

ANITA DESAI A FEMININE INDIAN WRITER: WITH REFERENCE TO CRY THE PEACOCK, FIRE ON MOUNTAIN

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ABSTRACT

Anita Desai is one of the best women writers of Indian fiction in English. She has gained distinction in exploring the human psyche and the emotional feelings of her protagonists. She has added a new dimension and marvellous favour to the contemporary Indian English fiction and has a significant place due to her innovative thematic concerns and deals in her fiction with feminine sensibility. She examines the deep psyche of her characters, especially women characters. She is a keen observer of the society and the position of the women in the contemporary society draws her special attention. They are the explorations of the family problems, which perhaps is the chief cause behind the estrangement of the women from their family. The novel, Cry, the Peacock (1963) is the faithful description of psychosomatic growth of a female character, which cannot cope up with the practical world of the husband and feels dejected.

In Indian writing feminism has been used as a modest attempt for evaluating the real social scenario as far as women are concerned. This paper is an important insight in-to representation of feminism in the novels of Anita Desai, while exploring feminism in Indian Writings in English. Anita Desai is one of the prominent gifted novelists in Indian English. She was born in Mussorie on 24th June 1937. Her father was a Bengali while her mother was German. She grew up with English, Hindi, Bengali and German. English was her first language. She began her writing at the age of seven it was in English. She has written novels, stories, children books and articles. She is often considered as psychological novelist and a feminist who deals with major themes of isolation, lack of communication, inner struggle, man woman relationship and marital discords. Her protagonists are female. Language and technique used by Anita Desai is as per theme and situation. She uses memories of past that is Nostalgia as a narrative technique. Her distinct style of writing, original characters, use of language, realistic theme, and narrative technique has made her writing so endearing which earned many words, recognitions and awards for her work. Her contribution to the literary world is without any doubt is great. All aspects of her writing are discussed in the paper. Abstract-Anita Desai is a very popular Indian novelist. She is

known as the Mother of the Indian psychological novel genre. Her meticulous depictions of modern Indian life have secured her a place of honour in the pantheon of Indian authors.

Winner of the Sahitya Academy Award, Desai has authored as many as sixteen works of Anita Desai is one of the most famous modern Indian novelists in English literature. Among the all Indian novelists she is one of the greatest, reputed, and successful writers. She is quite aware about the human psychology. She has obtained distinction in investigating the human psychology and the feelings of her characters. She adds a modern dimension and astonishing preference to the modern Indian fiction and has an important place due to her imaginative thematic interests and allotment in her fiction with feminine sensibility. She examines the deep psychology of her characters in her novels, particularly women characters. She is a keen observer of the society and the position of women in the contemporary society draws her special attention for writing issues of women in her novels. They are the explorations of the family problems, which perhaps is the chief cause behind the extravagant behaviour of the women in the family. Cry, the Peacock, a novel that describes the female psyche through Maya, the female protagonist. The research scholar in this paper attempts to study feminism present in the novel Cry the Peacock and Fire on Mountain.

Anita Desai is the distinguished representative of Indian English Fiction. Her novels reveal the extreme complexities of human life. For centuries, women in the traditional social order and system have always been considered subservient to men. In patriarchal Bourgeois society, the matriarchal community has been humiliated, afflicted, silenced and tortured socially and economically. With the post-modernizing age, women began to see the universe with their own eyes and not through the male gaze. In India, with manifesting itself in struggle against patriarchy another inner revolution started manifesting itself in literature, especially woman's writings. The voice of women began to vie with those of men. The purpose of my paper is to focus on the feminist message as articulated in Anita Desai's well reputed novels, Cry the Peacock and Fire on Mountain. My intent is to examine critically how in the post-modern ear Indian women writers in English have highlighted women's question. They have raised a fiery voice or initiated and inner revolution against the traditional customs and gender discrimination with a view to equalizing human rights. Considering, the femme fatale characters of Anita Desai, one of the most renowned Indian writers writing in English, especially to powerful and domineering female protagonists, Sita and Maya of Cry, the Peacock and Where Shall We Go This Summer? This paper proposes to draw attention to Desai's works as exemplary instances of postmodern womanism.

Keywords: Womanism, Feminism, Postmodern Feminism, Alienation, Frustration, Citation

Introduction

Anita Desai has tried to probe into the depths of a woman's psyche and showing its relation to society. And, this concern can be drawn through the portrayal of the neurotic like Maya and Sita. Both these women present sensitive individuals in their moments of intense struggle and their efforts to seek neurotic solutions. Anita Desai is widely recognized as the pioneer of psychological novel in modern Indian English literature. The prominent feature of her works is her art of the portrayal of characters. She examines the psychological inner workings of women and presents their reactions. Her two novels Cry, the Peacock and Fire on Mountain. Present the traumatic experience and mental tensions that Maya and Sita undergo. Desai explores the emotional world of neurotic Maya, who is haunted by a premonition of her husband's death on account of her belief in astrological prediction; while in Sita, Desai highlights the theme of repressed childhood neurosis. The repressed impulse and memories lie buried in the unconscious of the protagonist Sita but return later in a form of all full-blown neurotic pictures during her fifth pregnancy. The theme of both novels is disharmony and discord confined to the family and at times to the jaws of death and violence, while Sita suffers from Oedipus complex. Both Maya and Sita are representatives of Postmodern Indian Feminism. They both represent the Indian personality structure which is very complex and multi-layered. During psychoanalytical study, we may realize Maya and Sita likely to be the representatives of repressed female community. Mays's unexpected to deal with neurosis goes for violence while Sita's compromising and adjusting with it returns home peacefully.

Anita Desai's novels symbolizes the universal feminism. Through her novels, Desai has unveiled the grim as well as mysterious truth of human psychology, especially women's questions in most of her novels of our postmodern era. As a self-conscious social critic and reformer, Desai has divulged the unnoticed images of the inferior and hatred feminine community of her age. Feminism is one of the tops most issues of her fictional world; she has pictured a paradigm of the whole women community with a view to spreading the message of the second sex. She has dealt her fiction with feminine sensationalism and vivid themes which are innovative and potential concerning the miserable, drudgery plight of the weaker working class of women's untold affliction, agony, and psychological, conflicting senses under the unconscious and unwise, inconsiderate husbands, fathers, and brothers. Desai has wanted to highlight the matriarchal struggle, self-freedom, and self-identity and self-power against the male dominated world, where she has universalized the feminist message with the inner gaze.

Though Anita Desai attempts to analyse women's sensationalism and vivid expressionism in the field of fictional world, however, she has no willingness to sense herself as self-conscious feminist writer. Anita Desai, in her psychological novels, focuses on the minute and subtle image of a tormented, tortured, toiled, trodden and self-frustrated feminism preoccupied with her inner heart, soul and mind,

her sulking depression, melancholy, pessimism, self-storming pragmatics surrounding the atmosphere of mankind. The existential predicament of female world contradicts the masculinity. Though her female protagonists or femme fatale figures, Desai makes a fervent appeal and plea for a radiant dawn for the whole female community. The novelist discusses the vivid and clear-cut problematic features of temperamental incompatibility, conjugal chaotic and conflicting dilemmas and ever-growing hatred and despised disparity between male and female. In her novels, most protagonists cum heroines are segmented and alienated from the world, society, family, parents, and even from their own selves, because they are not average people but individuals who hardly enable to cope with the patriarchy, unable to keep abreast with this setup, rather they drift into their own sequestered world where they spin their great expectations, ambitions, dreams, which automatically disappears in the realm of vision. Her art of feminine characterization is superb but who are haunted by a peculiar acute concept and judgments of doom, withdraw themselves into an imaginative world of their own, get hysterical, neurotic, self-agitated and unhappy mood changed. A prick into the mystical crusts of the psychology of the female protagonists of Anita Desai upholds the universal emptiness, conventional alienation and solitude and an abysmal segregation from which they are victim of mental agony and pang of tormenting psychology. Her feminist superb creations are adamant and eccentric towards the male dominated order and system. They silently rebel and take recourse to naturalism and realism socially and economically a world of their own, a world where they can be able to confirm their determination, affirmation and freewill. Feminist and womanhood are not bounded by social contracts. Her tale and novel are presented through the feminine sensibility and pragmatic sense.

Desai aims to examine the natural, social and fanciful bonds that unchain the women's issues and, in this way, she is concerned with the destiny of the house minded woman in the typical Indian society. The theme of the martial unhappiness and sorrowful heart and an unadjusted marriage-bond cause depression and alienation in the mind of women as impacted in her popular novels. Anita Desai is considered as an inner psychological novelist as her prime concern is mingled with the nocturnal and nebulous atmosphere of the women's psyche. The motivations, the conscience and the psychic excitement and turbulent agitation of the storming psychology of the female community of their surroundings are dealt with the cardinal and excusive incidences of Desai's oeuvre. A particular trace and trait in the women's characterization, a tragic downfall turns into a psychic malady making their mentality over neurotic and hysterical as Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* who suffers from the father-fixation. Desai's fictions are auto-biographical, in the sense they impact her silent temperament. Anita Desai pictures the glaring portrayal of the women's quests by fostering out the profound and deeper universe of her powerful protagonists.

The major concerns of Anita Desai are hatred love and affection, depression and solitude. The purpose of my paper is to focus on the feminist echoes as articulated in Anita Desai's famous novels, *Cry, the Peacock* and *Fire on Mountain*. My intent is to examine critically how in the post-modern era Indian women writers in English have highlighted women's questions, demanding the rights, suffragettes. They have raised a fiery voice and initiated an inner revolution against the traditional order, system and gender discrimination with a view to achieving human rights. Considering the femme fatale characters of Anita Desai, one of the most renowned Indian writers writing in English, especially the powerful and domineering female protagonists of *Cry, the Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* This paper proposes to draw attention to Desai's works as exemplary instances of post-modern feminism. She is a keen observer of the society. The *Cry, the peacock* (1963) is faithful description of psychosomatic growth of a female character, which cannot cope up with the practical world of the husband and feels dejected. Feminism refers to any ideology that seeks equality and rights for women, usually through improving their status. Feminism is rooted in ending men's historical power over women. Feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal and social equality of sexes. This includes seeking to establish educational and professional opportunities for women that are equal to those for men.

The present paper attempts to probe Desai's expression for her pre-occupation with the modern ideal of building the society free from male domination. The study also means to investigate the role and contribution of patriarchal values towards the misery, suffering, loneliness and unhappiness of women or other psychological, social and economic problems experienced by them. The present research work will undertake a study of feminist awareness in Anita Desai's novel '*CRY THE PEACOCK*', with the objective to highlight the place and plight of women in a world governed by patriarchy. Feminism used to describe a political, cultural or economic movement to establish equal right and legal protection for women. The paper analyses feminine awakening in the words of Anita Desai. She shows the women who is oppressed, suppressed and self-determining with their spatial existence. She tries to explore the psychological state of her women characters. In the novel, *CRY, THE PEACOCK* she represents the theme of consciousness and sensibility of women in contrast with the men and their sufferings on their basis of emotional and physical repression. By the role Maya, Anita carries a new aspect of feminist publishing. Maya is an enthusiastic young lady who experiences both the expectation and the reality of her material life which is faced by every woman in the world.

In Anita Desai's first novel "*Cry, The Peacock*" 1963, Maya the chief female protagonist is obsessed almost from the very beginning of the novel with the awesome prophecy of an Albino Astrologer. According to the prophecy, she or her husband would die during the fourth year of her marriage. Maya's

marriage to Gautama with the lack of emotional attachment is in contrast to her joy's childhood. Those past memories over shadow her present with gloom. She can establish no effective communication with her husband. Maya's life is woven to her instincts and longs for her emotional and physical satisfaction other by his age. Further Maya's sensuous thrills and excitement are dampened by the non-attachment philosophy of the "Bhagwat Gita". Maya seeks communion of this kind the peacock seeks and makes intense mating calls. Through Maya's tragic end, Desai tries to emphasis the great yearning of the women to be understood by her male partner. The novel is mainly concerned with disharmony between husband and wife relationship. There is a breakdown in communication and Maya gets isolated and detached. Maya kills Gautama and then commits suicide. She is imprisoned within the four walls of the house and remains isolated because there is no one to share her grief. Alienation is one of the major problems confronting the postmodern man. The present era can be rightly called as "the era of alienation". In the present era, alienation is due to the generation gap, loss of identity, fear, loss of credibility, isolation and so on. The novel opened with the depiction of husband-wife alienation and discord by exploring the relationship of the prominent characters Maya and Gautama. The theme of alienation is the outcome of the hypersensitive nature of Desai's female characters. In her novels stress is shifted from the external and the internal world. The protagonist Maya is obsessed with the fear of death as a consequence of an astrological prediction that one of spouses will die in the fourth year of their marriage.

Maya feels destabilised even after four years of marriage, Gautama had failed to fecundate, "no you are too young"- perhaps of the bareness Maya had developed a slightly greater capacity for philosophy that she was born with. She blames Gautama for his grossness, for his concern with the fundamental and basic prosaic life in terms of money: "...it's always money or property – never a case of passion and revenge, murder and exciting things like that –not for love or life basic things- like Toto dying."(Orient Paperbacks,24) Mrs Desai, by powerful search light of her observation dives deep down and presents the world with her findings which include her prime concern to bare the hard covering of emotions to bring out sheer womanliness in them, to prove that they are actually devoid of feelings but in search of a pit of love and life. Cry the Peacock is a story of highly emotional, sensitive and imaginative woman told by a woman novelist .Maya is shown to be fast disintegrating under the pressures of marital discord. Married to an unresponsive and insensitive husband Gautama, she is driven from emotional instability in the beginning to madness, insanity and murder towards the end.

The cold and unresponsive attitude of husband becomes further clear as he asks Maya to go to sleep, "while he worked at papers." Maya is a victim of emotional as well as physical depression. She says: "...He did not give another thought to me, to either soft willing body or the lonely waiting mind that waited near the bed..."(9) Maya's attitude to nature and physical world also shows her obsessive love

of life. She gives highly sensuous account of the world of nature –of flowers and fruits, forms and colours. She has the deep sensitivity, quite deeply inclined by the sights and sounds, forms and colours of the natural world. She is infuriated when she finds that her husband fails to notice the dust storm. This indicates his insensitiveness to life. Gautama for her is representative of male-centred materialistic civilization and culture. There is no doubt she kills her husband due to her obsessive love of life. The act of murder is revolt against callous materialistic social order. Maya believes that she is not fit to live in this world based on male- centred wisdom, reason and order. She doesn't like the civilization based on logic and normality. She wants to be free from the chains of slavery based on customs and established norms of the society. Her revolt against the social order is an aesthetic revolt- the revolt of sensibility against the logic of the so-called normality that seeks to colonise desire through a network of institutional mechanisms: "... All order is gone out of my life, all formality, there is no plan, no peace nothing to keep me with the pattern of familiar, everything living and doing..." (195)

Maya represents the disturbed psyche of modern Indian woman. She tries to strike a balance between instinctual needs and intellectual aspirations. Deeply exhausted by this crucial act, she is further bewildered when the existential absurdity of life is brought before her .When she experiences loneliness and lack of communication she finds herself in mental crisis .Feminine studies shows that Indian woman-passive or aggressive ,traditional or modern –serves to reflect the writer's sense of isolation , fear, bewilderment and emotional vulnerability. She evokes continuous discussion of social values. She is the focal point of contact between the writer's consciousness and the alien world, her experience of reality and hope for salvation. As a symbol not only of growth, life and fertility, but of withdrawal, regression, decay and death, she is powerful figure indeed as a protester against social and sexual inequalities and discrimination. The awakening of women's consciousness establishes a new set of values in the fictive system. The typological experiences of the women have constant elements like the abrupt awakening, intense introspections and an abrupt ending with conscious decisions.

Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* reveals the patriarchal politics, whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the women. She shows the dichotomy of femininity as a cultural bias. Sex is biological and gender is social imposition. She asserts that patriarchal authority has given women a minority status that inflicts on her a "self-hatred and self-rejection, a contempt both herself and for her fellows." (Kate Millett, 55) To conclude it can be said that an understanding of the male-centred world –its discourse, institutions and practices, civilization and culture is a pre-condition for women's liberation .To understand their nature is to understand the nature and mode of domination, repression and oppression. All those alternative discourses which challenge and combat these institutions and

practices which heighten our awareness about domination contribute to emancipation and liberation of the women.

Anita Desai's fifth novel *Fire on the Mountain* published in 1977 in London, has confirmed Desai's reputation as one of the best Indian English novelists. *Fire on the Mountain* presents seclusion, isolation and desertion resulting out of pathetic sufferings of married life of female protagonist Nanda Kaul. Her alienation with her husband is the most unpleasant fact of her life which deliberately suppresses in the subconscious mind. Mr. Kaul was madly in love with a Christian lady whom he could not marry, and out of despair he treated his wife as a non-entity. The anger and pain with which the novelist narrates Miss Ila Das's rape and murder and the ill-treatment given to Raka's mother by her father is suggestive of the highest insult to woman's pride and dignity. Major characters who spot out the social, economic, political, emotional, and psychological disintegration woman suffers in a male-dominated society are Nanda Kaul, Raka and Miss Ila Das. It won the Royal Society of Literature's Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize and coveted 1978 Sahitya Academy Award. The *Statesman* appreciated it as an outstanding novel, sharp and refined, descriptive as well as symbolic.

The novel focuses on the violent, pathos-filled, existential struggles invariably engulfing the lives of the characters, the worst sufferers being the female characters. Marital discord has been presented in all its socio-cultural and psychological ramifications. The title of the novel is perhaps taken from William Golding's famous novel, *Lord of the Flies*, the second chapter of which is entitled *Fire on the Mountain*. It symbolizes the fire which burns in the heart of an old lady, a great grandmother, Nanda Kaul and her emotional world, which is the theme of the novel. In this novel the title refers to the worlds of Raka, the great granddaughter of Nanda Kaul, who says at the end of the novel. "Look Nani, I have set the forest on fire. Look, Nani, -look---the forest is on fire." (Desai 158) 44 The words are expressive of Raka's resolve to destroy a world where a woman cannot hope to be happy without being unnatural. Anita Desai makes use of the flash-back technique in describing the central theme of the trauma of a housewife in the novel. The novel centres round the character of Nanda Kaul.

(a)The Agonized Cries of Nanda Kaul and Marital Discord in her Life :- Anita Desai probes the feminine sensibility and a woman's inherent desire to know herself in terms of not only her relationship with her family but also in terms of her individual identity and its relationship with the world at large. *Fire on the Mountain* also deals with the theme of lack of communication and lack of understanding in marital life. Poonam Joshi in her book *Thematic Preoccupation*, describes Nanda Kaul's married life - Nanda Kaul, the Vice-Chancellor's wife who has chosen the house at the top of a mountain in Carignano in the village of Kasauli, as she wants to take shelter away from the disturbances of family

and society. Nanda Kaul and her husband do not have a warm relationship. He has cared little for his wife and family. Her married life with the Vice-Chancellor was full of long suffering with only the duties and responsibilities of her position without any love attached to it. She is disillusioned with her selfish, infidel husband. He only treats her simply as a useful thing. Nanda Kaul could not belong to the family and her position is no better than a house keeper. She played the role of hospitable hostess all the time for her husband, who wanted her always in silk, at the head of the long rosewood table in the dining room, entertaining his guests. She is always busy caring the family and doing the duties of mother, housewife and hostess that in the evening of her life she is happy in her isolation even though it is partly intentional and partly conditional.

Mrinalini Solanki rightly remarks : “Her option for total isolation is not related to the spirituality of Indian thought. She does not opt for this isolation willingly, but circumstances have left no other way out for her.” (Mrinalini, Solanki. ‘Anita Desai’s Fiction : Patterns of Survival strategies. New Delhi. 1992 30) I agree, this is a fact, when any woman, as a housewife is always engaged in household duties and does not give time to herself, she becomes fed up and wants the isolation from all those things and typical routine. Also like Maya’s and Sita’s husband, Nanda’s husband is also very busy in his duties and does not give 46 time to his wife and cannot care for her feelings. So isolation was the only way for her. The novel describes the hollowness into which Nanda is forced. Her married life was not peaceful. It was not all love and earnestness but the dreadful disloyalty of her husband provoked her to a life of silence. The children were alien. Nanda Kaul withdraws into a private world of self-willed isolation. She does not have any feeling for her husband. Her relation with her husband was just outward, no inner feelings were involved. The novel gives an impression of her happy life with her husband, but the last page of the novel reveals that the whole story was a white lie. She had concocted her life to Raka. The life of Nanda Kaul has been disgusting and tired. She felt happy when the responsibilities came to an end as she felt, “She had been so glad when it was over. She had been glad to leave it all behind, in the plains, like a great, heavy, difficult book that she had read through and was not required to read again.” Nanda Kaul’s solitude is described through many representations.

Desai said that “She had suffered from the disorder, the fluctuating and unpredictable excess. She revealed in her life’s bareness, emptiness ... to add to her own radiantly single life.” (Desai 32) Even though she has many children and grandchildren, she suffers from isolation within herself as well as in the outer world. She regards herself as a dejected and estranged woman. She does not want any disillusioned emotional bonds. She is used to live in isolation that she cannot adjust with other people. She is even unable to adjust to her own great grandchildren. Dr. Prakash Joshi throws light on the suffering of Nanda Kaul in his article Fire on the Mountain : Existential dilemma. He presents a study of the intense suffering of a housewife who takes shelter in seclusion. The lifelong faithlessness of Mr.

Kaul to Nanda Kaul and the phony situation compel her to confirm this separation. Nanda Kaul has conceded this after passing through psychic suffering and the bitter experience of a marital life. This wedding is veritably based on 47 physical lust and circumstantial ease for Mr. Kaul who does not love her as a wife. She plays a role of gracious hostess all the time and enjoys the comforts and the social status of the wife of a dignified person. Nanda Kaul becomes mother, grandmother and great-grandmother of many unwanted, and unloved children. Her life as the Vice-Chancellor's wife though packed and full of social activity, was truly aimless. There have been too many guests coming and going all the time, leaving little privacy for her. She passes her life in arranging the dinner table as a hard-working hostess.

The novelist presents the suffering of a housewife through the following words : “The old house, the full house, of that period of her life when she was the Vice-Chancellor's wife and at the hub of a small but intense and busy world, had not pleased her. Its crowding had stifled her There had been too many guests coming and going, tongas and rickshaws piled up under the eucalyptus trees and the bougainvillea, their drives asleep on the seats with their feet hanging over the bars. The many rooms of the house had always been full, extra beds would have had to be made up, often in not very private corners of the hall or veranda, so that there was shortage of privacy that vexed her. Too many trays of tea would have to be made and carried to her husband's study, to her mother-in-law's bedroom, to the veranda that was the gathering place for all. Too many meals, too many dishes on the table, too much to wash up after. They had so many children, they had gone to so many different schools and colleges at different times of the day, and had so many tutors, friends, all of different ages and sizes and families.” (31-32) Really Nanda's life is full of only household duties and there is no space for her. Anita Desai is a novelist of the human heart, an artist shaping the inner crisis of her characters. She is concerned with the personal tragedy of individuals. She is hardly interested in social life and political events. She explores the interior layers of her protagonist's mind and brings to the surface various shades of inner crisis.

b) Nanda Kaul at Kasauli :- Poonam Joshi focuses on the relationship between Nanda Kaul and her Children. She expresses in her book ‘Thematic Preoccupation in Desai's Novels’ that - The relationship between Nanda Kaul and her children is also intriguing and unappreciative. Nanda Kaul feels that her own children and grandchildren do not care for her. They have let her down. She is of no use of them after the death of her husband. Having been rejected and discarded all her life by her husband and children, Nanda Kaul decides to spend the remaining days of her life in a deserted lonely house in Kasauli, fed up with the endless demands of her long life of duties and obligations. Nanda Kaul decides to live in the Simla hills of the distant Himalayas at Carignano in Kasauli – a hilly resort. The arrival of Raka, her great granddaughter, will be a danger to her self-imposed seclusion, yet she cannot deny

the request of her daughter Asha, to allow Raka to come after her long illness. Then one day Raka comes and embraces Nanda Kaul with love. She looks at her grandma with curiosity. Mrs. Kaul finds in Raka a perfect model of what she once aspired to be herself. She says. "You are more like me than any of my children or grandchildren. You are exactly like me Raka." (52) After a lifetime of dutiful service to her family, Nanda Kaul purchases a house in the isolated hill country of Kasauli and lives out her days in peaceful seclusion. Her tranquility is disturbed, however, the great granddaughter Raka arrives at her doorstep having been forced out of her home by her parents' marital problems. Actually the novel deals with the elegiac life of Nanda Kaul, later joined by Raka's character. The novel brings forth the utter fatalism as reflected in the marginal and challenged life of the protagonist, Nanda Kaul. Desai unfolds the past of Nanda Kaul, who had only to contend with insults, betrayals, resulting tragically during the passage of time before she retreats to Kasauli after the retirement. She could never excuse her husband for his extramarital relations. As a mother of several children, Nanda Kaul found it difficult to accept her miserable solitude in her old age. The novel further explicates the alienation of Nanda Kaul and her granddaughter Raka. The loneliness and isolation of the two have been presented in it. Raka is an abnormal child. She likes to wander alone in the ravine without informing her great grandma. Raka is an unwelcome intruder into Nanda Kaul's life. Raka never enjoys the company of the grey old ladies like Nanda Kaul and her peculiar friend Ila Das. Their talks bore Raka to the extent of depression. Raka sets the forest on fire towards the end of the novel. The fire created by her is the result of her existential anguish to destroy the old and meaningless to make the new.

c) Nanda Kaul's Crisis for Identity :- Desai's protagonist Nanda Kaul presents an unforgettable, pathetic portrait of old age. Her life is a life of loneliness and isolation. She does not want to involve herself in any responsibility anymore, for all she wanted was to be alone. She likes to be free from all irritating involvements and withdraws into Carignano, her hillside home Kasauli. In this house she hopes to live a single life. In her agony she says: "Have I not done enough and had enough? I want no more. I want nothing" (Anita, Desai. *Fire on the Mountain*) (p-37) In fact Nanda is fed up of her life as a housewife. She wants her own space. Like Maya, Monisha, Sita and Sarah she also struggles for her own identity that she has lost in Mr. Kaul's big house, which is always full of people.

Nanda Kaul has done too much for her husband. Her cry is nothing but a cry in despair, a prayer which goes unheard and unanswered. She has withdrawn herself physically from her duties and responsibilities, irritations, joy and sadness. She can neither escape her past, nor help the present, nor predict her future. Her past keeps babbling in her mind and the memories create a series of pleasant or unpleasant feelings. She lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do. She finds a senseless compromise between inner and outer experiences. She is sick of her past, but the past including the memory of her husband's infidelity keeps assaulting her. Nanda Kaul hangs between

her decisions and indecisions. She becomes conscious of her loneliness and there is a crisis in her life. The inner crisis of her life is gloomy but it is the truth of life. This crisis serves as a mirror of the hollow self she has created. She has been a giver all her life holding back only the hour of stillness every afternoon. Here is a love impoverished heart, or rather a heart burning with feminine jealousy against Miss David the Mathematics teacher, with whom her husband led a life of romance. Whatever she got in her marital life as children and security of social status is gone with her husband's death, she is now unwanted. There are tall pine trees outside her garden. She looks at them, pines a way exactly conscious of what she is waiting for; she is awaiting the inevitable end to all human existence, death. She is haunted by the existential anger which has led her to conclude that human life is basically a lonely struggle against the odds of life. Nanda Kaul lives undisturbed by human company. She likes loneliness more than anything. She has cut herself off from human concerns entirely. Her desire to be lonely and isolated is seen in her apathy to receive her great granddaughter. She is fed up of being the wife of a renowned person like the Vice-chancellor. Her mental exhaustion and world weariness provoke her to detach from all the relations and responsibilities. But one day her great granddaughter Raka comes to Carignano to Nanda Kaul's house to stay with her for some days. Nanda and Raka both live in fantasy and at the end Desai bring a kind of harmony between Nanda and Raka. When Nanda hears the news of her friend Ila Das's murder, she receives a deep shock and the police officer tells her to come to the police station to identify the body. But Nanda has ceased to listen to it and she cries with distress and then Raka comes there and saw Nanda Kaul on the stool with her head hanging. She was no more. The novel tells of the hollowness into which Nanda is forced. The disloyalty of her husband provoked her to a life of silence.

. **d) Third Female Protagonist in the Novel - Ila Das** :- Poonam Joshi discusses about third female protagonist in her book *Thematic Preoccupation in Anita Desai's Novels* that - Ila Das, a childhood friend of Nanda Kaul is another intruder into the quietness of Carignano. Her role is marginal as compared to Nanda Kaul and Raka. Yet Anita Desai has projected another aspect of the existentialist philosophy through her character. In her life there is misery. She calls Nanda Kaul on the phone and informs her of her proposed visit to Kasauli to meet Raka. Her life is full of adversities. She was a university lecturer. She represents the poor class educated woman who can take up any job as a means of support. She finds herself fighting a lonely battle against a monotonous crowd. She remains faithful to her occupation. She succeeds in stopping child-marriages. She wages a heroic battle against the directives of the society. Finally, she pays a price for her convictions and refusal to compromise. She is raped and murdered by Preet Singh who takes his revenge on her. Thus Desai shows her characters in a different way. Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das depict women in different situations in seclusion. Desai examines three important aspects of thought through her protagonists. Nanda Kaul is in alienation

and existential angst. Raka symbolizes the individual's quest for meaning. Ila Das stands for the external conflict. One common ground for these three characters is that they are women who live in loneliness both out of choice and compulsion. Nanda Kaul stands for detachment, Raka for indifference and Ila Das for attachment to self. Desai has examined the dilemma of these three women in Kasauli and analyzes the crisis and psyche of women in isolation.

The novel *Fire on the Mountain* depicts the predicament of women in a society that fails to satisfy their desire and fulfill their hope. The novel depicts a world, which is not made safe for women. Therefore there is need for women to understand each other. The novel clearly shows the dilemma of women in a 52 society that has become a fit place, not for living but for dying. That is why when Raka comes to Nanda Kaul to tell the about fire, she saw Nanda Kaul on the stool with her head hanging, the black telephone hanging, the long wire dangling. Nanda Kaul is no more. With this novel Anita Desai emphasizes on female freedom as a myth. She likes to suggest that the myth of masculine superiority is preserved in the area of physical strength. The condition of women in the pre-independent India was worse and more pathetic than in the contemporary period. 4.6 Protest of Desai's Protagonists in their Married Life - Thus I found Desai's protagonists, Maya in *Cry the Peacock*, Monisha in *Voices in the City*, Sarah in *Bye Bye Black Bird*, Sita in *Where Shall We Go this Summer?* and Nanda in *Fire on the Mountain* are quite dissatisfied in their marital relationships. They face tension due to the discord between the individual and the surroundings. In Desai's novels, the parent-child bond is never satisfying. The parents are over possessive, or the child experiences total rejection. Unfortunately in some of Desai's novels, the children are left with a single parent- as in *Cry the Peacock* and *Fire on Mountain*. For example, Maya and Sita - their relationship with their parents does not satisfy their emotional needs.

Thus Anita Desai shows her protest against unhappy married life in the fake world through her female characters. Desai, in particular has concentrated on problems of women and projected them in diverse roles as sober and submissive like Monisha and Sarah. In these novels a woman is described from different angles - sometimes rebelling against her husband like Maya and Monisha and at times submissive and obedient to her husband like Sarah. Though in all her novels the heroine suffers from loneliness but the reaction to loneliness in all her novels is different. Maya pushes her husband from the roof, Monisha sets fire to herself, and Sarah and Nanda remain silent and subservient to their husbands. Monisha, Sarah, Sita are depicted as typical Indian women by Desai. Maya, Monisha and Nanda fail to arrive at any compromise. The women are actual living beings of 53 flesh and blood in her novels. There is change in women's condition from bondage to freedom, from indecision to self-assertion, and from weakness to strength. The novelist tries to give equal status to women and shows in the process that man should rise above in the prejudice of considering them as the weaker sex. Her

novels portray the struggle of the female psyche for identity. I would like to focus on the fact that, the uniqueness of Desai's novels lies in her treatment of feminine sensibility. She talks of women who question the age-old traditions and want to seek individual growth. They try to reconsider, to be known in a new context and find the significance in life.

The woman needs her space to create her own social and national identity. Jasbir Jain opines in his book *Gender and Narrative*. "In traditional societies women have been constrained by social constructs and have been vertically divided into family units, relating to the outside world through their men being governed by their positions or lack of communication. And how have they defined themselves related to society. These and a host of similar questions came in one's mind" (Jain 12) The women novelists in Indian fiction in English occupy a prestigious position. Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy are prominent in this field. The work of these women writers has given a distinct dimension to the total picture of women in the family and in society. More and more women writers came forward to explore the causes of suffering. A variety of shades, colours, visions are reflected when we go through the writings of these women writers. They have portrayed their responses and reactions. Their novels have female protagonists and they particularly deal with their inner selves and tried to reflect their inner feelings. But after all women suffer a lot in a male dominated Indian society. I would like to focus here, it is the fact that the Indian woman today faces the conflict between the restraints placed upon her by tradition and the need to assert herself. She also faces the conflict between traditional ideals and their own desires. In a critical venture when a woman tries to seek her identity, she tries to define herself by saying "I am a Woman". Through centuries, the Indian woman has tried to create her own space within a patriarchal society. Though educated, enlightened, demanding more from herself and life; conscious of an identity, apart from that which links her to a male, she is faced by a number of age-old beliefs. Feminism in literature is essentially concerned with the representation of women in society. Desai explores the disturbed psyche of Indian women, laying emphasis on the factor of loneliness. However Desai's women do not give up the strife so easily.

She focuses on gender roles of women seen through the lens of female activities. Her characters – Maya, Monisha, Nanda are like wooden creatures, subject to suppression and male domination only. The transformative power of Anita Desai's novels lies in her taking up the task of revealing the process of self-awareness at work in the feminine psyche. Most of her women characters registered a protest against the circumstances, which oppressed them. Desai's entire fiction traces the changing image of women in the face of existential dilemmas. These female protagonists assert their right to exist not as shadows of their male counterparts but as independent human beings with a will of their own. In fact this is the real aim of any feminist. I found, Desai's novels are addressed to and deal with women. The

primary concern of feminism is to declare that a woman is a being. She is not subordinate to man. Rather she is an autonomous being. She is capable of trial and error, finding her own way to salvation. We come across such women characters in Anita Desai's novels who are consciously trying to come to terms with themselves as individuals. Their voice is now gradually becoming audible and there is definitely a protest in their own voice. There is a clear tone of resentment and a pressing demand for freedom. The new woman has raised her voice against the atrocity and injustice done to her. The modern woman protests and dares to pronounce her convictions. And it is their voice of protest. Anita Desai as a focused feminist has presented three kinds of females in her novels. - In the first group there are such females who are hypersensitive and plunge into dark dismal depths of neurosis like Maya in *Cry the Peacock*. The second group portrays women characters who silently suffer the strain of life and become idealists or commit suicide like 56 Monisha in *Voices In The City*. While the third group discloses women who discern new and important discoveries about themselves resulting in a sobering effect on them and they find a sense of fulfillment in their relation to the world. Anita Desai's women characters display a sensitive and subtle awareness of the forces working to repress them and question the inequalities of such systems. There is an incipient feminist consciousness present in the anger of Maya and Sita and the studied indifference of Monisha and Nanda.

Conclusion

Thus looking at these various feminist viewpoints it may be remarked that the feminist consciousness is the consciousness of victimization and unjust treatment of women though the hostile power of oppression may differ in accordance to the ideologies or the vision adopted. What is significant is the need to profound changes in traditional social structures, family structures, and power of women, fundamental attitudes and personal relationships, leading to a just social order. Indian feminist writers present three images of woman: assertive i.e. progressive, submissive and compromising. Assertive i.e. progressive image is the advanced image of woman who is conscious of her identity, submissive image of woman is the traditional image of woman and the compromising image is the image of woman who seeks to change the status remaining with in some parameters without breaking from tradition. To conclude, I may say that the theme of both the novels is disharmony and discord confined to the patriarchal structure and at times to the mal-adjusted or ill adjusted self. Alienation and unrequited love drive Maya to the jaws of death and violence, while Sita suffers from Oedipus complex. According to many critics and Desai Scholars, both Maya and Sita are representatives of Post-modern Indian Feminism as impacted on *Cry, the Peacock* and *Fire on Mountain*. They both represent the Indian personality structure which is very complex and multi-layered. During psychoanalytical study, we may find Maya and Sita likely to be the representatives of repressed female community. Desai depicts Maya

as an unfortunate woman who lives on the borrowed optimism before marriage. However after her marriage she seems to have lost way and identify. In place of a considerate soul, she finds in Gautama a symbol of flinty wisdom that neither comforts her nor induces her. What sounds notable is that Maya's feminist consciousness protests against society which devalues women and forces her to realize that her socialization is not typical. Maya is a heroine from the feminist perspective: she defines her signifying self as separate and distinctive (as marginal) she struggles to maintain the identity even though at odds with the society around her (patriarchy, religion, female stereotype) and she finds validation in her own voice (life affirming) Maya's feminism is her struggle for personal fulfilment in countering the female stereo type of her friends and expectation and criticism of her husband. As a heroine with feminine sensibility, Maya dares to maintain her "aesthetically and morally coherent unique" individualism despite lack of support from friends, family or religion. In fact, Maya is energized to action in order to maintain her individualism, her "signifying self".

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