinated towards Indian life and culture which results in her marrying an Indian, Adit. Her union with Adit alienates her from her own people, food and music, making her feels like an isolated stranger in her native land, including her mother. Sarah has to pay a heavy price for marrying Adit as she has to shed her name, identity and ancestry to become the wife of a Bengali youth. The young man's culture is adopted by an English lady, who rejects her country, culture and likings. Commenting on it Anita Desai herself says:

She had most things out of it when she married - childhood, family, friends; all the normal ordinary things with which an ordinary person, of no talent must fill and adore his life.20

This feeling of loss of identity makes Sarah wonder whether she is Mrs. Sen or Sarah? Her self is divided into two contrary roles - as Mrs. Sen she grinds spices for a curry, which she does not want to eat, hears music, which she
does not understand and, as head secretary, she performs her duties sincerely and efficiently. She is mocked at for her Indian likings, and while performing these roles she neglects herself. Her body acts as a costume and faces as a mask to conceal her real feelings particularly her pain. Neeru Chakravertty has says:

In contrast to her husband’s intimacy with his group of friends, Sarah is characterized by alienation, loneliness and a sense of entrapment. She does not have access to the commonality of experience and shared warmth; rather the narrative stresses her total isolation even in her own country.21

The negative result of her marriage on Sarah can be seen in the form of her becoming anemic and losing interest in life, wearing dull coloured clothes preferring loneliness to company, avoiding her own people and walking at a quick pace as if haunted by some undesirable element to avoid the taunts of the children. When the cruelty and apathy hidden in the form of mockery becomes unbearable for her, Sarah adopts the path of loneliness to avoid curiosity, questions and contact of her own people. It is ironical that she has to hide her identity and liking for Indian things, and to be natural and true to herself, to express her natural taste and needs without any fear of being recognized and
reprimanded, she goes to the extent of selecting a supermarket for shopping, where she is unidentified and unnoticed, whereas generally people long for and struggle to be recognized and noticed.

The depression caused by the alienation from her own people makes Sarah's life mechanical and unhappy. Meeting her own people like her parents does not provide her with an emotional anchor or lesson & her anguish but instead it poses a threat to her identity. She longs to be free from the suffocating existence, in which she is living.

Sarah is reserved, self-possessed, non syllabic, quite and meek like a gazelle. She lets her husband dominate her and take all decisions, even very important ones concerning her, without consulting her. He dominates over her like a typical Indian husband and wants physical gratification pregnant. But Sarah tolerates all this with her cool and tolerant nature. Perhaps her shyness and rectitude like that of an Indian woman attract Adit towards her; for her feels that she is quiet and reserved just like a typical Bengali girl and prettier than others. Adit loves her as long as she submits to his commands and Sarah keeps on yielding, even when Adit decides to leave for India she never argues with him although she is, as a mother,
worried about the survival, life and identity of her child caused by her departure from England. It does not enter her mind that the unborn child's identity is also at stake besides her own.

To maintain peace and order in the house, she prefers not to argue with Adit. Sarah's calm nature is also seen in the way she responds to her mother's letter which is full of apprehension. It neither makes her temper loose nor is she agitated about her decision. Sarah seems to have controlled her emotions and, like a detached person, shows no signs of sadness and remorse when she goes to collect her things and meet her parents for the last time before her departure. She only feels the pangs of homesickness on bidding good-bye to her "English self". Despite knowing the reality of existence and the life in England which is comfortable, friendly and private will be substituted by cultural disparity, the emptiness, sorrow, despair, heat and rage of India, Sarah does not change her decision. Like the Punjabi old woman living next door to Sarah in England, one can hope that Sarah will have no difficulty in adjusting herself in India though life may be hard for her there. In brief, Sarah presents a contrast to the earlier two protagonists, Maya of *Cry, the Peacock* and Monisha of *Voices in the City*, for although she is conscious of her
identity yet she does not let it disrupt the harmony of her marital life and makes some sacrifices and tries to adjust with her dominating husband.

Next in the line of depressed woman is Uma in Desai's recent novel, *Fasting, Feasting*. Uma is a plain, simple, uneducated, spinster from a close knit orthodox Indian family. Who is trapped at home, smothered by her overbearing parents and their tradition? Maya is depressed because of her loneliness, Monisha because of lack of privacy and solitude, Sarah because of her alienation from her own people, but Uma's depression is thrust upon her from without. She is a loving soul for whom fate has apportioned loneliness.

The novel is about parents and their children's, Uma, Aruna and Arun. The traditional couple has tried to bring up their daughters in such a way to get them married at the right age and their son for a career. Uma, the elder daughter, who is not academically inclined, has to stay away from the school after the birth of her brother, so that she can help with the house work till a suitable marriage is arranged for her. Her mother feels relieved at the withdrawal of Uma from school because now she can leave her son in the care of the elder sister for bridge parties.
Since the son is more precious, he is not left with the servants but is bathed and dressed under the mother's supervision.

Here, Anita Desai does not give the parents' name. They are mentioned as parents by the authoress and addressed as 'Mama, Papa' by Uma. The reason may be that they represent all the parents of the typical middle class Indian society. Uma's parents never think of giving her a career. It is true that she is not good at strew dish but instead of sending her to dance, painting, tailoring classes she is kept back at home just to do the job of an attendant. Uma has to live under marry rests.

Uma proves to be unlucky where marriage is concerned too. The first proposal could not materialize because the boy liked the younger sister, Aruna. The second match, son of a wealthy cloth merchant of the city, was greatly liked by Uma's parents. A negotiated sum was offered as dowry and the engagement ceremony was arranged simultaneously. But later on the son had decided to go to Roorkee for higher education and felt he should not be hampered by an early marriage at this stage and asked for the engagement to be indefinitely postponed. They had spent the dowry on the house hence it could not be
returned. Uma's family now stands cheated by the Goel family. Her mother continuously lamented her bad luck and Aruna made fun of Uma but nobody ever noticed that Uma’s face was losing its childish innocence and taking on a look of continual care. The family stopped caring for this defeated girl. She missed her (Aruna's) teasing, sympathy and solidarity too. The tightly knit fabric of the family that had seemed so stifling and confining now revealed holes and gaps that were frightening - perhaps the fabric could not hold, perhaps it would not protect at all.

Mama tried hard to "dispose off" Uma and her photograph was sent to everyone who advertised in the matrimonial columns. Uma was never consulted and her marriage was fixed without even arranging a meeting with the boy (Harish). The marriage party arrived, the ceremony was performed in a state of "unenthusiasm" but the groom seemed to be as old as Uma's own father. Her mother in law informed Uma that Harish had gone to Meerut, without bothering to tell Uma even before the marriage was consummated. For several weeks Uma kept waiting and in these weeks she learnt how to cut vegetables in pieces exactly the same size, how to grind spices into a wet paste and how to tell one dal from another. All speech directed at her was in the form of instruction the plight of Uma in the
Indian context is symbolic of many other middle-class girls who are trapped in an unenviable situation and are unable to get out of it.

Uma's husband does not return and the somehow the marriage is cancelled, annulled and Uma remains unaware of the legal proceedings involved. In fact, she is never quite sure whether she is actually married or not having cost her parents to dowries, without a marriage to show in return, Uma is considered to be ill-fated by all without any fault of her own and no more attempts are made to find out a match for her. The big question is where does the fault lie? Is the social system to be blamed or the apathy of the masses to change? No one cares about the individual (Uma) who feels depressed and never can afford to assert himself in the family.

Another reason for Uma's depression is that her younger sister, Aruna, has married well, started a "fantastic" life in Bombay and won laurels of praise from both parents' and in-laws. Her successful marriage makes her dominating and has control over her in-laws.

Aruna's assertiveness high-light Uma's depression. Uma, who could never be like Aruna feels disturbed to notice the discontent between her sister's eyebrows and is reduced to the status
of a maid servant in the family. Since Uma did not have a happy childhood, her parents consider her to be a burden, so much so that she can neither go to Bombay for the trip to Bombay? Healment of her eyes nor is she allowed making phone calls because they cost money.\textsuperscript{22}

Uma is kept confined to the house sans friends, enjoyment or entertainment. This is evident from the reaction of her parents when Mrs. O' Henry's invites Uma to a coffee party. They think that Miss O' Henry is trying to convert Uma and it would be better if Uma stayed back and worked in the house.

Her father never liked Uma and turned away his head as if it was of no use talking to someone as naive and backward as his old daughter. Uma has to work all day, she has to write a letter to Arun, to drive off urchins from ripe mulberries, see that the cook had brought the green mangoes for pickle and all the necessary spices, Papa's woolens must be spread out in the sun and sprinkled with dry new leaves.

Anita Desai has beautifully depicted the life of an uneducated spinster, dominated by her parents, being given no importance and not even having the courage to take her father's permission to go. Her occupation at home
is no occupation for a feminist for she is kept busy in a thankless job, not out of choice but compulsion acting like a free attendant to her parents.

Uma has no way of escaping from this trapped neither can she visualize it in the form of a career. Her vision of refuge takes the form of a huge ancient banyan tree and she feels as through she saw herself seated on a stone step and Mira Masi telling her that God had rejected all the men whom Uma had chosen for herself. Here Anita Desai seems not to be that keen is exploring and expressing the mind of a lady deprived of conjugal bliss, as she has done in *Cry, the Peacock*. She has left much to the imagination of the readers and is now concerned more about the social, economic and religious problems of these women. With her constant march to wades objectivity from subjectivity, her impact on the heart and soul of the readers is direct and immediate. The loneliness has been objectified while depicting the circumstances, which shroud Uma.

Time has devoured all her friends and left her companionless, following the dull routine of life with indifferent, dominating and unfriendly parents. On the one hand her parents consider her an economic liability but,
ironically, they do not want her to work outside too. Even Uma never tried to explore this possibility till offer came from Dr. Dutt. Who was ready to employ Uma as a matron, a housekeeper in the new dormitory for nurse, her father who is a typical middle-class lawyer and capable of "putting on a progressive westernized front when called upon to do so in public, in society, not within his family of course" was filled with anger at the thought of working women who dared to step into the world he occupied. Her mother felt that as long as they were there to provide for Uma, she would never need to go to work. Later, she pretends to be sick just to act as an obstacle in the way for Uma's job. But Uma is now ready to assert herself at least by ringing Dr. Dutt up and confirming that her mother is not ill release herself from a thankless occupation at home. She is making efforts to which is certainly better than the recourses taken by Maya, Monisha and Sarah.

Among the stories of depressed women, the most pathetic is the story of Anamika in Fasting, Feasting although the episode is just an appendage to the main story it leaves an indelible mark on the psyche of the reader, especially a woman. "Anamika was simply lovely as a flower, soft, petal skinned, bumble bee eyed, pink lipped, always on the verge of bubbling, dove like laughter, loving
smiles; wherever she was, there was peace, contentment, well being." Daughter of a lawyer with thriving practices Anamika won a scholarship to Oxford; a University where only the most meritorious students could ever hope to go. She could not be sent abroad just because she was of marriageable age. The letter of acceptance from Oxford was locked in a steel cupboard merely taken out to be shown around with pride.

Anamika’s marriage to a man, much older than herself, with higher qualifications, ruined her lie for she suffered from Oedipus complex. He married her because it was a custom and would raise his status among other men in society. Joint family system becomes a curse for Anamika. She was beaten regularly by her mother-in-law, her husband a passive spectator and she had to do all the cooking and eat the leftovers. The story is a direct attack on the joint family system in the Indian society, cruelty of the in-laws, apathy of the parents towards a married daughter who were more concerned about what people would say rather than their daughter’s plight.

Marriage is seen as the only option for women, while the offer of a scholarship to study at Oxford, made to Anamika, is ignored by her parents. The novel throws light
on the misery that can follow a marriage too hastily arranged and the lot of women in a typical joint family, where the new bride is a prisoner and a slave to the mother-in-law. Anamika suffers a miscarriage after being beaten and is treated like "damaged goods" to be sent back to her family. This makes it clear that women are perceived as mere commodities. The novel throws light on many ugly practices in Indian society with regard to oppression of women. They criticize the long-held religious and cultural traditions with the oppression of women. The novel defines women as archetypal victims who freeze society into simple opposition between powerless (Women) and powerful (Men).

If women's oppression and depression are a fact of human existence, so there is resentment at the raw deal by a male dominated social order. The repressed female spirit resists even if unsuccessfully, the bond of convention. The manifestation of her anger and her revolt overt and covert - may very according to the quality of the individual spirit and the prevailing ethos. Most of the novels of Anita Desai are products of a social milieu vastly different from the western culture and society. Concept of female emancipation is still not very popular, rather non-existent, in certain types of contemporary society. Anita Desai embodies the common yeaning of womanhood for an
individual identity and a passionate longing for a fuller life.

*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* analyzes the inner thoughts, sufferings and trauma of Sita and her mother, the two main female characters in the novel. Mother and daughter rebel against and try to bring out their inner notions against the male domination against the odds and their family life. Sita may not be very successful in her attempt to protest at being pregnant during middle age fully, but she can't be denied a place on the periphery of assertiveness also.

The first part of the novel entitled "Monsoon 67" Sita, happily married, over forty years of age, has four children with pride and pleasure with all the placid serenity that supposedly goes with pregnancy and parturition. She is pregnant with fifth child. Suddenly in this state of tantalizing potential, she faces life with nothing but uncertainty. She feels unloved and experiences a strange loneliness and restlessness in her existence. She finds her threatened with boredom, a terrible existential problem that besets the sensitive individuals in this world. She grows a defiant behaviour rebels against her family and in desperation decides to leave the house when her husband, Raman asks the innocuous question *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* She insists on fleeing from the mainland to
the island of her childhood, Manori, where she feels she will find the same magic as she had found in her childhood. The interrogation used as the title of the novel leaves a big question mark on the mind of the reader. The name is suggestive of an escape from the summer that stands for the raging inner tension, frustration, disappointment, mental discord and disharmony of the inner consciousness of Sita. Madhusudan Prasad observes that this novel deals:

A recurrent existential theme that lays bare the agonized modern sensibility of an Indian woman.25

Sita is appalled by the pervasive phenomenon of violence that she observes in nature— the ruthless chase of a helpless young eagle by greedy crows in family, the bowling of 'ayah's in domestic life and the couple that reminds her of nothing but appetite and sex. She is unwilling to deliver her fifth baby in the world where the creative impulse had no chance against the overpowering desire to destroy. She is haunted by the strange idea: By giving birth to the child now so safely contained, would she be performing an act of creation or by releasing it a violent, pain-wracked blood bath, would she be only destroying what was at the moment, safely contained and perfect? She tells her husband "I don't want it to be born" she will not be an
instrument to bring another being amidst this overly meaningless world. When stupefied by her abnormal desire her husband Raman, calls her a mad child and she reverts:

I think what I am doing is trying to escape from the madness here, escape to a place where it might be possible to be sane again.26

To preserve her sanity she has to escape from the sweat and turmoil of the urban atmosphere in the Bombay and flee to Manori.

If reality was not to be born, then illusion was the only alternative. She saw that island illusion had a refuge, a protection. It would hold her baby safely unborn, by magic. Then there would be sea- it would wash the frenzy out of her, drawn it. Perhaps the tides would lull the children, too, into smoother, soften beings.27

R.S. Sharma observes:

Sita seeks to escape essentially from the cannibalism that is operative, unseen and unobserved, in contemporary city life.28

Anita Desai views the violence through the eyes of a woman in the limited area of her domestic relationship. Sita's unwillingness to deliver the baby is symbolic of her desire to prevent the experience that makes suffering and violence
possible. She is opposed to all "happenings" for it becomes unthinkable that anything should happen for happening is always violent.

Sita's stay with her in-laws after marriage makes her unable to relate herself to the surroundings or the people around her on the drudgery of a routine bound life. She finds the company of her husband's family disgusting. She feels that they live in the "thin age - rotten flat" and lead inhuman lives. She is vibrated and thronged in revolt against the most inhuman placidity, or suggestiveness. As a result she starts behaving provocatively by smoking and speaking in sudden rushes of emotions as though flinging darts at their smooth unscarred faces.

Sita's temperamental incapacity to adjust herself to the norms of society, make her treat all people around her as "animals". But even when she starts living in a small flat with her husband and children, her temperament is no better. She does not meet her physical and emotional fulfillment in human love rushes of negative emotions over power her. This situation leads her to fear after fear. Destiny pulls her ways, she does not desire. The world of illusion surrounds her that if reality was not to be born then illusion was the only alternative. She keeps oscillating
between illusion and reality but takes illusion as protective umbrella.

The urban residence with its surroundings and with its characters represents for Sita the prose of life whereas island of Manori stands for spiritual peace and manifestation of individualism. The island concretizes the feelings of isolation and alienation for Sita. She retreats once again to its womb with an obsessive desire to recapture once again her childhood innocence and purity. Her own frustration with her life in Bombay drives her to Manori where she hopes to provide her unborn child a corruption free world.

The final section deals with Sita's recovery from her plunge into existential nullity. As a sensible assertive woman she reconciles with the reality of life. She feels isolated even at the land of Manori, which has lost its magic with the passage of time. Almost all the protagonists, of Anita Desai realize the futility of illusionary life when they reach the state of self-analysis. Sita as a "broken bird" of the seashore analyzes the cause of her anxiety and neurotic behaviour. Her triumph over her illusions renders the island devoid of its powers and miracles. She realizes that the part is irrevocable therefore it is useless to go back to it.
Her diminished ego paves way for her becoming conscious of human relationship. Packing her luggage for departure from the island, many ideas surround her. She sees the expressionless faces of the night nurses in the Gymea ward. Which are symbolic of the routine day to day world in which Sita has lost her faith? She regains her poise and gets rid of her spiritual imbalance. The realization that her escape from the realities of life would not offer any solution to her spiritual impasses makes her regain, her lost faith. Maya and Monisha are unable to regain this faith which results are death. Sita is bold enough, first to protest against her circumstances, and then taking the blame on herself for being a coward and not facing reality.

*Fire on the Mountain (1977)*, takes a step forward in voicing the multifarious aspects of the tortured life of a woman. The novelist reveals the social, economic and personal problems of women. The three protagonists - Nanda Kaul, Raka, Ila Das are correspondingly analyzed for their respective search for "self" for they seek the security and fulfillment of love in society.

Mrs. Nanda Kaul, a widow of the Vice-Chancellor of Punjab University finds herself at peace and relieved of all sorts of tensions by living a solitary life at "Carignano".
Perplexed by the city sensibility, she leads a happy life amidst nature at Kasauli. She merges her identity as a city dweller. She arrives at Carignano for self discovery with a blank mind and insists on having her own way. She has been an assertive woman through out, awe-inspiring personality in family and society. She seems to be trying to hide her hollow interior with her solid exterior and Anita Desai has accurately presented both through her nostalgia. The metaphors like "bareness" and "starkness" are followed by noun, phrases like "sweeping view" indicate Nanda Kaul's hard life and it's routine during youth. But that is all over now and had been glad to leave it all behind, because it was like an unwanted burden. She enjoys perfect peace and tranquility on the hill not wishing to be interfered by even her own daughters and their children. Nanda has achieved that state of mind where Asha Kanwar rightly says:

The time remains an elusive fluid entity;
one that is best experienced rather defined.29

Nanda Kaul is quite contented with her present does not desire to look beyond 'Carignano' which is symbolic of time present. Even though she has no one to talk to, no one to share her grievances with or to plan her
future with, she is so content that she does not even want her great grand daughter Raka and the company of her childhood friend, Ila Das.

The intrusion of Raka and Ila Das in Nanda Kaul's visibly serene life, makes Nanda link her time present with her life past. Nanda had a happy childhood was married to an educationist, and played the role of a perfect wife, always in silk, always in pearls and emeralds. No matter simple the occasion her dress was a means to plaster her fractured interior, which is explicit from the reference of Miss David during Ila Das's visit at Carignano. Nanda had practiced "stillness" as a virtue it was an act which tranquilized her perturbed mind. She had learned it through years of practice.

Nanda Kaul had learnt to assert herself in that madding crowd in the house where she was the wife of a Vice-Chancellor, her present life of serenity and peace of "Carignano" with the roaring life in her house at the university. She fully declines to have ever associated herself with an artificial city life. P.D. Dubey has commented:

The garden of Carignano is a projection of Nanda Kaul's yearning for loneliness and privacy.
However, Nanda receives Raka and instructs her servant Ramlal to make proper arrangements for new guest. Raka turns out to be a very different sort of child, having no needs, not even emotional like an insect burrowing through the sandy loam and pine needles of the hill side. Like her great grand mother Raka desired for only one thing, single demand to be left alone and pursue her own secret life amongst the rocks and pines of Kasauli. Raka, a lover of loneliness was only a child but her mental make-up was at par with her great grand mother, who had passed through all sorts of experiences in life. Raka has a higher vision of life. She lives for herself and has a gift of disappearing suddenly, silently. Nanda respected the greatness of Raka as a recluse. Raka is an explorer and dislikes a duty bound code of life. She strives constantly to realize herself.

Raka is a recluse by choice while Nanda opts for this life out of rejection and vengeance in face, Raka's character has been created by the novelist to highlight the traits of Nanda's character. Outwardly, Nanda appeared to be an assertive lady but her husband's infidelity had shattered her inwardly. Raka is what Nanda had aspired to be throughout her life. R.S Sharma points out:
If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligations, her great grand daughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct. She had not arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice, she was born to it simply.\textsuperscript{31}

The presence of Raka reminds Nanda Kaul of her own flawed experience, for Raka was a "finished perfect model" of what she herself might have been. Raka’s arrival at Carignano gives a chance to the novelist for working on the childhood memories of Nanda. Anita Desai lets the wheel of time come in full circle, and the past memory of Nanda unfolds the novelist’s vision of human relations.

The title of the novel \textit{Fire on the Mountain} refers to Raka’s world who tells Nani that she had set the forest on fire. Her words are expressive of her resolve to destroy a world where a woman can not hope to be happy without being unnatural. Both Nanda and Ila assert themselves in their peculiar ways, the former is rich and sophisticated and the latter is poor and simple. Ila is the active and the unsuccessful part of the story, and Nanda is passive and successful. Through Ila, novelist bring about the human cause for serving society. This ugly and handicapped lady has a terrible life history. Her mother lay rooting in bed with a broken hip that would not mend and her father had
died with a stroke caused by greedy and ungrateful sons. Family property have been spent in playing debts and having a disabled sister to look after, Ila lives a life of poverty. But for Nanda Kaul's help she would not have been able to survive the crisis for she had been appointed as a lecturer in the Home Science Department through the influence of Nanda's husband who happened to be the Vice Chancellor. Ila had to leave that job due to the game of politics played after the death of Mr. Kaul and her work as a social worker saved her from starvation.

Ila as a social worker struggles against the social evils like illiteracy and superstitions and has never enjoyed the status of a privileged person throughout her life. She has a shrill voice, which is extremely unpleasant to her guests, relatives and colleagues. The extent of Ila's shrill voice can be gauged by Nanda Kaul's words:

It was this cackle this scream of her Nanda Kaul thought that held all the assorted pieces of her life together like a string or chain. It was the motif of her life, unmistakably. Such voice no human being ought to have had: it was anti-social to possess, to emit such sounds as poor Ila Das made by way of communication.32

She raised this "voice" to encounter, injustice, cruelty and
atrocity against women in the male dominated Indian society. She faces all-round opposition against her reforms and ideas and becomes a mouthpiece of the novelist in criticizing the Indian society where even religion supports the ill-treatment of women. She tells Nanda emphatically:

I do believe that women would listen to me, if it were not for that impossible priest. It is so much harder to teach a man anything. Nanda the woman are willing, poor, dears, to try and change their dreadful lives by an effort, but do you think their man will let them? No not one bit.33

This physically deformed, neglected and isolated woman has assertiveness in her personality and a wider vision of humanity. Which makes it all the more tragic that such a woman is mapped. Dr. Budholia opines:

In fact, the rape of Ila is the deterioration of human values. It becomes symbolic of the growth of animalism in man. Modern man has lost his rational power and depends solely on the criminal mentality.34

Despite the negative forces at work in society around her, this small lady is all determined to fight against them. She faces the challenges of adverse circumstances - personal, social, economic and becomes an instance of a 'little broken bit of a crazy life'. Her exhibited attributes of social
obligations distinguished her from others. She has sacrificed all her personal comforts and pleasures just for her family, then for society around. Her "parental pride" is her stronghold and won't let her ask for "half a kilo of corn" from the grocer and requesting Nanda to spare her a room at Carignano.

Ill "not asked" neither "not begged" theory is followed by Bim in *Clear Light of Day* (1980). Bim is not baffled by her past and her human relationships like Nanda in *Fire on the Novel*, is an interesting study of self in transition from childhood onward. She cherishes and sustains the feeling throughout that lead her to a life a social obligations. She is free from any psychological trauma like Maya and Monisha. The only trauma which she passes through is to understand the cyclic change in time. The story centers on Bim (Bimla) the eldest child of the four children in the family, growing up with their rather indifferent parents, a diabetic mother and a father who is nothing more for the children but a master of entrance and exit. Bim shares very close emotional relationship with Raja and she encourages him in every speculation, act and ambition. Both find a great mental and temperamental affinity with each other for they are bold, independent and posses a fiery, impetuous spirit. Bim, nurses Raja through
sickness cherishing the thought that he would take his father’s place and provide security to the fatherless family. But to her utter dismay, he decides to go away to Hyderabad to fulfill his dreams by a rather easy course, by marrying the rich Hyder Ali’s daughter and he tells Bim clearly that he has to begin his life sometime rather than strangulating at home.

With the passage of time the old relationship of childhood creates a new pattern familial relation. Raja runs away to Hyder Ali, leaving Bim to care for the deserted family in that crumbling house. He marries Benajir, Hyder Ali’s only daughter begets five children and abdicates all his responsibilities towards Bim and the mentally disabled Baba. Tara the younger sister finds a way to escape from that dilapidated house by marrying Bakul a bureaucrat in Foreign Service. Darshan Singh Maini points out that:

Bim is only person left to look after the house and Baba in the claustrophobic drama of severed relationship, violated loyalties and eroded lives.35

Bim is surrounded by many like paying the rent problems in time, Tara to be married off, Baba to be taken care of and the insurance company office to be attended. Past is full of sinister memories, the present is the burden
of pregnant fears and future is what is being sought by one who seeks only loneliness. Here Usha Rani says that, the dominant current of the novel runs along the lines: "Time the destroyer is time the preserver", a quote again from T.S. Eliot, quoted by Desai in the novel, further draws the reader's attention. Desai succeeds in conveying the mixture of fear and despair and hope present in the woman breast. Bim constantly feel tortured by an emotionless, dry official letter written by Raja to her after Hyder Ali’s death in which he says that since Ali has left all his property to him. Bim and Raja can continue to love in it without the fear of the house being sold.

Bim is educated, smart and intelligent and she receives a proposal of marriage from Dr. Biswas but she turns it down since she cannot be a submissive life like Tara. Bim works as a lecturer in a college and has an extremely romantic apprehension about her that finds gratification in an unhindered ego and assertiveness.

Most of Desai’s female characters are aware of her potentialities and sense of direction. Bim rebels against the compulsion to succeed in conformity, she refuses to accept and compromise. She is pinned down, burdened with responsibility and a narrow world of immobility and non-
choice. In a society where no room is made for a woman's sensibility and individuality, where her attempt at asserting her feminity and individuality is thwarted, where she is being dubbed as neurotic, and her male counterpart invariably fails in his traditional masculine role, the woman is made to feel, absolutely helpless. Women like Bim are still hopeful. She has the courage to withstand the onslaught of time and society, leads life on her own terms and struggles for loyalty in sensitive human relationship. She is realistic and not being an escapist and stays back alone at home to look after two miserable people in the house - Baba, a born disabled and Mira Mausi a child widow turned drunkard and mad. As a young girl she had been head girl of the school and the same qualities of leadership have seen her through life. Bim sustains continuity of life but without marriage, because both institutions are impossible for her. But what brings the family together is another marriage in the family, the marriage of Mona, Raja's daughter. Tara comes to India, to attend this marriage but Bim can't forgive Raja.

She tears the letter written by Raja, shares a family gathering with Tara and Bakul, gives them a warm send off and invites Raja to Delhi.
Bim could achieve her "identity and herself" not in isolation but in togetherlessness, not in rejection but in acceptance, not in withdrawal but in positive commitment. What sustains life here is not merely money but love, care and affection also. This sustenance requires a motherly presence. Bim plays the role of this presence in the family. At one stage, in the absence of any adequate response, she breaks down and decides to give up her responsibilities. The arrival of a letter from insurance office disturbs the routine of her life. She appease her anger, on Baba that she makes up her mind to forgive Raja "that unforgettable letter" and to wrest forgiveness from Baba. The clearing away of old papers by Bim at home is symbolic of clearing away all the barriers in the way of reconciliation. After a long period of frustration and anger, Bim comes to recognize the importance of forgetting to see life in the *Clear Light of Day*.

Bim is successful in attaining "positive detachment" when she learns to involve herself in action without caring for its fruit. Earlier her vision was clouded by vagueness in the fact that she expected fruit for her labour, for her sacrifice for the family in the form of gratitude. When she is not awarded this, she develops hatred for her loved ones and suffers from frustration as a result. But in the end she
forgives everyone for their betrayal and as a consequence attains her own serenity and poise. She develops a healthy attitude towards her life and accepts the world as it is. Bim pave her way through various phases of psychological tension and alienation and emerges as a strong character created by Anita Desai, unique in herself. She experiences and realizes the very source of love, its warmth and significance in human relationship.

The realization of the inadequacy of her earlier vision of reality leads Bim to spiritual wholeness. She consciously chooses to bridge the gap in relationships. A new awareness and a new horizon is set for Bim and she feels renewed and transfigured in other pattern. This new pattern "to forget and to forgive: to forgive and wrest forgiveness" becomes the motto of Bim's new person. The darkest depths of the past have been plumed, all emotions, anger, guilt, fear and remorse are spent, and there remains for Bim only an engulfing love, luminous like a clear day.

Bim is a symbol of love, devotion and sacrifice. She adopts the life of sacrifice and loneliness out of her feelings of responsibility after her parent’s death and Raja’s indifferent behaviour and betrayal. Bim idolized Florence Nightingale along with Joan of Arc in her private pantheon
of saints and goddesses. She succeeds living up to her ideal in life and undergoes purification of the soul. But Laila in *Journey to Ithaca* (1995) is a born rebel and through her rebellious nature seeks her "spiritual being" in India. Daughter of Amla and Hamid, both teaches in university, Laila was 'such a small child, so headstrong, so independent, that it was dangerous, anyone could see that. She spent her childhood in Alexandria where she becomes her stance, her habit. She was sent to Cairo where she joined a revolutionary student group and was in danger of being expelled from school. But a timely advice saved her and the result of the examination was unexpectedly good and she was sent to Paris from Cairo. She was a staunch believer in freedom and to become a trouble for her aunt and her family. She revolted against all traditional religious.

Laila joined a dance troupe after watching "Krishna Lila" and she wanted to play the role of Radha whom she ignorantly calls "Lila". She kept travelling along with her dance teacher, Prem Krishna and gave many dance performances. She presented a solo dance item titled- "The Peacock" Laila was selected by Krishna to be the leading dancer in his tour through America. Finally she reached India with him but was tired of dance and the material pursuits and foul intentions of Krishna Ji. She had always
been in search of "truth". And at the last, she was taken by her "Master", Permanand in his ashram in the Himalayan, mountains in the north. Here her journey ended up because she could not have undertaken another.

Laila was always in search of God's heart and truth and was eager to unveil the curtain in order to know the secrets of life and death. Prem Krishna initiated her to the higher metaphysics of science of soul. She found love in dance rather she could hardly tell them apart - dance and love. They came to be one:

Laila had a womanly weakness and faces many situations and physical temptations. Sleeping in the same room with her dance teacher Krishna Ji, Laila was momentarily tempted by lover's instincts but she gathers a will power to wrestle with them and emerges triumphant. This is wrong. It is not right, Krishna, I will not do it. I will leave you, I promise.\(^36\)

Laila could understand that, dance had nothing to do with religious belief or spiritual exercise, Indian or otherwise it was fast growing to be a commercial commodity in America. But Laila was turning to be a "Sadhika" and had firm conviction. Optimism and assertiveness was the entry point of her journey, Laila travelled northward and there is an ashram beheld that "Great Sage" seated on a carpet. He
blessed her and bid her to be seated. She had her fill of the
"Divine Visage". The true master spoke of divine love and
filled her every limb with its nectar and she turned to be an
enlightened soul which illuminated the dark corners of her
mind. Everywhere there was light there was brightness.

Montu Das, the doctor of mother's (Laila) Ashram
tells Sophie that the master said to the other disciples.
Mother was much criticized for being a Muslim and for
polluting the ashram but the master pacified them saying
that she was Kabir who was a Muslim but stayed in the
holy city of Benaras and wrote verses in the honour of
Rama. Master and the Mother shifted from Haridwar to the
present ashram in the Himalayas where Laila as mother
lived a contended life according to her own free will and
never felt dependent on anybody.

Sophie another female character in the novel is the
second assertive woman in the book. The women in
Journey to Ithaca revolt against their surroundings, she
longs for the worldly freedom and Laila aspires for the
spiritual freedom. The novel opens with Sophies
determination to discover the past history of Laila, the
Mother in whose ashram her husband Matteo lives as a
disciple Sophie, a journalist collects the loose threads of
Mother's past life from Montu Da, Krishna Ji and Mother's diary. Mother's past life as a student, a dancer, a seeker after the spiritual "Guru" is explored Sophie with her worldly pursuits is quite critical of Matteo but later on she perceives his higher position as seeker of "truth" Sophie herself is filled with spiritual fire and realizes the higher vision of love in her husband and the mother. She decides to complete her journey by esoteric experience like her husband.

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