

ALIENATION and SURVIVAL

A Study of the Novels of Anita Desai

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PREFACE

This study aims at exploring the themes of alienation and survival in the novels of Anita Desai. It intends to offer a new insight into the novelist's mind and art, especially her philosophy of life and nature by considering an entire range of her published novels, from *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) to *Fasting, Feasting* (1999). Since the study of these novels cannot be approached through a single method, a pluralistic approach has been adopted in interpreting the texts. References to postcolonial feminism and existential notions of human quest have also been touched upon in this study. The most important feature of this study is to highlight the idea of alienation, quest and realization as essential clues to survival.

Attempts have also been made for a diligent rendering of the previous research on Anita Desai as informed by current and updated study in the area. A brief review of such critical heritage reveals that most of the critics have dwelt on the theme of alienation and frustration of the characters of Desai forming a pessimistic outlook. Even some existing studies appear to be inadequate in delineating the themes of quest and survival in the novels of Anita Desai. Along with the theme of alienation, the individual's search for identity and realization of self has not been treated exhaustively. The present dissertation concentrates on fulfilling this critical lacuna and explains the novels of Anita Desai as

anecdotes of human quest and survival through realization of truth and knowledge of the self. It also critiques those critical opinions, which produce a notion of pessimism as an essential feature in the novels of Desai. One of the primary motives of this study is to foil the negative interpretations of the works of Desai and to move towards an understanding of the profound idea of survival, which runs through as a scarlet thread in her novels.

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Chitababhadra Chhetri
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. It is not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We are not pleading merely for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it.

(Virginia Woolf. *Modern Fiction. The Common Reader, 1st Series.* 1923.)

SECTION ONE

Literary Scene

ANITA DESAI belongs to the post-independence Indian English writing whose pen has broken a fresh ground to give a new dimension to Indian English fiction. Her literary output has progressively increased and she has now to her credit eleven novels, two collections of short stories, several books for children and plenty of literary articles. Her novels include *Cry, the peacock* (1963), *Voices in the City* (1965), *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971), *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *The Village by the Sea: An Indian Family Story* (1982), *In Custody* (1984), *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), *Journey to Ithaca* (1995), and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999). She has tried to explore the inner lives of her characters with psychological insight, creative excellence and lyrical intensity. Her novels may be considered as the novels of self-discovery, of process and of becoming. She moves away from larger themes such as political, social, or satirical, towards the inner world of individuals.

For her literary contribution she has been conferred many national and international honours. She

is a member of the Advisory Board of English of the National Academy of Letters in Delhi. She has been awarded the Neil Gunn International Fellowship for 1994. She is also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London, of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, member PEN, New York and of Girton College at the University of Cambridge. She has been given the honour of Scottish Arts Council, the Hellen Can Fellow, Cambridge University, 86-87, the Ashby Fellow etc. As K.C. Dutt, in his *Who's Who of Indian Writers: 1999* outlines, she teaches in the Writing Program at M.I.T. and divides her time between India, Boston, Massachusetts and Cambridge, England. She is also the visiting Professor of Smith College, USA 1987-88, the Purington Professor of English, Mount Holyoke College, since 1988, Visiting Scholar, Rockefeller Foundation, Bellagio, Italy 1992.

Born in Mussoorie on 24th June 1937 from a mixed parentage, Desai began writing prose fiction at the age of seven, which were published in children's magazines. Her father, Dhiren Majumdar, was a Bengali and her mother Antoinette Nime was a German. The family lived in Delhi and there she had her education: first at Queen Mary's School and then at Miranda House, Delhi University. She passed her Master's degree in English literature from Delhi University, worked for a year in Max Muller Bhawan, Calcutta, was married to Ashvin Desai, and mothered four children. As she has lived in

metropolitan cities like Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Poona and Chandigarh, she describes these cities in her novels.

After a long literary journey of four decades, she stands as an established novelist, as an heir of many great awards and prizes. She is the recipient of the Royal Society of Literature's Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize and the National Academy of Letters Award (Sahitya Academy) in 1978 for her novel *Fire on the Mountain*. She received the Guardian Award for Children's Fiction in 1982 in U.K. for her novel, *The Village by the Sea: An Indian Family Story*. *Where Shall We Go This Summer* won her Federation of Indian Publishers and Author's Guild of Indian Award for Excellence in Writing in 1978. She is also the recipient of Booker Mc Conel Prize in 1980 and 1984 from London; the Neil Gunn Award, 1994 for international Writers; Padma Shree, 1990 by the Govt of India. Her novels like *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1994) and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) were nominated for the prestigious Booker Prize. *In Custody* is recently filmed by Merchant Ivory Productions. The blurb of her novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* thus reads:

Her work has won widespread critical acclaim. Victoria Glendinning, writing in the *Sunday Times*, said of *Clear Light of Day*: 'Quiet writing, like Anita Desai's, can be more

impressive than stylistic fireworks. She has the gift of opening up a closed world and making it clearly visible and, by the end, familiar'; Peter Kemp in the *Sunday Times* described *In Custody* as 'resonant and realistic'; and Anthony Thwaite in the *Observer* called Anita Desai 'the most original person I've come across in fiction for a long time' (1989).

The literary platform of Indian English novel on which Anita Desai stands, seems to develop through various stages. In the beginning, it emerges as largely imitative of the European literary convention. An increasing sense of patriotism and spirit of nationalism inspire the later Indian novelists. Their novels can be considered as attempts to interpret the Indian consciousness to the rest of the world. The post-independence Indian novelists seem more interested in exploration of the individual in their creative writings.

With the introduction of English in India, a large number of English classics begin to find a place in the educated Indian minds, which consequently become models for the Indians writing in English. Bankimchandra Chatterjee becomes the first Indian writer of a novel in English, with the publication of his novel *Rajmohan's Wife* in 1864. The novel is a rather

melodramatic tale of the trials of a typical, long-suffering Hindu wife Matangi at the hands of her husband Rajmohan who is a bully (Naik, 106). *One Thousand and One Nights* by S.K. Ghosh and *Indian Detective Stories* by S.B. Bannerjee are other works of prose-fiction in English by Indians. Raj Lakmi Devi's *The Hindu Wife* (1876) and Toru Dutt's autobiographical novel, *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden* (1878) can be said to be pioneer novels by Indian women. Besides these, K.K. Lahiri's *Roshinara* (1881), H. Dutt's *Bijoy Chand* (1888), Khetrapal Chakravarti's *Sarata and Hingana* (1895), Ramesh Chandrs Datta's *The Love Palms* (1902) and *Slave Girl* (1909) are among some of the earlier works in English.

These earlier novels are more in consonance with Victorian literary models. Most of the novelists aim at elimination of social evils by trying to create a national and social consciousness. However, in the field of characterization they do not seem very successful. With some exceptions, the art of character portrayal continues to be stereotyped. The problem of creating round characters does not seem to be efficiently resolved. Many of them seem to be carried away by the lure of creating images of the romantic and glamorous India of Rajas and Maharajas, and of mystic saints and sadhus who could perform miracles. These novels provide us with historical significance than with literary insights.

The next phase of Indian novel is concerned with a nationalist consciousness as well as a social awareness. Ideas of the Indian struggle for freedom and social awareness are reflected in the novels of K.S. Vankataramani, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Vankataramani's *Murugan the Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan the Portrait* (1932) deal with economic and social themes entirely based on Gandhian thoughts. Anand is more concerned with the social milieu than with the individualized characters. Though his *Untouchable* (1935) is mainly about the caste system and social untouchability, the Gandhian myth is predominant in the novel. Most of his novels overlook the psychic portrayal of the characters. In *Coolie* (1936) the inner development of the main protagonist is ignored. Narayan seems to be implanted in his exclusive locale, Malgudi, thus producing 'Comedies in Sadness'. His novels like *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Dark Room* (1938), *The English Teacher* (1945), *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *The Financial Expert* (1952) and *Waiting for Mahatma* (1955) deal with various regional problems, aspirations and wisdom of the Indian way of life. Raja Rao deals with philosophical and religious themes in his few but refined novels. His *Kanthapura* (1936) is a socio-political novel with the theme of 'Gandhi and our Village'. Another novel, *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) deals with the themes of east-west cultural and philosophical confrontations.

Other novelists like Manohar Malgonkar and Bhabani Bhattacharya express a tradition of social realism in their novels. Malgonkar drives at literary pleasure rather than social criticism in his novels like *Distant Drum* (1960), *Combat of Shadows* (1962), *The Princess* (1963), *A Blend in the Ganges* (1964), and *The Devil's Wind* (1972). Bhattacharya writes from a social point in view, for whom a novel must have a social purpose. His novels like *So Many Hungers* (1947), *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1952), *Music for Mohini* (1952), *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960), *Shadow from Laddakh* (1966), and *A Dream in Hawaii* (1978) exploit political, social or economic realities. His novels are outstanding works on the themes of moral debasement of the characters struggling for physical survival rather than a spiritual one.

These novelists retain the momentum of national freedom coupled with a tradition of social realism. Apart from socio-economic themes, the struggle for freedom looms large in their novels. They show a political tension rather than a spiritual one. They mostly narrate a social story dominated by an urge for political freedom. Their writings manifest a choice of oriental subjects. The spirit of modernism seems to be almost alien to these writers. It appears that they make little attempt at shaking off the worn-out conventions of the colonial past. Even the fact of independence seems to mean only a political change to

some of them. The realization of freedom could hardly manifest itself in the choice of an idiom still belonging to their colonizers. A kind of decadent romanticism forms the literary ethos of the period of 1950s. Various themes like the spirit of nationalism, the Indian national movement, the partition of India and the destruction and suffering caused by it have inspired these novelists.

Indian novels continue to develop and grow, adapting to the changing Indian environment. Many social, political and industrial changes have brought parallel amendments in the substance of these novels. The thematic nucleus of these novels consists in the depiction of the picture of hunger, poverty and disease in the Indian rural life. Along with the depiction of widespread social evils and tensions, an examination of the survival of the past and an exploration of a hybrid culture of dislocations also constitute the themes of these novels.

The era of the modern Indian novel may be said to have started from the 1960s. The new novelists are basically concerned with individualized characters. There is a marked shift from the life of community towards the delineation of the inner life of the individuals. The introspective and psychoanalytic character of the modern Indian novel may be seen as a new trend in its history. Though the novel retains its

momentum of patriotism and national consciousness, the conflict between modernity and tradition comes to be one of the favourite concerns of the novelists. Many of them deal with the theme of east-west confrontation and its aftermath. Along with the themes of increasing inwardness, the new novelists have also explored the crisis of the self.

Arun Joshi in his novels like *The Foreigner* (1968), *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), *The Apprentice* (1974) and *The Last Labyrinth* (1981) deals with human predicament in its different aspects. In his thematic stance, he seems to be influenced by European writers like Sartre, Camus or Kafka. His protagonists are intensely self-centred individuals, prone to self-pity and escapism, who try to search for their own identities. Chaman Nahal in his novels like *My True Face* (1973), *Azadi* (1975), *Into Another Dawn* (1977) and *The English Queens* (1979) deals with the painful odyssey of the individuals in different contexts. B. Rajan deals with the problem of east-west encounter in terms of the individual's quest for identity in his novels like *The Dark Dancer* (1959), *Too Long in the West* (1961). His novels also deal with the themes of change. V.K. Gokak's *Narahari: Prophet of India* (1972), Timeri Mukherjee's *The Marriage* (1972), Raj Gill's *The Rape* (1974) and *The Infidel* (1979), Saros Cowasjee's *Goodbye to Elsa* (1975), S.S. Dhami's *Muluka* (1978) explore the new Indian consciousness. These novels lay

a great emphasis on personal tensions, private selves, alienation and isolation of individualized characters.

There seems to be a little continuity between pre-independence and post-independence fiction. The new novelists had yet to break with the literary conventions of their colonizers. They had to take upon themselves a new challenge and pioneer a new tradition. They could not fall back upon their predecessors. Yet they deserve a fairer estimate at least for their contribution to Indian writings. Some of their conclusions provide valuable insight into the modern Indian novel including that of Anita Desai.

With the dawn of independence there has been a sudden spurt of women novelists. They have attempted to provide new philosophical insights, wealth of understanding, and depth of meaning. They help the readers to reach out to a different world and also to realize the potential of human achievements through a feminine point of view. "One of the reasons that women have taken up their pen is because it has allowed them to create their own world" (Dhawan, 10). It also permits them to establish the conditions of existence, free from direct intrusion of men. They can also identify themselves with a range of characters. Ian Ousby observes that when women write they are in touch with libidinal energies and drives, which can find no place in the regimental discourses of male reason. Men

may perhaps gain access to such writing, and may even themselves produce it in certain rare cases (1994, 325). Women seem to have some different sense of values and are more concerned with thought, emotion and sensation. Their writings allow them to occupy a safe place from where they can discover a wide range of experience.

The women writers have taken up the issue of the tortured selves of the Indian women as one of their major themes. The novels of Kamala Markandaya can be studied as essays on realism. Her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) deals with the theme of hunger, where food becomes the primary requisite for human dignity whereas hunger debases man. In her other novels like *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *Possession* (1963), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgins* (1973), and *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), she projects India's quest for true identity in the context of cultural changes. Ruth Praver Jhabwala reveals the picture of the Indian urban life in the light of east-west encounters. In her novels like *To Whom She Will* (1955), *The Nature of Passion* (1956), *Esmond in India* (1958), *The Householder* (1960), *Get Ready for Battle* (1962) and *A Backward Place* (1965), she depicts the picture of such women who opt for modernity without conviction. Most of her female characters are portrayed as using modernity as a licence for free love. She also tries to explore the

mind, the sensibility, and the agitated heart of the lonely or trapped women. Sashi Deshpande reflects on a realistic picture of contemporary middle-class woman in most of her novels. Her very first novel *The Dark Holds no Terrors* (1980) presents an unusual female character, "who defies her mother to become a doctor, defies her caste to marry outside, and defies social conventions by using Boozy to advance her career" (Iyenger, 758). Bharati Mukherjee deals with the theme of an immigrant's experience of Indo-Americans in her novels like *Wife* (1976), *The Tiger's Daughter* (1980). Her female characters are deeply rooted in Indian ethos and possess admirable strength in facing the calamities of life. Nayantara Sehgal presents the picture of such women, who face various arduous situations in their quest for self-fulfilment. In her novels like *A Time to be Happy* (1958), *This Time of Morning* (1968), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), she explores the theme of the modern Indian woman's search for sexual freedom and self-realization. Besides these, other women novelists like Santa Rama Rau, Nargis Dalal, and Sobha De give various accounts of post-independence Indian life and culture.

These women novelists also present oriental and occidental cultural conflicts with deep insight. The theme of dejection remains a keynote for most of them. They profess the view that traditional Hindu values have oppressed Indian women. Writing for them becomes an approach for the rising of the consciousness of an

entire culture. The feminist cause as offered by these writers can be studied as a historically significant literary movement, well founded alternatively in Indian tradition, French enlightenment, British liberalism, and also deeply linked in style towards ideas of truth, justice, freedom and equality.

ANITA DESAI belongs to such a new phase of Indian writing in English. Her novels reveal the themes of alienation and survival accompanied by human quest for meaning and truth. She tries to explore the life of the individuals, who become victims of the conflict between tradition and newly acquired values of modern life. Since she is concerned with the inner-self of the individuals, the spiritual freedom and psychic dimension is what interests her the most. According to her, writing is an effort to discover, and to underline, and finally to convey the true significance of things. She confesses that her novels 'deal with the terror of facing single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence' (Dalmia, 13). Hers is the writing that depicts the inward journey of the mind in preference to the world of men and matters. Her preoccupation with human psyche diverts her attention to the question of being and nausea of existence. The complexity and obscurity in her fiction originates from her existential roots that impart to it a substantial element.

SECTION TWO

Critical Background

There has been an ample amount of critical writings and research articles on the novels of Anita Desai, which provide us with diverse interpretations of her works. She has alternatively been appreciated as a novelist of new ideals and condemned as a mere imitator of European writers. She has been viewed as an existentialist, as well as a champion of feminist problems. A brief survey of such critical writings will be helpful in pointing out those areas which critics and researchers have left unexplored. Efforts can be made in bringing into picture those unexplored areas of her creative writings which basically emphasize the theme of survival of the self as an essential human element.

Her very first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, has received wide critical acclaim for its novelty and philosophical strength. Most of her critics have interpreted the novel as Desai's attempt at presenting two different approaches to life: one poetic and another pragmatic. The first critical review of the novel of Anita Desai, "Rev. of *Cry, the Peacock*" (1963) by P. Lal, has interpreted the novel as Desai's

approach to present conjugal tension. Her second novel, *Voices in the City* (1965) has also received wide acclaim in the literary scenario. Meena Belliappa in her book, *The Fiction of Anita Desai* (1971) has made an attempt to study the scope and nature of Desai's first two novels, evaluating the fictional mode and techniques of the novelist. She has traced in Desai an evidence of a departure from current modes of fictional writing in India. B.R. Rao has studied the novels of Anita Desai as portrayals of human tragedies in his treatise *The Novels of Mrs. Anita Desai: A Study* (1977). According to him the tragedy in Desai's novels arises out of the inability of the characters to establish any connection with the prose and the passion in their lives. They live only in fragments finding no meaning of their existence.

R.S. Sharma has found the essence of Anita Desai's fiction in its explanatory nature. In his book *Anita Desai* (1981), he has tried to show a tension between prose of form and poetry of life as acting upon the lives of the characters of Anita Desai. He also shows Desai trying to achieve a unity between the two through a series of parallelism and contrast at thematic and structural levels. Appraising a keen observation of Desai, he remarks thus:

Nothing escapes her eyes, not even the leg of a spider! This intensity and density of

texture compensates for the absence of a strong plot or story line in her fiction. One reads her novels like long poems drawn mostly from those corners of life where no poetry seems to exist (1981, 166).

Madhusudan Prasad, in his book *Anita Desai: The Novelist* (1982) has made an attempt to study the novels of Desai from various angles. He tries to highlight her obsessive existentialist concerns as expressed in her novels. He emphasises the imagery, symbolism, narrative technique, lyrical prose and other aspects of her art. Harimohan Prasad also makes an elaborate study of the various themes and images as expressed by modern Indian novelists. He writes that in Anita Desai's novels, the acuteness of dilemma is lost in the welter of lyricism and her characters hardly emerge as sharply etched figures. According to his view, man is fumbling for his true self, his real identity. There is no definite image of man; he is groping *en route*. Hence quest is his condition. He thinks that the spirit of inquiry into the truth of human life as expressed in the novels of Desai is Indian, or to be more extensively, of Eastern lineage. The gospels of *Bhagawat Gita* have also been revealed in the fiction of Desai (1983, 37-42). Another critic C.P. Singh writes that Desai is struggling hard with an idea of producing a realistic novel of social as well as racial identity (1983, 232).

J.P. Tripathi has tried to trace the development of art and resourcefulness of Anita Desai in terms of her achievement as a creative artist. In his book *The Mind and Art of Anita Desai* (1986), he has studied the novels of Desai as depiction of human predicament marked by failure and frustration. He observes that the characters of Anita Desai are studies in inadequate love-relations. He also views that the free flow of love and sympathy may make marital life heavenly but Desai's characters being born with higher sensibility fail to provide them. This is the sort of emotional inadequacy, which exists between pairs of lovers in her books. He finds no deliberate attempt to cement their discord which is the result of temperamental differences. He considers the female characters of Desai as suffering from existential predicaments. He thinks that Anita Desai has always focussed her attention on the plight of women. Commenting on her eighth novel, *In Custody* he writes that:

Life as an eternal trap in the universe - this is the epitome of pessimism. In the situation the existential search for freedom - the human quest for liberty is put forth: "Then where was freedom to be found? Where was there fresh air to breathe?" in a limited sense only the novel is open to interpretations of existential philosophy (1986, 147).

Studies by Jasbir Jain, Ramesh K. Srivastava and Amarnath Datta have thrown light on various existential aspects of the novels of Anita Desai. Their studies point to the frustration, loneliness and defeat of women in contemporary India. According to Datta, Monisha's suicide, Sita's flight and re-absorption into quotidian life, and the tragic end of Nanda Kaul's deliberate isolation are all but different aspects of an organic and central vision (1987, 923). These critics find a strong influence of existential writers like Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and J.D. Salinger on the mind of Anita Desai.

The novels of Desai have also been interpreted from the psychological angle. Usha Bande's book *The Novels of Anita Desai* (1988) considers the novels of Desai from the point of view of "Third Force Psychology", based on the concepts of neurotic processes, as evolved by Karen Horney, and its application to health based on the tenets of Abraham Maslow. S.L. Paul's *Cry, the Peacock: A Critical Study* (1988) examines her novel in the framework of 'the metaphysics of the unconscious' put forward by Von Hartmann in his book *The Philosophy of the Unconsciousness*. R. K. Dhawan, in his two anthologies of critical studies on Anita Desai has detected a new era of psychological realism in her writings. He comments that Anita Desai's serious concern is with 'the journey within' of her characters, the chief

protagonists being female characters. Therefore the recurring theme that we come across in her novels is the agony of existence in a hostile and man-dominated society that is not only conservative but also taboo-ridden (1991, 12).

Asha Kanwal makes a comparative study of the novels of Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai in her writing "Anita Desai and Virginia Woolf: Comparative Study". Examining the use of time and memory in their novels, Kanwal shows how these concepts are made to function as artistic tools integrated into the structure of the novel lending a unified vision to the art and vision of these novelists. Commenting on the theme of time as used by these novelists, she writes that we have its threefold effect - the passing of moments or hours, the voyage from youth to age, and the historical time, or time in relation to nationwide events. In Woolf, inner time is not in contradistinction to outer time, for she has decried the isolation of the self. To her, the external and the internal are complementary. Both Woolf and Desai use inner time without ignoring its relation to the outer (1991, 29).

Many critics have tried to explore the themes of loneliness, solitude or separation in the novels of Anita Desai. R.A. Singh interprets the novels of Anita Desai as the outcome of her tragic vision of life in his dissertation called *Existential Characters of Arun*

Joshi and Anita Desai (1991). He considers her novels as examples of existential writing in accordance with western writers like Sartre or Camus. He thinks that her imagination is terrified by the emptiness of modern man. He writes that a sense of insecurity surrounds the milieu of her novels as in the case with Saul Bellow or Margaret Atwood. He studies the theme of alienation as one of the negative forces that makes the characters of Desai frustrated and defeated. Since they find themselves as aliens in their environment, they fail to overcome the impending predicament of their lives. He shows them as doomed only to be defeated in their search for meaning and purpose of life. Another critic Salman Rushdie writes that the subject of Anita Desai's fiction has, thus far, been solitude. Her most memorable creations - the old woman, Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain*, or Bim in *Clear Light of Day* - have been isolated, singular figures. And the books themselves have been private universes, illuminated by the author's perceptiveness, delicacy of language and sharp wit, but remaining, in a sense, as solitary, as separate, as their characters (1991, 71).

Most of these critical writings show Desai as a novelist preoccupied with a tragic vision of life. Since they deal only with the human predicament, they actually miss the other dimensions human alienation. Though man suffers from the torment of alienation, yet he can transcend his negative attitude towards life and

come to a spiritual survival through knowledge and realization of the self as an independent individual. It is not necessary that an alien experience is only tormenting. The sense of alienation also paves the way for individual's quest for identity leading to the realization of true self. Critics have ignored the other aspect of alienation in the novels of Desai.

Usha Pathania, in her treatise called *Human Bonds and Bondages: The Fiction of Anita Desai and Kamala Markendaya* (1992), has made a comparative analysis of the works of Anita Desai and Kamala Markendaya in the context of 'kin' relationship to discover a pattern of human bonds and bondages emerging under the weight of multidimensional pressures and tensions. She considers that Desai explores the human bonds from the viewpoint of a psychologist whereas Markendaya examines the human relationship in social, economic and political contexts. She also attempts to understand the psychic turmoil the characters of Anita Desai.

Critics have also carried out studies on symbols, images and myths as essential features in the fictional setting of Anita Desai. Kunj Bala Goyal's *Language and Theme in Anita Desai's Fiction* (1989), Seema Jane's *Voices and Vision of Anita Desai* (1989), Kajali Sharma's *Symbolism in Anita Desai's Novels* (1991), S. Indira's *Anita Desai as an Artist: A Study in Image and Symbol* (1994), and Sandhyarani Dash's *Form and Vision*

in the *Novels of Anita Desai* (1996), provide extensive studies on the use of images, symbols, myths and the verbal patterns as used by Desai. They have viewed that Desai uses these images, symbols and myths in order to articulate her psychological and philosophical themes. They examine imagery as a major component of Anita Desai's fictional technique and artistry. They also view that an interaction between poetic texture and narrative structure raises her novels to a higher level of artistic success. These critics show how imagery has enabled the novelist to integrate the inner and outer rhythms of life, thereby giving the reader an absorbing experience of the inner drama as well as outer action. Their studies are primarily concerned with exploring the literary style of Anita Desai.

Fits and Misfits: A Study of Anita Desai's Protagonists (1996) by Narendra Kumar interprets her novels in terms of her relationship with the tradition of the Indian novel. The main focus of the study is laid on her art of characterization particularly the mode of individualizing of character. He writes that Anita Desai has never created common characters. Instead she has written about individual men and women - the solitary beings who are not average but have retreated or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against or made to stand against the general current of life. Her characters, independent, agonized, frustrated and combating with angry defiance

their individual problems and predicaments, make us feel as though we have noticed them in our neighbourhood. Herein lays the charm of Anita Desai's art of characterization (1996, 88-89).

The study of Desai as a delineator of the dilemma of Indian women is not a new concept. From the very beginning of her literary career, she has been studied as an author of the new Indian woman and her problems. Shyam Ansani interprets the novels of Desai as attempts to portray the concept of New India in a transition period. He writes that her fictional milieu is the India in transition with its cultural and ethical values in the melting point. In each of her novels, one could sense the author's urge for a way of living, which would respond to the innermost yearnings of the Indian women for self-emancipation and self-dignity (1991, 109). P.F. Patil also views that Desai portrays the picture of the defeated woman in many of her novels. In his essay called "The Theme of Marital Disharmony in the Novels of Anita Desai", he tries to show the picture of beaten, lonely or alienated women in the fictional world of Desai. He observes that the women characters of Desai live in isolated worlds full of existential problems. Solitary and introspective, they show a marked tendency towards neurotic behaviour. Obsessed with their life of alienation, depression and loneliness, her characters suffer from an inner torment of the self. According to him:

Anita Desai has introduced marital disharmony as a central theme. She has an independent approach to women's problems in Indian social life as well as life in general. She does not accept the social tradition emphasized through religious mottoes and economic needs that a woman's body and soul are similar to a male-dominated family (1991, 127).

Regarding her as a painter of the defeated woman, Ian Ousby also writes that *Cry, the Peacock* and *Voices in the City* feature sensitive Hindu women of orthodox background, seeking unorthodox means of fulfilment that leads to despair and insanity. *Clear Light of Day* is the account of an embittered woman discovering her own human shortcomings. He finds her interested in exploring the complex psychic depths of the female characters trapped within the close confines of incompatible marriages (1994, 253). Sashi Khanna analyses the treatment of broken human relationships in the novels of Anita Desai. In the introduction to her book, *Human Relationships in Anita Desai's Novels* (1995), she gives a brilliant description of human relationships as depicted in Indian fiction in English. In the rest of the book, she makes an attempt to explore the relationships between parent-child, man-woman and individual-society, as portrayed by Desai in eight of her novels. Besides these, various other

studies like Bindulata Chaudhury's *Women and Society in the Novels of Anita Desai* (1995), N.R. Gopal's *A Critical Study of the Novels of Anita Desai* (1995) and Rajiv Sharma's *Feminine Sensibility in Charlotte Bronte and Anita Desai* (1995) try to explore feminine sensibility as expressed by Desai in her novels. These critics try to make a study of broken human relationships marred by gender isolation with insight.

In the anthology called *Feminism and Indian English Fiction* (1996), critics like P.M. Nayak, M. Mani Meitei, Rama Nair and many others have given their outstanding expositions on the feminist aspects of the novels of Anita Desai. These critics have interpreted her novels as explorations of the dilemma of modern Indian women who are keen to define themselves in postcolonial situations. In his 'Introduction' to the anthology, Nayak reviews the novels of Anita Desai as being those of a first class feminist. He observes that:

Elaine Showalter talks of three phases in the growth of feminist tradition: imitation, protest and self-discovery. Anita Desai's works are directly related to the third phase. They encapsulate her 'private vision' that captures the long smothered wail of a lacerated psyche that tells the harrowing tale of blunted human relationship. The fate of

Maya, Monisha, Sita and Nanda Kaul reminds us of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1996, 12).

Rama Nair is of the opinion that Desai is primarily interested in exploring the complex psychic depths of the female characters trapped within the close confines of an incompatible marriage. He writes that her women characters live in isolated worlds of existential problems. Solitary and introspective, they show a marked tendency towards neurotic behaviour. Obsessed with their life of alienation, depression and loneliness, they suffer from an inner torment of the self (1996, 57). Meity on the other hand tries to study the theme of the quest for balance in human relationships. He thinks that the age-old principle that men are for war and female for kitchen does not work in her fiction. Commenting on her impartial views on filial relationships, he writes that Anita Desai stresses conjugal co-operation and understanding as the basis of family harmony (1996, 45).

Ashok Chopra has considered the novels of Anita Desai as studies in Indian family problems arising out of marital discords. In his essay "Anita Desai: The Novel Queen", he comments that Desai is obsessed with relationships and problems in adjustment and acceptance, most specifically in familial relationships. After giving a brief survey of her

novels he concludes that Desai's forte is the portrayal of fractured relationships within the Indian family and kinship structures (1999, 40). S.P. Swain also studies the dialectics of marital polarization in the novels of Anita Desai. He considers her novels as portrayals of delicate housewives unable to cope with the apathy of the in-laws and the dehumanised and depersonalised urban milieu (2000, 95). Hariom Prasad writes that Desai has achieved a cohesive design of content and form in her psychological novels. She imposes harmony over different streams of feeling and sensibility, found in different strata of human society. He tries to find a match between 'what life is' and 'how it has to be lived' with the natural make-up as expressed in the novels of Anita Desai. He feels that in all her novels, Anita Desai seems to be under the spell of existentialism, and all her protagonists champion the cause of existential philosophy (2000, 112-119).

SECTION THREE

Despite the abundance of such critical heritage, a great deal seems to have been left unexplored. Most of these critical estimations focus on the pessimistic side of the novels of Anita Desai. The theme of a quest for identity and survival of the self has been ignored by these critics. They do not sufficiently explore the total concept of female sensibility that Desai attempts to bring into the arena of her novels. They also overlook the fact that Desai has portrayed her characters not only as subordinate entities under social legalities and external definitions, but also as seekers of truth and meaning of existence. Even some recent works look inadequate in delineating the themes of quest and survival within the individuals that the novelist often expresses in her writing. Though these diverse studies cannot be discarded as insufficient, yet we can trace some lacunae in these critical writings. These expositions study the theme of alienation as giving birth to the feelings of confusion, dilemma and indeterminacy, showing the characters of Desai accepting defeat in their quest for the selfhood. The critics have not sufficiently dealt with the individuals' potentiality in conquering or transcending the torment of alienation and achieving spiritual survival on the basis of their existence.

The present dissertation aims at fulfilling such gap which the previous critics of Desai have overlooked. It helps us to understand her novels from a new perspective. The stress has been laid on the quest and realization of the self at the heart of Desai's artistic self that she reveals in her novels. This uniquely illustrates the process of the evolution of human soul through alienation, quest and realization. This fresh approach offers a new insight into the novelist's philosophy of life and nature. A blend of subjective vision and objective reality, a subtle unity between her aesthetics and her philosophy has been taken into account in this thesis. Along with the theme of alienation, the individual's search for identity and the realization of the self as an essential element of survival has been taken up in the course of this study.

There are five chapters in this dissertation. The first chapter, "Introduction" is subdivided into three sections. The first section has opened a little window to the brief history of Indian English fiction. The second section has offered a panoramic survey of previous interpretations and commentary on the novels of Anita Desai. The third section of the chapter has shown the research gap of the study of the novels of Anita Desai. It reveals the original purpose of the thesis as to bring out the meaning of alienation and survival as depicted by Desai in her novels. Fresh departures have been brought to light in Desai's

philosophical views on life as depicted in her novels. There is a conscious movement away from the tormenting self towards a quest for identity and survival of the self. The stress is given on the spiritual realization and a unification of subjective vision and objective reality.

In the second chapter called "Philosophical Dimensions", the intellectual background of the works of Anita Desai has been explored. It contains a critical background of the theme of alienation and survival. This chapter has been subdivided into four sections. The first section gives the meaning of the terms 'alienation' and 'survival'. The second section deals with the existential notion of alienation and survival. The third section is concerned with alienation and survival in the postcolonial scene. The fourth section deals with gender alienation and survival. Her indebtedness to other sources of writings has also been discussed with reference to her novels. Efforts have also been made to bring into picture those direct or indirect influences and echoes of various writings, which are responsible in shaping the philosophical backgrounds of the novels of Anita Desai.

The third chapter, "Alienated Self", considers the different aspects of alienation and its consequent effects on man with reference to the novels of Desai. Desai portrays her characters suffering from an inner

conviction of isolation and uncertainty in the way of their existence. Most of her characters are alienated souls in the universe, and sometimes even from the self. The apprehension of this alienation comes in various ways. In the fiction of Anita Desai, it develops from a failure of human communication and a lack of emotional stability. It evolves also from the individual's failure to cope with his society, which always seems to be indifferent towards him. Her idea of alienation far exceeds what the existing critical accounts have explored. The feeling of alienation is not the product of loneliness or solitude. It is rather a feeling of division, cut off from the rest of the world. In this way, this chapter intends to interpret the theme of alienation from a unique perspective.

The fourth chapter called "Quest for Identity" shows that Desai not only deals with the alien experience of her protagonists but also outlines various means and methods that these characters adopt for their survival. The protagonists of Anita Desai make various attempts to overcome the torments of alienation, such as by creating different mechanisms of living, by performing different activities to make themselves meaningful, by trying to create their own values by acts of free choices, and also by aspiring for certain higher values in life other than the present ones. Since the interest of Anita Desai does not lie in mirroring the externals but in exploring the inner recesses of the individuals,

the search for truth consists in the life of mind and soul, and not merely in the life of body. Even in the midst of sorrow and pain, they keep alive some of their warmth and goodness towards an alien world. Their search for identity gives them a different dimension, depth and meaning even in their wretched conditions of life.

The final chapter called "Survival of the Self", deals with philosophical realization and recognition of survival as expressed by Desai in her novels. The present dissertation does not end in studying the themes of alienation and quest in the novels of Anita Desai. It attempts to explore the meaning of survival with new insights. Therefore, this chapter deals with various meanings of survival. It also shows how the characters of Desai finally attain their survival through their quest, realization and knowledge of the self. Such an idea of survival, still unexplored by the critics, is the subject matter of the final chapter.

The final chapter is followed by "Summary and Conclusion". It recapitulates the entire work with its major findings and their implications. This is followed by a list of "Works Cited", prepared according to the rules of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Fifth Edition 2000, edited by Joseph Gibaldi. Attempts have been made to update the thesis in accordance to the guidelines as furnished by the *Handbook*.

CHAPTER TWO

PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSIONS

We see the fragments mixed together
Yet it is not a piece of patchwork
Influences may give the impression
Reflections can be traced there
Yet the self is more than mimicry
Above reflections and reminiscences
Life is more than all
The philosophers have ever argued
And the seers have eternally seen
Beyond labelling, above discussion
It is a unique work of art
From the unfathomable mind of the Master

SECTION ONE

Meaning of Alienation

An exploration into the diverse influences on the writings of Anita Desai will be very helpful in course of this study. While analysing the themes of alienation and survival in her novels, various echoes like the modernist predicament and search for modern roots, existential malaise and quest for the self, postcolonial dilemma and search for balance and harmony reverberate quite and often. The Indian and Western concepts and personalities may also be seen as various intertextual incidences in her writings. An analysis of such influences will be helpful in bringing out the concepts of alienation and survival in brighter perspective.

Desai discloses the spiritual crisis of modern man and woman under various situations. She studies the theme of alienation as one of the central problems of modern life. As the sense of alienation seems to touch the deepest level of man, the sense of otherness, the feeling of an island, anguish and strange malaise corrodes his life from diverse quarters. He suffers in spirit by the feeling of disintegration, displacement and confusion. Isolated from another person, he seems to be doomed to a feeling of alienation that dominates

his sensibility. Unable to find himself as part of any group, he considers himself as 'other' in every sense. Alienation and isolation, both emotional and physical, shape the fictional world of Desai.

Various writers and thinkers have used the term alienation since a long time. In the past, the term alienation was used with reference to an insane person. As Fromm points out; "aliene in French, alienado in Spanish, are older words for the psychotic" (Sane Society, 120). Albert William Levi writes that the Latin term *alienatio* has a long and distinguished history. Cognate with the verb *alieno* (to alienate, to sell, to estrange, to become apostate, to become insane) and with the adjective *alienus-a-um* (foreign, contrary, hostile, adverse, distracted), it appears characteristically in the works of Caesar, Cicero, and Seneca. Its French derivative *alienation* appears as early as Calvin's *Institutes* ("We excuse his confession through the alienation of his spirit, caused by wine") and during the reign of Louis XIV in the memoirs of St. Simon, and throughout the eighteenth-century in the three analogous meanings, which are also to be distinguished in its Latin ancestor: (1) the transfer or conveyance of property to another; (2) estrangement or loss; and (3) madness, lunacy, mental derangement (1967, 244).

Of these three meanings of the term alienation, it is clearly the second that constitutes its philosophical significance. Wycliff in 1388 says that alienation from God is to man wickedness (Levi, 244). Burton in 1621 speaks of Macedon; "Alexander saw alienation in his subjects' hearts." Burke in 1770 speaking of the American colonies writes: "They grow every day into alienation from this country". As Levi puts in, the German equivalent, the verb *Entfremden*, with a similar meaning appears in the writings of Luther, Goethe and Wieland. It is the German ambivalence of the first half of the nineteenth century, which has fixed once and for all the resonance of the term 'alienation' that enters into the vocabulary of the existentialists and in the social criticism of the twentieth century.

For Hegel alienation is a term, referring to metaphysical condition. His account of metaphysical alienation can be understood in two sections: The Unhappy Consciousness and The Self-estranged Spirit. The first examines what it means to be a self. The second explores the phenomenology of the self as a developmental entity. For him, the self is free insofar as it maintains its identity, keeps solely touched with itself, and maintains the undivided unity of its self-existence. But this purity is compromised internally, for consciousness itself is a thoroughgoing dialectical restlessness, a fortuitous imbroglio, the giddy world

of a perpetually self-creating disorder. Thus we have here 'that dualizing of self-consciousness within itself, which lies essentially in the notion of mind; not yet present. This brings forth the *Unhappy Consciousness* or the alienated soul, which is the consciousness of self as a divided nature, a doubled and merely contradictory being (Levi, 245-246). An individual removed from the metaphysical universe suffers from both the unhappy consciousness and estranged spirit. Hegel thinks of alienation as the Spirit's estrangement from itself in a subjective sense or as an affair confined within the realm of mind.

Marx on the other hand considers alienation as the state of mind due to the productive relations into which human beings are classified. He views that the basic form of alienation is economic, rooted in the capitalist mode of production. When labour is treated as a marketable commodity, man becomes dehumanised and a separation between man-as-man and man-as-labour begins to grow. For him, it is only in the communist mode of production that alienation could be overcome. 'It is through praxis, revolutionary praxis, trying to break the class barriers, which sustain the capitalist mode of production, that man can hope to get rid of the economic alienation' (Roy, 167).

In his discussion of Modernist literature, Hawthorn writes that the term alienation has come to be

used in a rather more general sense to characterize the sense of non-belonging, exclusion and loneliness typical of the modern vision of life (1982, 6). It also refers to man's failure to realize his identity and his inability to recognize himself in the product of his labour. According to Levi, Fragmentation, Mechanization and Distantiation constitute the core meaning of the term (1967, 264). The term *other* implies space as well as otherness signifying implicit wisdom innate in human language and sensitivity and the term *self* indicates the real nature of the inner-man of an individual. As Hawthorn writes, 'to characterize a person, group, or institution as 'other' is to place them outside the system of normality or CONVENTION to which one belongs oneself.' "If woman is other, then that which is particular to the experience of being a woman is irrelevant to 'how things are' to the defining conditions by which one lives. If members of a given racial group are collectively seen as other, then how they are treated is irrelevant to what humanity demands - because they are other and not human" (1994, 208).

The term alienation, as we interpret in connection with the novels of Anita Desai, implies the condition of man being an alien to the universe and society as well. It is a state of detachment of a person in terms of feeling or affection. Unlike loneliness, it is rather a permanent structure of human experience, an unalterable inner crisis of man that cannot be overcome

easily. It is distance or division between two or more entities. This also refers to the process of separation or estrangement of somebody or something from something else. As a state of isolation or separation, as a special form of distance or sense of non-belonging or completely different dividing-self, it can also be taken as feeling of having no connection with anyone around.

Self-alienation may be understood as loss of contact of an individual with the prevailing social patterns that are not in agreement. As a result of this, the individual is forced to feel incapable of controlling his actions. It has worse effects on the individual than social alienation. It is a more basic form of rootlessness that can foil his mental and psychic development in a distressing manner. It forms the subject of many psychological and philosophical studies. Spiritual alienation may refer to a gap or separation between the finite self and the infinite one. Man's reason and intellect alienates him from God and his intuition helps him to come to contact with his deity.

Although alienation seems deep-seated in the very being of man, yet it cannot be denied the responsible factors that create an alienating atmosphere in socio-cultural conditions. Alienation as experienced by the characters of Anita Desai seems basically created by an

identity crisis. Various reasons may be credited for such identity crisis among which lack of healthy and heart to heart communication is the primary one. When such communication is broken 'the other' becomes an object and alien to the individual. The breach of communication is brought into existence through various agencies. It is also broken by man created division in gender relation and consideration of woman as an inferior sex. Nature's wilderness and its indifference is another cause of man's alienation which can be studied in her novels. The other factors that alienate Desai's characters are the individual's subordinate position under socio-political systems, the east-west cultural conflict resulting in identity crisis, and also the disparity of an individual with social, cultural and intellectual values that surround him.

Modern predicament and human quest for modern roots finds its substantial air in the writings of Anita Desai. It seems that the feeling of alienation is ever present in the being of man. A sense of sterility runs through the socio-political and cultural disruption of present generation. Desai tries to reveal the spiritual crisis of modern man and woman under chaotic situations of contemporary life. Her fictional milieu looks pregnant with a sense of disbelief in objective reality, an anxiety with the industrial atmosphere and hastening change in modern life. Moreover, she presents her characters as being in

desperate search for modern roots. She is also concerned with a sense of lost values, an interest with the unconscious, a desire to discover significant artistic structure in increasing chaos. She also deals with the problems of an individual whose life is dominated by indeterminacy and uncertainties. Most of her novels reflect personal disintegration and the cultural displacement of modern man.

The influence of Freud may be considered as a significant element in analysing the modern predicament. He turned the attention of many writers inward, towards subjective experience rather than the objective world. His study of human psyche as Pleasure principle (*Id*) and Reality principle (*Superego*) has helped in shaping the modernist ideals (Hawthorn, 180). Human instincts are either repressed or sublimated in search of reality through institutionalisation. This results in neurosis that finds air in abnormality including hostility and violence. It is because of this suppression that there is always tension between individual and society.

The suppression of human instincts in the name of so-called institutions or systems resulting in neurosis or abnormality can be studied in the novels of Anita Desai. Although gifted, most of her characters suffer from extreme introversion. They seem obsessed with various manias generating from various sources such as

lack of emotional communion, disharmonious family background and cultural discrepancy. Her characters are aliens in some way or the other, who are unable to establish a lasting rapport between their inner visions and outer realities.

Anita Desai also makes an attempt to study human psyche marked by an increasing self-awareness. In the shift from common sense to personal sense, her emphasis is altered in favour of rendering the refinements of individual sensibility rather than collective experience. The pursuit of knowledge resulting in a radical distress, an alienation of the human freedom from its former image, and breakdown of traditional standards are few of the indexes in her writing. The sense of cultural crisis being central to her art, most of her novels are open ended. She presents her characters as alienated, yet engaged in the quest for modern roots and self-dignity.

SECTION TWO

Alienation and Survival: Existential Dimension

Anita Desai's depiction of the theme of alienation and survival finds its sufficient philosophical foundation in the existential writings of the twentieth century. She denies the dominance of objective values stressing instead the reality and significance of human freedom and experience. Her novels hold the existential view that an individual is free and responsible in determining his own development through the act of independent choice. She also denies the existence of objective values stressing instead the reality and significance of human freedom and experience. The question of individual selection or freedom of choice is often brought into picture in her writing.

Existentialism can be viewed as a modernist thought based on the belief that "existence comes before essence" (Sartre, 1963, 26). Generally it is conceived as "a philosophical theory emphasizing the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining his or her own development through acts of his will" (Pearsall 491). It also professes that the problems of real importance for man are not solved by thought alone, but by the act of free choice on the level of existence. It inquires

to reject the existence of objective values, stressing instead the importance of free will and experience. Philip Mairet considers it as an outcome of "intellectual disorder between the two great wars" (1963, 8). It recognizes the intensity of man's anxiety to feel and know that he exists, and that this is the root of all his anxiety. When Kierkegaard said 'I am, therefore I think', he did not simply alter the Cartesian view, 'I think, therefore I am (*cogito ergo sum*)', but also invited a tremendous revolution in the course of human thought. It is opposed to abstract philosophising and is concerned with the meaning and problems of existence. The main emphasis lies on the predominance of existence over essence.

As inspired by the existential writers, Anita Desai often deals with the question of human existence on earth. Traditionally human existence is conceived as actuality or *is-ness*. An individual manifests himself only in those attributes that are his essence. But the existentialists do not seem ready to equal *is-ness* with *existence*. Existence is not a state, but activity: a category relating to the free individual. To exist refers to realization of the self through free choice between alternatives, through self-commitment. Copleston thinks that to exist means becoming more and more an individual, and less and less a mere member of a group. It also means transcending universality in favour of individuality (1965, 114). Thus,

transcendence of possibility is an important tenet of existentialism. It refers to the freedom of becoming, which belongs only to the individual.

The process of becoming and realization of the self is often dealt with by Anita Desai in her novels. She deals with the belief that the existence of the self precedes the essence of objects. She seems to be more concerned with the individualization of the characters. She projects her characters as recognizing the truth of their existence through involvement and quest. Most of her characters show such existential notion of alienation and the quest of the self. Her second novel, *Voices in the City* amply reflects her existential notion of freedom of choice and freedom of becoming. The main issue of the book lies in depicting the theme of existential freedom in the lives of the main characters, viz. Nirode, Monisha and Amla. Nirode as a true existential character is shown as in search of total freedom all his life, rejecting everything that he possesses; his past, ancestry, heritage and even security. Such notion of existential freedom can be observed even in *Journey to Ithaca*, where Matteo is portrayed as seeking after total freedom from all material blessings in his quest for spiritual fulfilment in the mystic land of India.

Most of the existential writers discuss about the alienated condition of man and quest for true identity.

These writers identify the term alienation with "inauthentic life". 'While Marx desires dis-alienation, the existentialists crave for an "authentic life", writes one critic. The concept of an authentic as opposed to an in-authentic life is one of the most original and important contributions of existentialism, precisely because it provides ethical norms generally rooted in human ontology (Johari, 509). Such shift from inauthentic life to authentic is often dealt with by Anita Desai.

Kierkegaard thinks that man's separation from God makes him finite and despondent. According to him when man conforms to the familial or social personalities or obligations there is every possibility of losing his sense of identity. He suggests man's inevitable return to God as an essential solution for his alienation. For him man's realization of the self as an inseparable entity from God is the true remedy from the torments of alienation. For him, existence is a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, and man is both infinite and finite. The act of existing is striving and the striving is infinite. Man for him is 'existing individual' who possesses great potentiality of becoming. He argues that an existing individual is in process of becoming, and in existence the watchword is always to proceed forward. Existence is the child that is born of the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, and is therefore a consequent striving.

He believes that every man is a mixture of the finite and the infinite. Considered to be finite, he is separated from God, alienated from Him. Considered as infinite, man is not indeed God, but he is a movement towards God, the movement of the spirit (Copleston, 114).

Nietzsche on the other hand considers man in the process of becoming. He relies on the individual's self-potentiality of overcoming such predicament. As he prefers life to knowledge, he takes this world as will to power and individual as this Will to Power. The world for him is not a mere appearance of a metaphysical unity or an illusion. The reality is of becoming and the individual is the one who turns it into being, imposing stable patterns on the Will to Power. As he replaces the religion by God's Death, he also replaces the myth of immortality of soul by *Eternal Return*, and slave morality by *Superman*. For him 'not humanity, but Superman is the goal'. But it is not a question of man evolving into Superman by a process of natural selection. For him, *The Eternal Recurrence* as the highest formula of the yea-saying attitude to life can ever be attained. He thinks that man is something, which must be surpassed; man is a bridge and not a goal. Man is a rope stretched between animal and superman - a rope over an abyss (Copleston, 188).

A feeling of alienation is also intensified by the individual's inability to make his free choice in the way of his existence. Although man possesses tremendous potentialities of becoming through the act of free choice, his very freedom is obstructed by various external agencies. These agencies are responsible for dividing and alienating man from other man, from the universe and also from his faith in both the subjective truth and objective reality. Sometimes it also gives rise to the feelings of absurd or irrational making whole universe look indifferent or hostile. The individuals, bereaved by the torment of alienation, also suffer from a deep conviction of their inability to create their own values and failure to alter their hopeless state.

Philip Mairet writes that Nietzsche's *Superman* and Kierkegaard's *Knight of Faith* are both examples of the transcendence of passion and intellectualism through the power of some purely inward integrity, though the one is an integrity of mastery and the other of obedience (1963, 9). It would therefore be very improper to assume that the existentialists have taken the notion of alienation only as a negative feeling. The sense of alienation also appears to be an essential element in recognizing the true self of an individual. Alienation is a crisis and like every crisis, it gives rise to the feeling of rootlessness and placelessness. It is only by the potentiality of human soul that an

individual becomes able to transcend the torment of alienation. An awakened soul can withstand the loss, can reconstruct and survive with a new insight, new meaning and new mechanism of living.

One of the basic problems that the protagonists of Desai face is the problem of individual choice or freedom of becoming. They are seen as fighting to overcome the obstructing elements in the way of their becoming. Maya in *Cry*, the Peacock fights back the indifferent situation at the cost of her becoming insane; Bim in *Clear Light of Day* tries to keep her individual values till her last. Deven in *Voices in the City* fights the absurd and inimical world around him. We find her characters trying to survive by creating means and mechanisms of survival and also by attempting to individualize themselves by the acts of their free choices. When they realize that they exist as different entities from the rest they grow and develop from within. They do not seem satisfied with what they are. Rather they seem trying to transcend their ordinary condition of life. Desai shows them as attempting to be more than the ordinary. Some of them opt for the infinite as their survival strategies while some others try to seek a lasting relationship between the finite and infinite, temporal and eternal.

The theme of alienation and realization as experienced and achieved by her characters through the

act of free choice links Anita Desai with these thinkers. The primacy of personal experience over abstraction, emphasis on individual choice, firm faith in human potentialities and supremacy of man over objects can be studied in the writings of Anita Desai. She not only deals with the wretched condition of man under the sun, but also tries to explore the unexplored realms of human psyche and tremendous human potentialities of becoming through the act of individual selection. As we find, Desai attempts to gather all the elements of human reality into a total picture of man.

SECTION THREE

Alienation and Survival: Postcolonial Scene

An impact of the postcolonial dilemma and quest cannot be overlooked while analysing the themes of alienation and survival in the novels of Anita Desai. We find an ample mixture of cultural and mythical influences in her writings. Native cultural representation and quest for identity can be studied as primary motives in her novels. Along with the theme of self-cultural dependency and a belief in self-sufficiency in indigenous writing, the allied themes of journey, loss, search for community and the arrival of the stranger can be studied as postcolonial images embodied in the writings of Anita Desai.

A process of decolonisation follows the Second World War as an expression of new local realities and the new international political order. It is reflected in the rapid evolution of literature in the erstwhile colonies and the Third World. Post-colonialism does not merely mean post-independence or after-colonialism. Rather it refers to a shift from the patriotic to the individualistic approach of life. The conflict between tradition and modernity, multiculturalism, an attempt to create a space are some of the essential features of such new writings. Bruce King writes that the

international literature of post-colonialism is based on the conflict between what is perceived as the traditional culture of the past and incorporation into a global modern culture" (1998, 7).

Alienation in colonial situations may be interpreted as the experience of the colonised against the colonizers. Since a colonizer has an urge to dominate, he considers the colonized as inferior and even having dependence complex. The very concepts of superiority or inferiority can be taken as the agencies that divide colonizer from the colonized. It has alienated the blacks from the whites in Africa and the cultured from the subalterns in India. History shows that the Europeans have considered the Africans next only to apes in reason and intellect. Colour was identified with intellect. Such falsification was also supported by the fact that Africans were an enslaved race and they had no formal written literature as well. The British called Indians *subaltern* or *sub-cultured* meaning subordinate or inferior, and by implication possessing an inferior mode of knowledge.

Such racial differentiation or colour complex has produced tremendous hatred and jealousy between the Europeans and the Africans, imperial British and the Indians. This has not only separated them from each other politically, but also fermented rebellion and change by creating a great spiritual distance and

division in between. The novels of Anita Desai also echo such kind of racial and political division in human relationships. A kind of hatred and jealousy between the British and the Indians can be observed in *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*, the victims being English Sarah and Indian Adit. Baumgartner's *Bombay* also reflects tremendous hatred and jealousy among the Germans and the Jews, the Indians and the Europeans, the coloured and the whites in their varied forms.

By postcolonial alienation, it may be understood that man is alienated in his own land and from his own people. It is a special kind of alienation when man suffers from a kind of rootlessness, a feeling of otherness and a mood of estrangement. Such alienation is experienced when the native's cultural or literary roots are overthrown or discarded. In the case of many new writers, including Anita Desai, postcolonial alienation plays a dominant role. It forms the individual's quest for native cultural roots or national background.

A major feature of postcolonial literature is concerned with place and displacement. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin point out; it is here that the special postcolonial crisis of identity comes into being, the concern with the development of recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place (1989, 8-9). Elleke Boehmer also thinks that it

is the writing which foregrounds and celebrates a national or historical rootlessness sometimes accentuated by political cynicism (1995, 240). Sense of the self may have been eroded by dislocation or cultural denigration. It may have also been disturbed by the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. Postcolonial study 'seeks to re-establish the balance of knowledge by demonstrating that the 'inferior' is made so through discourses of power and politics' (Devy, 117). Beyond historical and cultural differences, place and displacement, the writers make an attempt at presenting human reality and spirit of newly ascended quest in their writings.

The crisis like departure from the colonial culture and loss of the self therefore forms the first principle of postcolonial Indian writing. As the writers face a kind of rootlessness after independence, they are prompted to make a quest for identity and also develop some survival strategies. The second phase deals with the quest for national identity. Bruce King writes that during the first phase national political and cultural liberation was the goal. In the second phase cultural and economic liberation became the ideal for groups and movements within and across national boundaries, including Black Nationalism, feminism, and recent immigrants, each of which claimed its own

literature (1998, 3). Survival of the native or realization of the self forms the third phase.

Postcolonial alienation and quest play a dominant role in the fictional setting of Anita Desai. As she started her writing career after the independence, she suggests a gradual process of de-colonization, which provides a fresh attitude towards life leading to a new movement in literature. Unlike colonial writers, she does not merely rely on intellectual and cultural conflict between the ruler and the ruled but tries to expose the total picture of the individual under the postcolonial situation. Her characters are not only alienated under the new situations; they are also inspired to make a search for self-cultural or national identity. She can be related to the third phase of the postcolonial Indian writing.

Lament over disintegration of trusted tradition along with identity crisis is also evident in the writings of Anita Desai. As the problem of identity is increased in a technologically advanced society, the emphasis is given to individual consciousness that leads to the quest for identity. Her writing identifies its mission as making a theory of consciousness rather than a theory of mere change. She frequently hints at the postcolonial alienation of the individuals accompanied by human quest for modern roots. She concerns herself with the postcolonial dilemma of

modern man, whose ideology is marred by a taboo-ridden traditional society. A typical postcolonial anxiety like the conflict between old morality and new consciousness also constitutes the hub of many of her novels. Afzal-Khan considers her a postcolonial writer with realistic preoccupations. He thinks that Anita Desai has opted to remain within history, despite its ravages and cruelties. He writes that:

Anita Desai has shown in novel after novel her moral disapproval of a stance that refuses to shoulder responsibility for the past and present and chooses to withdraw from a painful present reality into a romantic or mythicized past. Yet the lure of myth is great, especially as an aesthetic form, and Desai deals with this dilemma by letting her writing and many of her characters take on the formal qualities of mythic fiction (for example, the poetic lyricism of her prose, the proneness to solitude and to the extraordinary in her characters). In matters of message, however, Desai is clearly on the side of realism, so she chooses to view myth and its attractions from, and ultimately to subordinate it (or at least balance it) within, the critical realist perspective" (1993, 96).

Postcolonial Indian novel is a Quest Novel, and its quest ranges all through cultural, racial and linguistic encounters. Culture may also be studied as a quest, which is not always mutually understandable. But it is not good if the quest is not a free choice. The themes of quest and choice are the two ingredients of culture. Cultural concepts are ancient and contemporary, traditional as well as modern. The cultural and linguistic roots pierce deep into the human consciousness and are therefore, difficult to separate. Such replacement creates a certain rootlessness and spuriousness. This very cultural rootlessness magnifies the torment of alienation in the lives of Adit and Sarah in *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*, Hugo Baumgartner in *Baumgartner's Bombay*. Desai amply deals with the sorrow of broken cultural lineages, which results in crisis of identity. She presents cultural crisis in man with the theme of East-West enchantments and disenchantments. Motivated by a bright prospect of national and racial survival, her characters also create a sense of quest for identity.

Desai's views on culture and tradition may be viewed as 'trans-national and trans-cultural'. Traditions are yesterday's changes. The cultural is always intercultural. The intercultural should be seen from the inside, as part of a society's creative adaptation and synthesis, rather than an alien imposition (King, 23-24). Culture changes and it must

change. Otherwise it becomes static. Her novels can also be studied as products of change. Her characters seem nostalgic for the past when they were supposedly complete in themselves. But they do not believe in the value of the rituals of the past. Culture is also influenced by technology. Her novel *Village Bye the Sea* shows such change brought about by technology and modernization of a village to an industrial belt, which creates a great change in the lives of the individuals.

Along with the postcolonial crisis of alienation and quest, her novels also echo the anxiety of vagueness, uncertainty and indeterminacy. Her characters suffer from the anxiety of increasing fragmentation and of human powerlessness. She delights in being the creator of her fictional universe and leaves no opportunity to drive home this fact. Equally startling is the precipitate self-consciousness about the act of writing. An urge for individualism can be observed as one of the major traits in her fictional settings. Her novels also breed question about the nature of reality. She often searches for alternatives to formal revolution as the only effective way of communicating a subversive meaning in her quest of the true nature of reality.

Section Four

Gender Alienation and Androgynous Consciousness

A reader often comes across gender isolation and female sensibility in the novels of Anita Desai. She explores the problems of alienation, quest and survival of modern Indian women in her novels. Her women characters are often considered as inessential others, devoid of intellect and inferior entity by the male dominated society. But Desai also portrays them struggling to discover their own identity by adopting various means and methods of survival. Her novels also deal with many aspects of female sensibilities like the social censure of infertility in *Cry, the Peacock* or *Voices in the City*, joy and burdens of motherhood as in *Where Shall We go this Summer*, family bonds as wife or as single woman as in *Voices in the City*, *Clear Light of Day* and *Fasting, Feasting*. A shift from male-female alienation to a quest of balance in gender relationships can be well traced in her novels.

Feminism can be studied as the result of increasing division and distance in gender relationship. The very concept of feminism is born out of the sexual injustice. Women in many societies have been demoted to the position of the other. Patricia Waugh comments that female identity has been repressed throughout the history. Society has considered women as

culturally inferior. It has often functioned to reinforce their desire to please, to serve others and seek definition through them, internalising masochistically any essential femininity (1991, 358). Such dominance of modern Indian women by male dominated world aggravates their sense of alienation. Desai confesses that women and their problems interest her. Being herself a woman she can well identify herself with female sensibility. She seems to be aware of the strange dilemma and search for identity of modern Indian women. The primary quest of women in her fiction is concerned with determining their place in society. She portrays her women characters as seeking to establish their identity as intelligent beings instead of mere pleasure objects. In this way, quest for women identity becomes one of the prime attentions of Anita Desai.

The idea of feminism that we find in the novels of Desai is directly related to the postcolonial identity crisis and quest for the self that her female characters are engaged with. She seems more concerned about psychical suppression than the physical one. Her women characters suffer from psychic depression as their creativity is misunderstood. They are given protection but not freedom; they are given companion but not communion. Since their very quest for self-dignity and individuality is unfulfilled, these women feel discontented. It gives way to frustration,

irritation and fear. In the novels of Desai, the self of a woman is lost sometimes in the east-west cultural encounter, sometimes in the husband's supremacy and sometimes in parental protection. The identity of Maya, Monisha, Sarah or Sita is lost in their husbands' domineering selves and Uma is utterly dominated by her parents. Her novels hint at this lost identity of the woman.

The feminist views of Anita Desai can be related to what Showalter calls the third phase or the phase of self-discovery. Her novels portray her private vision which captures the long afflicted wail of a wounded psyche focusing on the complex tale of human relationships. Her female characters long for spiritual relationship between themselves and their partners. They also rebel against the norms of a patriarchal mode of society. Most of her novels are characterized by a fine feminine sensibility and the central consciousness is that of a woman. The evolution of her sensitivity shows that her gendered subjectivity is very strong in her earlier novels, especially *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* This phase reflects some very feminist thoughts rooted in male-female binaries. Desai also displays an ambivalent attitude towards sex.

To the discontent of radical feminists Anita Desai emerges as an androgynous artist. The principal idea

behind her feminist view is that unless there is a healthy coexistence of the male and female principles, the artistic mind is incomplete and, therefore, artistic creation is not possible. Her androgynous consciousness is rooted in a humanistic and altruistic vision of life and art. She rejects the binary gender opposition posited by the radical feminists. In her view a sense of division and mutual exclusion between male-female relationships creates resentment and seclusion. But this can be overcome by developing a healthy communication and mutual understanding between the two. Gender alienation can be transcended also by helping each other to realize their individual potentiality as creative beings.

Desai's idea of independence of women and their freedom from patriarchal conventions is heralded by Aunt Lila in *Voices in the City*. She thinks that women can be themselves only when they discover their own spirits. She expresses her sentiments: "Women place themselves in bondage to men, whether in marriage or out. All their joy and ambition is channelled that way, while they go parched themselves" (221). Desai does not resent male but considers the female as capable of overcoming male myth. She is interested in exploring female identity by way of overcoming the torment of alienation in the context of family or society.

As Showalter writes, without an understanding of the framework of the female substructure, we can miss or misinterpret the themes and structure of women's literature, and fail to make necessary connections within a tradition (1979, 97). Female structure does not include only ascribed status and the internalised constructs of femininity but also the occupations, interactions and consciousness of women. According to Jungian psychology human personality has both male and female aspects: animus and the anima. Gender is at the level of behavioural traits and the male-female aspects often become inseparable in human personality. It may also be one of the grounds of the rejection of the male-female binaries. This results in the mutual neutralization of the two principles during artistic creation. Thus gender becomes only a matter of individual voice and style.

Desai's sense of feminism covers a broader area. She tries to explore and evaluate every form of human degradation and quest. Her female characters resent dominant and oppressive patriarchal structures of power, which creates a profound sense of alienation in them. They are engaged in transcending the alienation created by gender. The creative consciousness of Anita Desai reveals her androgynous and even trans-sexual character despite her feminist idiom. Her novels represent incessant quest for love and identity that is misplaced and misunderstood. Such a view of feminism

posits her as a third world feminist with postmodernist leanings.

Though various feminist interpretations can be entertained with regard to the works of Desai, we should remember that this is only one of her many voices. In an interview with Atma Ram she states that not only women but also men and children are injured. She confesses that her concerns in writing are metaphysical rather than sociological. In a question as to whether the struggle of her women characters is for establishing a separate identity as an individual, she responds that she would "reject such interpretation as being childishly simple". Considering gender isolation as a metaphysical condition, she confesses: "I see it in the context of the human struggle from which I exclude no one... If I write chiefly about women, it is simply because I know and understand them best. I do not for a minute consider woman as *abla*" (1996, 96). The themes on which her books are based on employ both male and female characters and they are seen to have 'much the same struggle and problems'. Indeed according to her, alienation is common to both man and woman. It sometimes transcends sexual barriers. She explains:

I should be a poor novelist if I allowed my readers to forget that my characters are women, or ignore what they have suffered. I would attach exactly the same comment to my

male characters - and the children - their sufferings. I write about human conditions - not the male/female condition (1996, 96).

The novels of Anita Desai can be interpreted as attempts to study human consciousness governed by a sense of loss, personal disintegration, and also by an increasing self-consciousness. Desai hints to a shift from common sense to personal sense. Her emphasis is laid in favour of rendering individual sensibility rather than collective experience. She tries to seize the reality of human existence through individual consciousness. Her sensibility is upheld by a disdain for authority, a feeling of urgency to break new ground, and also an examination of harmony. It is further manifested in her desire to reduce worn out standards, to modify the human notion of alienation and to recognize individual awareness, and finally to stress on the principle of change as an essential motif. She aims at investigating the crisis of alienation and struggle for survival uniquely and explicitly.

CHAPTER THREE

ALIENATED SELF

By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which a person experiences himself alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the centre of his world, as the creator of his own acts [...] The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, is experienced as things are experienced; with the senses and with common sense, but at the same time, without being related to oneself and the world outside productivity.

(Erich Fromm. *The Sane Society*, 1966, 120)

A major portion of the novels of Anita Desai can be studied as investigations on the sense of alienation experienced by contemporary man. Feeling of alienation in her novels manifests itself variously in the form of generation gap, integrity loss, and fragmentation of persona. It is also intensified by the obstruction of personal development and dearth of meaning. She not only presents man as an alienated being, but also shows the various factors that intensify the torment of alienation. As she discloses the spiritual crisis of modern life under various situations, the central theme in most of her novels becomes the existential dilemma of modern man as an individual. In her novels, man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but also from an inner conviction of isolation, uncertainty and futility in his way of existence.

The earlier novels of Anita Desai can be viewed as studies in alienation between husband and wife. She projects this crisis through perceptive wives and dutiful yet insensitive husbands. Distance and division in emotional relationship forms the basic issue in these novels. The female figures are portrayed as unable to create an effective heart to heart communication with their husbands. This generates in them a sense of non-belonging not only to their husbands but also with reference to the whole society. The male figures in her novels fail to recognize what

Jung calls anima or the female principle, 'the inherited collective image of women lying in man's unconscious' (Nayak 11).

Desai makes an attempt to deal with such alienation in her very first novel, *Cry the Peacock*. She draws a pen-picture of Maya, whose life is marked by postcolonial feminist dilemma. Since her ardent longing for her husband becomes only a dream, the possibility of finding a meaning in love has been destroyed. Her views on life, thoughts on love and indulgence in pleasures are termed as sheer attachment by her husband. She fails to establish an effective relationship with her husband, which leads her to inner frustration and psychic disintegration. But Gautama does not give proper attention to her emotions. This adds to a spiritual distance between the two.

Maya's sense of alienation is increased by various factors such as her excessive sentimentality, Gautama's cold intellectualism and a lack of mutual concern between the two. When she was still unmarried, an albino-eyed astrologer had prophesied the predictable death of one of the couple within four years of her marriage. Three years had already been passed when the novel began. The prophecy acts upon her like the prophecy of the three witches upon Macbeth. The fear of death of any one of the couple casts its shadow upon

her married life since the very beginning. This also interrupts the free flow of love between the two.

The early death of her mother induces in her a special affection for her father who also feeds her superstition. In response to the prophecy he says: "If one can do nothing about them, why not accept" (54). He would make her a daddy's girl rather than a practical and mature lady. He is evidently unconcerned towards her education. His domineering protection and fatalistic philosophy of life turns Maya into an introvert and impractical girl. Instead of considering her choice, he matches her with Gautama, allowing for his age and intelligence. He only hopes that Gautama would give her good protection.

But Gautama fails to satisfy both her emotional and physical needs. It makes her regard his house as a lonely tomb. "I sat as in a tomb" (129) she contemplates. She complains his indifference and lack of tender feelings:

Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me to either the soft willing body or the lonely, wanting mind that waited rear his bed..

'Yes,' I cried, 'yes, it is his hardness - no, no, not hardness, but the distance he coldly

keeps from me. His coldness, his coldness, and incessant talk of cups of tea and philosophy in order not to hear me talk, and talking, reveal myself. It is that - my loneliness in this house' (9).

Maya needs some change, some vacation, but Gautama has no time to spare. The memory of the prophecy deeply unsettles her. He remains sarcastic when she needs his affection and assurance. In her anxiety, she wishes to visit her father for comfort. But when she confesses her desire to Gautama: "I wish I could see father again. It always helps" (53), she is shocked at his reply: 'Helps what? Whom'? At such reaction, she reflects:

Without realizing what he had done, Gautama had laid his finger and forced mine upon the fatal vulnerability of what I had believed in like a fond fool. My father, with his quiet words, would have done nothing to allay my fears or dispel my conviction, but merely underlined their power by asking me, however sadly, to 'accept for it must be so.' In his words, 'It must be so.' If he saw disaster he saw it as being inevitable, and if he saw rebellion, he saw it as being hopeless (54).

Gautama has based his life on the tradition of Gita, which advocates a life of meaningful detachment. Such a detachment is a kind of nausea to an acutely sensitive woman like Maya. He calls her a 'third rate poetess' (133), 'neurotic' and "spoilt baby" (115), disallowing her poetic heart and imagination. When she is termed as 'overbearing woman', she replies that all she wanted was to be outside with him, near him; but he made her go away (110-111). It seems to her that the avoidance of her loneliness is impossible. Her reflection reveals her frustration at this loneliness:

And then those fierce headaches began, frightening in their intensity, clenching in their steel jaws my entire brow, then shifting a torturous weight to a point between my eyes—the albino astrologer had touched me, just there, had he not? —Then to one side of my head, till only that seemed to exist and I became a half-headed ogre then slipped across my scalp and down to my neck, throbbing like a drum. The drums never ceased (151).

Such distress is caused by her deep frustration in her marriage. Even after three years of marriage, she is still childless. The stillness of the house frightens her to the core of her being. She feels that she is neglected by all the family members of the house. It creates a great anguish in her. She remarks:

"I had been tortured by a humiliating sense of neglect of loneliness, of desperation that would not have existed if I had not loved him so, had he not meant so much" (201). She feels sorry for herself as she finds her love unfulfilled and dreams shattered. Emotional alienation thus becomes the central problem of her life. Lack of contact and communion, inadequate mating and insufficient emotional support magnify her sense of alienation. Her reflection provides ample evidence for her divided self:

Yes I am going insane. I am moving further from all wisdom, all calm, and I shall soon be mad, if I am not already. Perhaps it is my madness that leads me to imagine that horoscope that encounter with the albino, his predictions, my fate? Perhaps it is only a phenomenon of insanity (108).

I am torn between two worlds - the receding one of grace, the approaching one of madness. My body breaks in the battle (177).

Maya longs for the world of her father, a world of flowers and poetry. She seeks her father in Gautama, but does not find any one. Her father was a gentle father for whom she used to long "with fiercest desire" (52) whenever she was in need of reassurance and love. She had loved him ardently as her decision-maker,

guide, protector and nurse at the cost of her growth into maturity and independence. But she is shocked when he gives her in marriage just to unburden himself. After her marriage, her father becomes indifferent to her. He does not even write her any letter. This makes her irritable. She complains: "'Nobody!' I shouted, flinging myself down on the chair under the futile fan. 'Nobody writes to me. Not even father - and I'm waiting to hear from him about his plans for the summer. He knows I'm waiting'" (129). But her waiting is never satisfied by her father or by her husband.

Gautama sees only the upper surface of her life. He oversimplifies her personality as spoilt by the pampering of her father. He considers her as living in an unreal atmosphere of fairy tale and being cut off from the life of 'ordinary man'. He is cold to her inside feelings and affections. There is mutual withering of affection between the two. Instead of being her lover he becomes an adversary to her. He says to her, "Life is a fairy tale to you still. What have you learnt of realities" (115)? He also perceives that Maya is an Electra but he cannot help her come out of the inconsistency. He does not try to bring her to her present moment of reality. Instead he says to his wife:

You have a very obvious father-obsession, which is also the reason why you married me, a man so much older than yourself. It is a

complex that, unless you mature rapidly, you will not be able to deal with [...] it will probably destroy itself in the end, since passion of this sort is almost always self-consuming, having no object within its range that it can safely consume. Any little setback destroys it, leads it closer to its termination (146).

Such an allegation aggravates her disintegrating sanity instead of creating a balanced relationship. She feels that Gautama neither understands nor satisfies her needs, physical as well as emotional. She finds in him a cold intellect and disinterested realism which makes him neglect her sentiments, fantasies, fears and longings. He fails to meet her emotional demands with his pragmatic attitude. This makes her conscious of the massive distance between them. She feels that her marriage is a fiasco broken repeatedly so that the pieces were picked up and put together (45). For her Gautama becomes so near, yet so far away. This leads her to such a point where she can neither express nor repress herself. She thinks of only one escape - doing away with her husband.

The communication gap between husband and wife is felt throughout the novel. Their marriage becomes neither true nor lasting, for it is forced on them from outside. As one critic comments, the novel becomes a

fascinating psychological study of neurotic fears and anxieties caused by marital disharmony and compounded by age-old superstitions (Kumar, 3).

The agony of alienation is also presented in *Voices in the City*. The novel can be studied as a tragic exploration of personal suffering of Monisha, an educated Indian woman. Her relationship with her husband Jiban is distinguished only by loneliness and lack of communication. She feels that he is an immature, awkward and a boring man who fails to meet her emotional needs. His half-literate family-members misread her creativity. She feels that all of them are insensitive and dull-witted towards her.

Like Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, Monisha is a young wife unable to meet the demands of marriage. She fails to adjust as part of a joint family that never gives her any privacy. She becomes tired of the lack of conscience in the family. It makes her secretive and silent. Her inability to procreate further alienates her from the family. Out of compassion and loathing, she is forced to accept the latter. Although she has a higher sensibility than ordinary women, yet she considers her life as a big problem. In her utter anguish of her married life, she complains:

Is this what life is then, my life? Only a conundrum that I shall brood over forever with

passion and pain, never to arrive at a solution? Only a conundrum - is that, then, life? (124-125)

There is absolutely no light thrown on her love for her husband. It can be said that finer love feelings in her are nipped in the bud. There develops an emotional gulf between her and the entire world. For her, fear becomes the inspiring force of life instead of love. Such a monotonous life makes her existence bizarre. Shocked at unproductive activities of the women around her, she questions: "Why are lives such as these lived? At their conclusion, what solution, what truth falls into the waiting palm of one's hand, the still pit of one's heart" (121)? The pettiness of their existence makes her feel persecuted. She believes that most women survive by pretending to forget this emptiness of their stifling existence.

Monisha feels that the household members not only lead a futile life, they also mistrust her creativity and intellectual aspirations. They constantly keep a watch on her, suspiciously and doubtfully. Even when her sister Amla visits her, she is not left alone with her. She wants to be free but freedom seems a far-fetched dream. Her longings for silence and solitude, love and understanding become impossible to her. The image of a caged tiger, the 'proud, glorious beast' in

the zoo is suggestive of her predicament. In her sheer frustration she utters:

Alone I could work better and I should feel more whole... Only I wish I were given some task that I could do alone, in privacy, away from the aunts and uncles, and cousins and nieces and nephews. I should feel more - whole. But less and less there is privacy (115-116).

Monisha has no choice except to stay in the joint family, nor does she have the ability to attain detachment. Had she been religious, there would have been a chance for her to renounce the world. She has no alternatives even in spiritual life. As she reflects: "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 surroundings, tells me such a life cannot be lived - a life dedicated to nothing - that this husk is a protection from death" (122). But she does not find any alternative to replace her estrangement.

Absence of love resulting in husband-wife alienation becomes a strong factor of her dilemma. Jiban is neither kind nor considerate towards her. Instead of trying to understand or comfort her, he sides with his own family members. Since there is no

love relationship between them, she feels so alienated from her husband that she ceases to feel any hurt or regret. She feels a total separation from him. Her reflection reveals the self of Monisha as devoid of such love feelings towards her husband:

If only love existed that is not binding, that is free of rules, obligations, complicity and all stirrings of mind or consciousness, then, but there is no such love (135).

The kind of love that she aspires for is not available to her. Jiban destroys whatever meaning their relationship might have had. Her desire to develop a love relationship with him and a desperate urge to make it meaningful is destroyed only by rejection and loneliness. It plunges her into the most disastrous pains, fears and regrets. She withdraws herself from the material concern of family. She also advises her sister to rebel and always go in the opposite direction. She suddenly becomes conscious of having lost all zeal to exist. Her fear of touch and intimacy, her withdrawal from passion and its display confine her to her own private passion. She becomes aware of a vast gap between her self and the world around. She reflects:

I am locked apart from all of them, they cannot touch me, they can only lip-read and

misinterpret. Similarly, I cannot really hear them; I cannot understand what they say. I have never touched any one, never left the imprint of my fingers on any one's shoulders, of my tongue on anyone's damp pallet. What a waste, what a waste it has been, this life enclosed in a locked container, merely as an observer, and so imperfect, so handicapped an observer at that (239-240).

Lack of peace, solitude and fertility turn Monisha into a pitiable figure. Her happy and satisfying infancy stands poles apart from the taboo-ridden family of Jiban. The suffocating atmosphere of the house makes her uneasy. She finds no getaway from the suffocating family environment. She reacts with such a frenzied passion that even her impassive husband is surprised. She considers that her life is dedicated to nothing. For her, the choice is between death and mean existence, and that, surely, is not a difficult choice (122). She does not take long to decide her course of action. She finally decides to immolate herself. Just before she destroys her bodily life she ruminates:

I am standing here, pressing myself against the wall so as not to feel senior aunt's flesh bump into me. I could not bear to have her touch me while she is sighing and humming and swaying to this loud music. I could not bear

to touch, however vicariously, this appalling exhibition of a passion that ravages the soul and body and being. If I did, I should be a traitor, and a liar. I have never been touched by it, nor ravaged. I bear no scar on my body. I am different from them all. They put me away in a steel container, a thick glass cubicle, and I have lived in it all my life, without a touch of love or hate or warmth on me (239).

The tragedy of Monisha characterizes the dilemma of many fateful young Indian women who have nothing else to fall back on. Desai in this novel brings into focus a typical postcolonial Indian woman's dilemma and anxiety, whose life is torn between the two worlds of old morality and new awareness. As an educated and conscious new Indian woman, Monisha cannot bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, awareness and taboo. The age-old myth of woman as an inferior sex devoid of creativity and sublime thought pushes her back into the realm of an alien world. Concerning her character, Narendra Kumar comments:

Unlike Maya, Monisha is not a neurotic. In the jungle of civilization, invisible laws turn her into a helpless, isolated victim of a monstrous system. The image of the racehorse is symbolic of the impending tragedy in the

novel. The wounded horse is suggestive of the protagonist's predicament (1996, 23).

We can locate the elements of a modern existential crisis in this novel. Desai seems more interested in exploring human mystery than the natural one. She is primarily concerned with the theme of individual choice. Conflict between the sensitive individual and insensitive universe creates a sense of powerlessness in the individual. Since man cannot comprehend or defeat nature he becomes despondent which consequently leads to existential alienation. The handling of the wasteland and Bohemian themes provides the novelist with an opportunity for dealing with existential modes of life such as nihilism and nausea.

The novel also deals with the tragic predicament of Nirode against an inimical world of Calcutta. There is an atmosphere of spiritual stagnation in his life. He is described as an "outlawed hermit crab" (190) or an "ill-tempered hermit" (194). It is a sterile condition that he represents. His sense of void emerges from an awkward and embarrassing domestic tension in which all things seem insignificant and hollow. He feels hurt and betrayed, and considers all relationships to be needless and futile. He thinks that marriage, bodies, touch and torture are meaningless and unsatisfying (35). A devotee of philosophers like Baudelaire and Camus, he is strongly obsessed with

failure. According to him achieving success in life creates only a sense of emptiness. This is not at all acceptable to him. He meets failure after failure. He confesses to his friend David:

I want to fail quickly. Then I want to see if I have the spirit to start moving again, towards my next failure. I want to move from failure to failure to failure, step by step to rock bottom. I want explore that depth. [...] I want to get there without that meaningless climbing. I want to descend, quickly. [...] Happiness, suffering - I want to be done with them, disregard them, see beyond them to the very end (40).

Indeed his entire life style becomes a negation of life and a rejection of love. He never replies to his mother's letters. He becomes a masochist who rejects the concept of progress and advocates failure. Instead of acceptance, he wants negation. Silence and solitude become two most powerful attractions for him. He refuses even to make essential contacts which life demands. As Desai herself writes, "The intricacies of relationship - approach, recompense, and obligation - these aroused in him violent distaste and kept him hovering on the fringe of the world" (62).

Nirode may be considered as an Oedipus or a Hamlet who is unduly obsessed with his mother's relations with major Chadha. She stays in her utopian house at Kalimpong enjoying her flowers and garden with her adulterous lover. Nirode is disgusted by her sensuality. It disables him to draw conclusions regarding her conduct. The torment of alienation makes him incapable of human emotions. He ends up as a 'wandering bohemian' constantly experimenting with failure. Desai describes of him:

He was proud to the point of being a fanatic, he was intense enough to be capable of whole-hearted dedication, yet he drifted, a shadowy cipher, and his life consisted of one rejection following another. He loathed the world that could offer him no crusade, no pilgrimage, and he loathed himself for not having the true, unwavering spirit of either within him. There was only this endless waiting, hollowed out by an intrinsic knowledge that was nothing to wait for (64).

The theme of alienation arising out of cultural conflicts can be studied in her next novel, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. The novel mainly deals with the alienation of Sarah, whose Indian husband Adit does not let her English-self to be preserved. She experiences an identity crisis more than any other characters in the

novel. "She had become nameless; she had shed her name as she had shed her ancestry and identity, and she sat there, staring, as though she watched them disappear" (31). Her alienation seems mainly caused by cultural disparity. Both husband and wife suffer from adjustment problems at the various levels of their existence.

Sarah mutely suffers from her alienation by herself. Adit fails to consider her interests. He frequently insults her English-self. Though she is ready to sacrifice her everything to save her marriage, yet he seems to be criticizing her. He forces her to prepare Bengali food without giving any importance to the likes and dislikes during her dinner. Every time he would pass some mild insults upon her. Describing her wife Adit says to his friend Dev:

These English wives are quite manageable really, you know. Not as fierce as they look - very quiet and hardworking as long as you treat them right and roar at them regularly once or twice a week (29).

Sarah is already frustrated due to the callousness of her own people. Being sick of the selfish mode of life of the English, she marries an Indian. But when she finds her own husband insulting her, her sense of alienation is more intensified. She gives up her food habit, cultural background and family pride, but

somehow or the other, she is degraded by her own husband. She makes Indian dishes and listens to Indian music. But inside her she feels that she is playing double roles, one in the morning with the schoolchildren and one in the evening with her husband. Her identity is questioned. She is neither Sarah nor Mrs. Sen nor both. Her face is only a mask, her body only a costume. Desai describes her:

Who was she? [...] Where was Sarah? Staring out of the window at the chimneypots and the clouds, she wondered if Sarah had any existence at all, and then she wondered, with great sadness, if she would ever be allowed to step off the stage, leave the theatre and enter the real world - whether English or Indian she did not care - she wanted only its sincerity, its truth (34-35).

When her friends ask about her in-laws, she cannot answer them properly. Julia once comments on her: 'If she's that ashamed of having an Indian husband, why did she go and marry him?' Sarah analyses the difference of Indians and Englishmen. She says that English people aren't as self-conscious as they are supposed to be. They are really quite open when it comes to things like that. Unlike Indians, they are not in the least bit self-conscious about their persons but very much so in their relationships (65).

The difference between her self and the Indian way of life becomes clear and the gulf becomes greater. The indifference of her own people makes her feel insignificant as a particle of dust, paralysing his ability to act and build 'the tension in togetherness'. As she longs for a group-oriented society, she finds it difficult to have meaningful communication with a stereotyped personality from the west. She also sees that their urbanization has erased an individual's uniqueness. What hurts her most is the indifference of people.

When she attempts to relate herself with the world around him, she fails. A sense of insecurity and anxiety is felt within. She feels like Alice falling, falling down the rabbit hole, like a Kafkaesque stranger wandering through the dark labyrinth of a prison (64). She tries to break the geographical or cultural bondage, but in the process she does not gain her freedom. Instead she finds herself in another kind of exile. Such experience makes her a neurotic for she is unable to attach meaning to her experience. She becomes aware of such state of chaos and confusion in her created by external pressure. She feels that she is losing her balance.

Desai presents her characters as undergoing spiritual crisis, arising out of conflict between

reality and illusions that they built up for themselves. They are basically unable to make a lasting connection between truth and phenomena. Instead of agreeing to conform to the practical realities of life, they attempt to bring a new meaning to their existence through the complex nature of their self-made illusions. For them subjective vision is more conducive than the immediate situation where they live. The force of a larger and powerful world consisting of the other also acts upon their illusions. It also makes them experience a decline of faith which had sustained them so far. Being without an alternative set of beliefs, they are beset by an acute anxiety in them. This is further intensified by the presence of objective reality which continues to affect their subjective vision.

Psychic disparity on the level of understanding deepens the sense of alienation. The contrast between value systems in husband-wife relation is established from the very beginning of her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* and continues through *Voices in the City* and *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*. The theme of disintegration in a family life caused by such disparity is revealed in *Where Shall We Go this Summer* as well. Inadequacy of mutual understanding forms a major concern in the novel. Though the natural flow of affection between husband and wife seems almost intact, yet it is more

frequently disturbed due to misunderstanding and lack of adequate forbearance.

The novel gives an account of a middle-aged woman, Sita whose abnormal childhood environment and frustrating human interactions turn her into a disintegrated personality. Her motherless childhood and negligent up-bringing by her father makes her experience desertion and psychic disorders. She becomes a prey to emotional crisis and also feels a neurotic pride in her. She believes that the spirit of violence infects everybody living in the present, including her own children. She thinks that:

Everyone fights. They are all violent... like the waves incessantly, tiresomely crashing into each other, her sons hurled their bodies at each other as if they were made for attack and combat. [...] No one offended her so much by violence as Menaka in her carelessness. She watched disbelievingly, as Menaka, telling her about a party she had been to, idly reached out her fingers and crumbled a sheaf of new buds on the small potted plant. [...] Menaka had done it unconsciously, had not meant to destroy anything at all. Destruction came so naturally; that was horror (44-45).

Her grief also arises from her failure to accept the present social values and attitudes of life. Her feeling of helplessness in an unfair society adds to her anxiety. She considers the world around her as lurching in ruin. She thinks that everybody around her leads an animal life. She says that they are nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matter to them (47). Besides being merely unable to communicate efficiently with her husband, she feels distant from the world around. She is distressed at "the tedium and ugliness of a meaninglessness life" (145). She even doubts the relevance of her existence on earth. "Life seemed complete, full, without her; there was no reason for her to exist" (84). Yearning for meaning and order in life she finds chaos and futility. She finds her urge to freedom lost. She cries out that she wants to "escape from the madness here, and escape to a place where it might be possible to be sane again" (23).

A great difference in attitude between husband and wife also aggravates her sense of alienation. The novel provides a number of events that reflect a widening gulf between the couple. One morning, as she sees a pack of crows attacking an eagle, 'wounded or else too young to fly', she tries to scare the crows with an air gun but in vain. The crows jeer and tear the eaglet to pieces. The situation objectifies the conflict in her own life. But Raman is irritated by her big concern for

the helpless eagle. Her actions appear to be nothing more than a weird 'act of drama' to him. He does not try to probe into her troubled mind. Whatever she does appears to be extravagant to him. When she feels pity at the dying eaglet, he makes fun of her. She is deeply hurt when Raman remarks about the result of her action in such words: "They have made a good job of the eagle. Look at the feathers sticking out of that crow's beak (41).

On the part of her husband, love seems scant and understanding meagre. She thinks that he delights in her failure to protect the eagle. This small event indicates the wide gulf that alienates her from her husband and children. She often remains despondent and unhappy. She fails to satisfy her husband by show of natural affection. Emotional reassurance, so frequently needed to make life pleasant, "simply did not exist for her and should not make it exist. So she did not speak any words of love or reassurance to him" (41). The novelist brings out this point all through the book and frequently refers to Sita as "wanting and not being given what she wanted" (132). Desai describes her plight thus:

She felt so weak, she wanted to lay down her head and weep, 'my father's dead - look after me.' She cleared her throat. 'All right', she said, hoarsely (131).

Her face was so grey; such sharp grooves ran from her nostrils to the corners of her mouth. It was the face of a woman unloved a woman rejected (133).

Sita is also disturbed by Raman's unimaginative way of life. Because of dire difference between their attitudes, she fails to open her heart to Raman. It becomes an intrinsic cause of a subtle distance between the two. Although desirous of complete surrender to her husband, she keeps back her feelings to herself. A lack of emotional communication leads both husband and wife to fragmentation and mutual seclusion.

Sita feels that not only her husband, but also her children are inconsiderate towards her. They have different tastes and likes. They are apathetic and brutal. Menaka carelessly tears the buds and destroys the paintings. Karan gets his lustful joy in the destruction of things than in building them. Her reflections amply signify her increasing alienation from the children:

Destruction came so naturally. That was the horror (45).

Children only mean anxiety, concern, pessimism, not happiness. What other women call happiness is just sentimentality (98).

All that mattered to her, they discarded (137).

The theme of love had been misunderstood or rejected in the novels of Anita Desai. Since men provide comfortable home and fulfil some material needs, they consider that women have no reason to be discontent. They become the spokesmen of a society which doubts the judgment of a woman who struggle to break free from traditional standards. They also forget that women are not satisfied with mere food and sex, home and babies. Rather they aspire for something higher than these basic needs. Since their very aspirations are neglected or misread, these women feel defeated and bereaved, which creates in them a sense of futility, absurdity and also a desire to commit suicide or homicide.

More than being simply the accounts of marital disharmony, these novels are also symbolical of the individuals' inability of coming out of their private worlds. They try to establish a point of contact between the inner world and external reality. The female characters fail to see the world as it is. They desire to see the world as it should be. Maya feels

that she is neglected, but it is also a fact that she never for a moment tries to glimpse what would go inside Gautama. Sita fails to recognize the good spirit in Raman. This not only increases a distance between the two but also gives rise to a sense of rootlessness in her.

Anita Desai is primarily concerned with the individual. The delineation of nature serves only to highlight her characterization. Nature for most of her characters is not a benevolent guide or a nursing mother. Rather it is inanimate object, devoid of any feeling or sensitivity. Nature itself is neither friendly nor hostile to man. It is only that man cannot understand the mystery of creation or universe. Whenever he tries to comprehend it with his own measures, his comprehension is bound to be incomplete and fragmentary. Nature has its own way and processes which man has not been able to grasp. The characters of Desai consider nature to be indifferent and inaccessible. Their very fixedness of such an attitude towards nature and universe separates them from its resources.

Man by essence is a social being. But when he finds himself entirely different from society in every aspect he gradually pushes himself back into the alien world of seclusion and alienation. The case with Bimla Das in *Clear Light of Day* such that her very efforts to

make a happy life prove futile. She is not an isolated woman by her very nature, but the situations turn her into one. Her parents misread her creativity. Her brother Raja, whom she had loved more than anything else, deserts her at the time of her troubles. This makes her regard herself as alienated from all the family members.

The novel is a family story of Raja, Bim, Tara and Baba, the four victims of an unwholesome childhood atmosphere. Later, Raja becomes prosperous by marrying Benegir, the only daughter of their landlord. Tara also gets married to a bureaucrat. Bim is left alone with her social obligations and the burden of her idiot brother, Baba. It instigates her to experience dejection and futility in human relations. She finds herself alienated from her family members with whom she was once spiritually attached. She finds no physical or spiritual relationship with them. She feels wounded by the indifferent attitude of her late parents and the unfeeling behaviour of her brother Raja who deserts her at the time of her suffering.

Bim had loved Raja intensely but he ran away, undoing his role of a brother and taking the part of a landlord. One day, she receives a letter from him in which he hints at raising the rent of the house she and Baba lived. She feels betrayed and defeated. This intensifies in her a sense of disparity between her and

her brother. She comes to the conclusion that everyone is neglecting her. She also apprehends how time has ravaged the old affections of childhood and has created a changed pattern of relationship in the family.

Her sense of alienation is also increased by her failure to achieve a balance between her inner-self and outer realities. She is caught up in a web of the past, which makes her unable to live fully and happily in the present. Unable to forget the pain of her past, she wants to reject its very memory. Yet she is frequently haunted by childhood nostalgia, when the four brothers and sisters were happy together. She cannot replace the child Raja with the adult Raja. Her frustration gradually develops into a lasting and unhealed wound, which disables her in her quest to find any meaning in human relationships, including marriage. Dr. Biswas, identifying her dilemma thus says to her:

Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated your life to others—to your sick brother and your aged aunt and your little brother who will be dependant on you all his life. You have sacrificed your own life for them (97).

When she reads *The Life of Aurangzeb*, she sees a parallel between herself and the Mughal Emperor. The last words of the Emperor become the mirror in which

she sees the course of her own life. Aurangzeb says in a letter to his son that many were around him when he was born, but now he is departing alone. He knows not who he is or wherefore he came into the world. Life is transient and the lost moment never comes back. When he has lost hope in me, how could he hope in others (167)? These words reveal not only the agony of the Mughal Emperor, but also the psychic turmoil of Bim.

Anita Desai considers alienation to be the central problem of modern man. For her alienation has both universal and social dimension. In the universal aspect it arises in man's continuous struggle with an insensitive universe. Placed before the totality of the universe, man fails to comprehend the universe. This may also be viewed as nature's wilderness and its apathy to man. In its social sense it arises from isolation from one's fellowmen. It refers to a failure of communication and lack of understanding. It might be due to narrowness in the face of ultimate values. Universal alienation makes man aware of their insignificance before the totality of universe whereas social alienation makes man conscious of his inessentiality. Man's alienation from another person may be seen as his separation from the other by the barriers of language, intellect or psyche. His alienation from himself may be understood as an intense split or division within the individual. It can also be studied as the loss of the self or the development of

some depression in which he begins to consider himself an object.

The theme of such alienation can be studied in Baumgartner's *Bombay*. In this novel, Anita Desai presents an intense mental torture of modern man. Hugo Baumgartner is a wandering Jew all his life. His various experiences like painful childhood in pre-War Berlin, failure in business in India, and imprisonment during the Second World War make him realize universal alienation. He leads a Sisyphus-like life whose existence seems to be like a series of hollow gestures. Everywhere he is looked down upon as an outsider. He is too dark for Hitler's Germany and too fair for the Indian mass. Desai describes him thus:

Accepting but not accepted; that was the story of his life, the one thread that ran through it all. In Germany he had been too dark - his darkness had marked him as the Jew, *der Jude*. In India he was fair - and that marked him as the *firanghi*. In both lands he was the unacceptable (20).

Baumgartner is portrayed as devoid of social and cultural heritage. Even after staying fifty years in India, he is not accepted by the Indians. He finds himself alone and his loneliness becomes his companion. The Indians do not accept him as their own. Instead

they look down upon him with contempt. "They watched him fearlessly—to them he was nobody, an old man with an empty bag" (8). Such rejection intensifies his sense of alienation.

When Hugo first comes to India, he stays in Bombay for few days. Then he is sent to Calcutta for a business deal. His stay in Calcutta marks a turning point in his life and career. The spectacle of death and homicide before and after the independence radically alters the mode of his thought and action. It makes him feel the need to eliminate his meliorism from the web of his fantasy. His resentment also stems from the rising violence and crime committed in the name of race and religion. It brings down his altruistic self gradually yet effectively.

The horror of the Second World War leaves him with depression and sterility. His father was tortured and murdered by the Nazis. The Germans captured his property forcing him to leave for India, a land of alien race and culture where the British government arrests him for his German passport. When the War starts, he is put into the detention camp with other German arrestees, where he has to undergo all sorts of suffering like all other war victims. The prisoners in the camps are treated like subhuman beings. In Germany he had to suffer because he was a Jew and in India he has to suffer because he had a German passport. In the

camps, Jews were persecuted both by the Nazis and the British. His strange, severe and bitter experiences in British run camps for six years is here narrated in a vivid manner:

As long as news came in of German and Japanese victories, Baumgartner and the others in the Jewish quarter had good reason to feel thankful for the protection of the British-run camp, however sick with sorrow over the fate of their relationship or of Germany, however restless and frustrated and bored by the lifeless monotony of the camp. At least it was a refuge, even if temporary (131-132).

He writes many letters to his mother in Germany but never gets any reply from her. It is informed that she had lost her address, or she was lost. After the war, the prisoners in the camp start worrying about their freedom. But to Hugo it creates a sense of doom and defeat. He does not like that freedom where all sorts of dirt, mud and decay of Calcutta would welcome him. He longs for a neat and disciplined camp. After his release from the camp, he finds himself quite ignorant of the INA, and the Indian freedom movement. This makes him strange in the eyes of his fellow beings. They look at him with fury and contempt. Being conscious of their attitude, he silently slips-away from their company. He sees the hatred and bloodshed

during the partition of India. The communal riot in Calcutta before and after the partition creates a void in him. He finds himself overtaken by yet another war within himself; the war between his own divided selves:

His war was not their war. And they had had their own war. War within war within war! Everyone engaged in a separate war, and each war opposed to another war. If they could be kept separate, chaos would be averted. Or so they seemed to think, ignoring the fact that chaos was already upon them. And lunacy. The lunacy of performing acts one did not wish to perform, living lives one did not wish to live, becoming what one was not. Always another will oppose to one's own, always another fate, not the one of one's choice or even making. A great web in which each one was trapped, a nightmare from which one could not emerge (173).

The division between his self and his existence makes him an absurd character. He is an absurd, who is alienated to the extreme. The cultural and racial division always torments him. Although forced to stay in India, he looks back at Germany with nostalgia. Germany haunts and the horror and loss of motherland always pursues him. He is an alien in India, forced to leave his motherland. He looks like a man who is

descending a ladder of patriotism and national pride. He becomes a dehumanised soul in Indian soil. All his life he lives alone, both inside and outside himself. He suffers from an unusual experience from realizing he is unaccepted everywhere he goes. "The God had spat him out". He had not been found to be fit. "Shabby, dirty, whiteman, *firanghi*, unwanted" (190). To accept a foreign land as his own is a tragic experience for him.

Baumgartner not only faces the crisis of cultural difference but also the crisis of self-dignity during post war period in India. He himself does not desire to live devoid of purpose and cut off from his religion, metaphysical and transcendental roots, yet the very biosphere in which he lives in forces him to lead an alienated life. He realizes that life is nothing but an ironic dilemma of pointless activities. Such realization leaves him aimless and absurd.

The novel portrays the helplessness of the individual against the tormenting human conditions of life. Hugo tries to accept Indian society but it becomes hostile towards him. He experiences an utter alienation in his existence. The novel also suggests that any attempt to define human existence in a cut-and-dried manner will often end up as an exercise in futility. Since man often finds himself on the horns of conflicting dilemmas and suffering, his desire becomes meaningless.

Although Desai deals with a variety of themes, her concern with human alienation marked by wasted lives and shattered dreams remains prominent. As she explores various aspects of the crisis of modern life, the central image in her novels is one of disillusionment and disfigured identity. As a critic comments, her preoccupations consist of the way in which we live as part of the changing pattern of life. An attempt to explore, appreciate and impose a meaningful pattern upon the apparently chaotic matter of life marks most of her novels (Taneja, 42).

In a male-dominated Indian society, woman is still regarded as a second person, a second sex. She is often considered to be devoid of intellect or incapable of being equal to man. Even an educated woman cannot follow the career of her choice if she fails to meet her preordained duties. The discharge of her womanly tasks must take priority. Such discrimination has created a rift in human relationships causing irritation, boredom and confusion in modern women. Such plight of the modern Indian woman is depicted in her latest novel, *Fasting, Feasting*. The novel primarily deals with the alienation of Uma whose life is spoilt by the birth of her brother. She is trapped at home and suffocated by her snobbish parents and their traditions. She is bullied and reprimanded by her

callous mother. She fails to receive any loving care from her parents.

Although the central focus of the novel is on Indian family relations and the associated problems of adjustment and acceptance, the inner tension and frustration of the individuals constitute its main focus. Papa and Mama seem to agree completely to each other, but internally they conflict with each other. Uma is the real sufferer. She does not find any complement and satisfaction in her action, even in her being. She also contemplates suicide, but cannot do so. She remains a hopeless character all her life. Her life is made frustrated by her mother's rudeness and father's indifference.

The alienation in Uma is prevalent from the very beginning of her childhood days. In school the nuns never permit her to go and pray inside the chapel. She is curious to know and do what it is but the nuns look too religious and out of touch. When Arun is born, her mother discontinues her schooling. Since all the importance is given to Arun, the long awaited son in the family, Uma has not only to discontinue her studies but also to demolish her creativity. But her plight is nobody's concern.

Mama treats her like a tigress. Once when she goes out with her cousin, Ramu, to the restaurant, her mama

reprimands her and says that she was a disgrace to the family (52-53). As she grows up, the problem of her marriage troubles her parents. She is exhibited to Mrs. Shyal's son but he likes Aruna, not Uma. She is later engaged to Goyal's son but he also declines from marriage. Finally an elderly man, Harish accepts her. But his unenthusiastic expression relinquishes all her hopes. During her engagement, he looked at Uma glumly and without interest. What he saw did not seem to make a change in his attitude. Her marriage ceremony is described thus:

The ceremony wound on at its own ponderous pace. Finally the sullen bridegroom broke in and said curtly to the priest, 'Cut it short, will you - that's enough now.' The priest looked offended. If he could not even tolerate the wedding ceremony, how would he tolerate their marriage (90-91)?

After the marriage, he brings her to his village by the train and Tonga. He leaves her on the same day and goes to Meerut for work. The whole family seems strange to her. Nobody talked to her directly, only instructions are given to her. Later it is found out that he was married, had four children and lived in Meerut. Papa comes and takes Uma home. "Having cost her parents two dowries, without a marriage to show in

return, Uma was considered ill-fated by all and no more attempts were made to marry her off" (96).

The alien experience of Uma is intensified by the fact that she finds herself separated from her own values and choices. She leads an alienated life because she does not experience herself as the centre of her own world; as the creator of her own acts. Instead she finds herself as a subordinate entity under the pressure of domestic affairs. Such subordination creates in her a sense of insignificance and futility. An existential predicament overrules her existence. She is also tormented by the fact that she is simply considered as a second sex by her parents, by her suitors and even by her husband.

The profound anguish in Uma plunges her into an acute identity crisis. One can gather from her statements that she is alienated from her parents as well as from her friends. She finds her sister and herself as the children of loveless parents. The two broken engagements and one unsuccessful marriage marks the second phase of her alienation. Forced into a state of total alienation, she finds her very survival threatened. She finds her life meaningless and hollow. What is at stake, however, is not physical but spiritual.

The concept of alienation is the one essential element in the writings of Anita Desai. She is concerned with exploring the state of alienation in men and women in modern India. From *Cry, the Peacock* to *Fasting, Feasting* the notion of alienation runs through as a scarlet thread. Not the situation of objectification but the conditions of isolation, division and desertion become major concerns in her novels. These novels present a picture of man as experiencing the turmoil of existential alienation on various levels. She presents her characters suffering from a sense of dislocation between the ideal and real. The discrepancy between what they aspire to do in life and the harsh reality also plunge them into intense misery.

CHAPTER FOUR

QUEST FOR IDENTITY

One's preoccupation can only be a perpetual search for meaning, for values, for - dare I say it - Truth. I think of the world as an iceberg - the one-tenth visible above the water is what we call reality, but the nine-tenths that are submerged make of the Truth, and that is what one is trying to explore. Writing is an effort to discover and then to underline and finally to convey the true significance of things.

(Anita Desai, *Interview with Yasodhara Dalmia*, 1979, 13)

Quest for identity refers to the existential struggle of man in order to attain meaning and value in his life. It is an inward journey, which is also a journey for existence, a search for roots and a struggle for self-expression. A careful survey of the novels of Anita Desai reveals such quest for identity as innate in every conscious character. She not only deals with the alien experience of man but also delineates various means and methods that he adopts for his survival. Though considered alien and misfit in his environment, he is also the seeker for meaning and truth of his existence. Even if he undergoes traumatic psychic experience due to the collapse of value system and lack of satisfactory alternatives, he refuses to give up his quest for self-identity. We see constant struggle of the individual as a heroic attempt, which finally brings glory to him and also adds dignity to the spirit of freedom. This search for truth or quest for identity gives him a different dimension, depth and meaning even in a wretched condition of life.

In the context of the novels of Anita Desai, failure, dejection and frustration especially in matters of human relationships do not always give rise to complete chaos and anarchy. For her, search for values and meaning in life is the most needed drive for human existence. She portrays man as struggling against the given situations of life. She also tries to explore

the inner realms of his being, which she calls iceberg. Little concerned with traditional notions of truth, she is frequently inspired to peep into the inner recesses of man rather than in the outer spectacle of the world. For her 'it is depth which is interesting, delving deeper and deeper in the character, a situation or a sense rather than going round about it'. In an interview, she herself has stated thus:

I am interested in characters that are not average but have retreated or being driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against, or made a stand against the general current. It is easy to flow with the current, it makes no demand, and it costs no effort. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out 'the great NO', who fight the current and struggle against it, they know what the demands are and what it costs to meet them (Dalmia, 13).

The pursuit of being and the process of becoming are the foundations of existential thought that she has picked up as her fictional backbone. The former concept refers to the reality of the existing man and the later one to the quest for survival accompanied by the individuals' tremendous possibility of becoming. Her characters strive to seek the Truth by refusing to conform to the present situations of life.

Quest for identity of the modern Indian woman constitutes one major trait in her novels. Her woman protagonist is portrayed as engaged in establishing her dignity and self-identity against the given conditions of life. She never gives up her quest for a higher meaning in life. She has longing for love and communion of the spirit in every aspect of their existence. Instead of compromising with the humdrum of mundane life, she is shown as struggling to give meaning to her existence through quest for love and communion of the spirit.

Search for love and communion of the spirit can be traced in the very first novel of Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock*. 'How important is sex where not union but communion is concerned' Maya records. The root of her quest lies in her excessive involvement with the sensuous beauty of life. She is alive through all her senses and lives intensely for each moment. It is really her effort to tell her story to herself, to discover some meaning in her life, and even to justify herself to herself (Iyenger, 465). She longs for permanence of love and beauty. She confesses that she has so much to look at, to touch and to feel, and be happy about. Her world is full of Gautama (118). She longs for moments of love and fulfilment. The truth of living, the quality of existence, the colour and flavour of each passing moments for her become things

to be felt and not to be explained. After taking a flower from Gautama, she remarks:

Do you know, I should not mind dying now, after all. At this very moment. Then it would remain like this, for me (121).

Maya wants Gautama to love her existence and help her fulfil her desires. Her quest is based on sensuous contact with the world around. She believes in the unity between body and soul, self and society. She yearns for the peace that comes from companion life alone, from brother flesh (18). She does not wish for anything in her married life excepting a caring and responsive husband. She wishes to die happily in the loving arms of her husband. He is the one with whom she desires to make a point of contact with the world of human activity. Her keen sensibility makes her more intrusive about the meaning of life and death. Her quest lies in her vision and some undefined self-cultivated fantasy.

Both Maya and Gautama are seekers of truth and meaning in their existence. Desai attempts to present conflict between two different approaches to life marked in the lives of Maya and Gautama. Maya's love of beauty and sensuous life stands in sharp contrast with Gautama's philosophy of detachment. Conflicts between reason and sensibility, objective reality and

subjective truth form the basis for the quest in this novel. Gautama stands for truth and balance, and Maya for idealism. Gautama seeks his satisfaction in detachment whereas Maya looks for it in attachment. As a realist, he believes in action and reason. From Gita he learns that attachment leads to destruction:

Thinking of sense objects, man becomes attached thereto. From attachment arises longing and from longing anger is born. From anger arises delusion; from delusion, loss of memory is caused. From loss of memory the discriminative faculty is ruined and from the ruin of discrimination, he perishes (112).

But Maya seeks a higher love, beyond the matter of fact realities. Instead of being conscious of duty alone, she becomes conscious of love. She desires to satisfy love with love. She longs for expression of emotions and affections to drench her love-thirsty heart. She is romantic and self-indulgent, pursuing fancies and dreams. She is like a toy-princess living in a world of elusive happiness. Her utterances reveal her romantic longing for her husband, the only lover:

I live my life for you. [...] You are - untouched. How can I explain it to you then (114)?

Maya has a stifling sense of freedom. When Gautama takes her into a railway compartment and locks it, she cries hysterically: "Let me out: I want to live, Gautama, I want to live" (156). The close railway compartment creates in her a terrible sense of fear. The letter of her brother brings a message of freedom to her. She imagines him as a young hawk hard to be tamed. As a non-conformist, a rebel working in a canning factory in New York, life for her brother has a meaning. She looks at life, whereas he interprets it. In fact, he is the objectification of her innermost desires. He stands for freedom which she desires the most.

Maya's quest also lies in her effort to achieve freedom from her father figure. Only then will she be freed from her claustrophobia. Since she has engraved her father's image in Gautama, she unconsciously decides that she must destroy her husband in order to liberate herself from her father obsession. She thinks that Gautama has reached the stage of detachment that nears silence. She tries to enter his world but he is so engrossed in his work that he does not realize when she had entered the room, had spoken, had left. She wonders: "Could death disturb him then" (198)? She convinces herself that he is the one who should die. She feels that with his life denying ideas he has no right to live.

Since Gautama cannot fill the vacuum in her imagination, gradually the moon, symbol of female imagination, starts to govern her sentiments. Although she sees the moon as ominous at several points, still it represents the revolt and anger raging within her. Maya ruminates that when it rose out of the churn of her frenzy, vast and ghost-white, written over with dim, tortuous signs in ash-grey, it was not the gentle moon of love-ballads and fairy revels but a demonic creature, a phantom gone berserk trying to leap the threshold of her mind (27). The moon captures her vital solidity and translates into insanity which prevails over her commonsense. Her husband commits a grave mistake by coming in between her illusive quest and objective presence:

And then Gautama made a mistake—his last, decisive one. In talking, gesturing, he moved in front of me, thus coming between the worshipped moon, and me his figure an ugly, crooked grey shadow that transgressed its sorrowing chastity. 'Gautama!' I screamed in fury, and thrust out my arms towards him...saw him fall then, passed through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom (208).

When she pushes her husband over the edge of the roof, she in fact achieves a victory over tradition. Her action is not based on some realist mode. It is motivated by the female myth. The price she has to pay for her liberty is awfully heavy: the price of sanity. Yet, it is a better alternative than remaining a prisoner to the tradition of male myth forever. Her extreme sensitivity makes her revolt against such tradition. It indicates her rebellion against the limited vision of life that the pragmatic philosophy of Gautama provides with. It also signifies Maya's attempt of removing the obstacle from the path of her quest. Since she does not find any spiritual or emotional parity between her husband and herself, the existence of Gautama not only becomes insignificant to her, but also disruptive. Her leap into insanity suggests her translation from objective reality into subjective vision or her self-nurtured fantasy. She stands for change, whereas Gautama represents the patriarchal tradition. She defies such tradition through her senses and emotions, but Gautama uses his logic to support the most traditional view of life. It is such a traditional and patriarchal philosophy of detachment from life that Maya rebels against. Her disaffection with Gautama is partly responsible for her artistic beauty more than her lover.

The quest for self-identity of the new Indian woman is focused even in *Voices in the City*. Monisha is depicted not only as an alienated soul, but also as a seeker of the meaning of her existence. Like Maya, Monisha also refuses to live a 'one-dimensional life'. She longs for peace and solitude where she could nurture her selfhood and grow into dignity. Her search is to attain freedom and solitude, both internal and external. She yearns for the free air of Kalimpong, where she could identify herself with the sincerity and novelty of nature, "the solitude of the jungles there, the aqueous shadows of the bamboo grooves and the earth laid with great fallen leaves" (116).

Monisha has something higher in her individuality. Her intellect is filled with the thoughts of writers like Kafka and Dostoyevsky. Although her in-laws are apathetic to her higher sensitivity, yet she keeps her awareness intact. She rebels inwardly against the servile existence within the rigid confines of a traditional Hindu family. Unlike many other Hindu women, she longs for creativity and privacy. Her intellectual aspiration is beyond the grasp of the ladies of the household, who always talk about dowries, saris, babies and jewellery with 'their indoor minds, starless, darkness' (81). Though her search is foiled by the suspicions of her unimaginative in-laws and mean-minded husband, the very nature of her quest transports her to a higher plane. Instead of trying to

adjust herself with the mundane realities of life, she tries to seek meaning within herself. She has knowledge of her search. She also knows the life of other householders as being "traceless, meaningless, uninvolved amounting to non-existence" (140). If she were a naïve and simple woman, devoid of any awareness, she would perhaps comply with the imposed mundane life. But her enlightened mind cannot rest without having the desire to peep beyond phenomenal reality.

Revolt against social or universal absurdities is one of the essential dimensions of the quest for identity. A sensitive individual rebels against social and universal absurdities. Desai's characters are motivated by the search for unity, spiritual order, meaning and truth. Many of them rebel against their given situations of their life. Their rebellion is not for some political or social purpose but for attaining freedom, meaning and truth. This rebellion may be called what Camus calls 'Metaphysical Rebellion'. Most of the characters of Desai refuse to accept the weight that makes them live in a wretched condition. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* pushes her husband off the roof to defend her world of sensuous abundance whereas Monisha sets fire on herself in order to reach the core of her being. Both the acts may be interpreted as their acts of rebellion against the suffocating isolation in their married lives. Maya's abolition of her husband may be considered as an attempt to get herself free from the

unimaginative world of Gautama, and Monisha's suicide can be viewed as her attempt to give a meaning to herself at least in death, for her present life has not been able to provide it. Her suicide is preceded by self-knowledge which asserts her freedom. It is an exercise of her choice.

Nirode is another character of the novel, who also has a search for higher values in life. His pursuit of higher values in life constitutes the thematic nucleus of the novel. He starts a magazine in which the intellectuals of the whole nation might exercise their power for the reawakening India. As a writer and editor of meaningful journals, he attempts to communicate his higher and original ideas to the whole nation. Ordinary people work for success and happiness but Nirode relinquishes both. He feels that such things would lead his life to blind alley. "He feels frantically proud, capable of great dedication yet shifting like a shadow, a cipher, from one rejection to another" (54). It is clear that his body encloses a sublime spirit, which is averse to the docility of an office life and its servile bossism. He is unhappy with his magazine as it presents a 'lot of trivial, worthless scribbling' that has no deep essence or message for mankind. He gives up all pursuits of worldly benefit for the higher purpose of writing. Monisha, his sister, testifies that he had 'done away with all other things in order to have time to read and write' (114).

Freedom is the primary quest of Nirode for which he is ready to sacrifice everything. He resents his father's inheritance, shifts from one business to another one. As a hermit he loves nothing but freedom. He longs to be free from family, tradition and heritage and wants to be himself. Considering the heavy cost of freedom, he says that "independence is too damned expensive" (131). But still he has a positive soul full of admiration for greatness wherever it is found. His faculty is verified by the amazing play he writes although theatres are unfit for it. It is only that the society fails to understand his talent. Even though he is misunderstood, he never gives up his quest. His struggle raises him above the level of common humanity.

Nirode debates for anonymity of the true artist as an important ideal. He believes that giving signatures and announcing names is improper to an artist of high rank because it involves some egoism. He holds in high esteem those anonymous artists who never bothered about fame or celebrity. For him, anonymity of artists should be sustained in the field of writing as well. He criticizes those great writers, who could not resist the temptation of publicity. As an artist, he considers writers as worse than painters and other artists:

'The Ajanta murals, the temples at Konarak and Khajuraho - not one of them bear a single signature, does it'? He asks it like a question of potent interest, and this makes him smile, the white skin on his lips cracking as he does so. 'But writers,' he says, 'writers were always a vain bunch, from Kalidas downwards. Blasted fools, the lot of them. It's only a waste' (130)

Related to his higher pursuits, his devotion to fine arts and is another significant aspect of his quest. He touches upon a still higher notion that if speech is silver silence is gold. Speech involves attention to the audience. The audience may place different demands on the artist based on their preferences. This will be a great burden on the genuine artist. His ambition in life becomes "to earn only as much as I need immediately, never so much as to spill into the bank" (157). He avoids all sorts of encumbrances in order to be free and be alone to write. Action without desire for result guides him in early life while working with the newspaper and the magazine. Guided or misguided by the principles of Gita, he always seems in search of detachment.

Nirode is a rebel, who rejects the world of security for attaining an existential freedom. Instead

of living a dull and mundane life, he wishes to die an independent death. He wanders all his life from one rejection to another one, from failure to the next one to achieve total freedom. To get hold of freedom, he is even ready to move from failure to failure to rock bottom. He considers the concepts of success or failure as sheer hindrances on the way of freedom. In order to attain an existential freedom, he attempts to transcend every barrier: familial, social and moral. He reflects that it is "better to leap out of the window and end it all instead of smearing this endless sticky glue of senselessness over the world" (18). He also confesses that happiness or suffering - he wants to be done with them, disregard them, and see beyond them to the very end (40).

Since his search is to attain freedom in its totality, he desires to escape from the stark realities of life. In order to free himself from bondage of security he gives up his handsome job and starts editing *Voice* magazine. Then he begins to write as a free-lance writer. Again he opens a bookshop in a dirty locality. All these are his attempts to get hold of freedom and wholeness. Success for him is but a mere delusion. For him "life lived to be a success only follows one success after the other, but eventually has to bend with the arch and arrive at the bottom" (184).

Nirode's rebellion is not political, but metaphysical one. It is a rebellion against human degradation. He has a passion for clarity and unity of thought, and a craving for meaning and truth. His is a rebellion by means of which he protests against his condition and consequently against the whole creation. It is metaphysical because it disputes the ends of man and of his creation. As a rebel he defies more than he denies. He lives in a world he creates for himself and he is by and large all alone. He rejects every outside agency that would obstruct his freedom of becoming. His search is for freedom at its totality, and not for security. In the name of freedom, he discards his family wealth and ancestry. He rejects everything that would link him with the mundane routine life. He desires only his private world of doubt and questionings. Desai describes his desire as follows:

What he wanted was shadows, silence, stillness - and well, he told himself, that was exactly what he would always be left with. He remained in the half-dark - and each light on that street served to show up an expanse of wall, a doorway, a balcony that was darkly shadowed - and bled with longing to go... (8)

A quest for racial and cultural identity can be studied in her next novel, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. The novel deals with the theme of cultural conflict born of the

colonial encounter between India and Britain. Through the portrayal of Adit, Desai tries to portray a quest for cultural and racial identity. Adit searches for his new identity in the west. He tries to identify himself with the English way of life. He praises the life in Britain to the extent that he completely identifies himself with it at the expense of his Indian past. He confesses to his fascination for England in the following words:

Yes... I do love here. I'm happy here. I like going into the local for a pint on my way home to Sarah. I like wearing good tweed on a foggy November day. I like the Covent Garden opera house. I like steamed pudding with treacle. I like - I like thatched cottages and British history and reading the letters in the *Times*... I like the pubs. I like the freedom a man has here: Economic freedom! Social freedom! (22).

His basis for occidental fascination is based on its rich tradition of art and painting. He visits art gallery illuminated with the rosy, noontime vision of the Impressionists. He looks for meaning and beauty in the poetic tradition of Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Eliot. He sings:

Earth has not any thing to show more fair:

Dull would he be of soul who could pass by.
(75)

He feels that "the English have a genius of preserving art and beauty and keep it somehow fresh and vivid, miraculously safe from the ravages of time and decay, so that it affects generation after generation in precisely the same manner - and even outsiders from the far corners of the world" (92-93). He searches for a higher dimension in life and art. He crosses the threshold of his native land in order to get social freedom which he fails to achieve in India. His desire to jump ahead of traditional mores of Indian life can be considered as his new awareness. This makes him unable return to his past. His desire to find unity with his fellowmen or his attempts to establish new ties by marrying Sarah can be taken as his egalitarian endeavours.

The novel also deals with the theme of cultural and linguistic adjustment in the lives of Indian immigrants in England. They experience many things, encounter variety of people and situations, discuss several subjects; but their sole objective is adjustment in social, intellectual and educational areas. There is a clash between two races or customs, not forged or artificial but innate and inborn.

Tired of too much duty and very little liberty within the traditional Indian life, most of her characters choose myth in order to escape the painful reality. They seek peace and security by adopting myth as an alternative for their predicaments. Their approach at escaping the stark realities of life by adopting myth as a possible alternative forms one major traits of their quest for identity..

Desai deals with the very fundamental question of human existence in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* The novel poses the question where shall we go from here? It also deals with the quest for meaning and purpose of life. The novel becomes a query of Sita's total self. Her quest for identity emerges from the conflict between two contrary attitudes towards life. A disagreement of feelings between the husband and wife can be found in the novel. Like Gautama in *Cry the Peacock*, Raman is a successful businessman who has a rather pragmatic view of life. Sita is sensitive and imaginative, having more than an ordinary sense. If Raman is social and extrovert, Sita is personal and introvert. If he has common sense, she has higher notions about life than the average woman would have. Because of such temperamental variation, the points of disagreement between the two often occur.

Sita's quest begins with her disgust at the conception of her fifth child. As a sensitive woman she

considers modern civilization as a crazy one for sensitive souls. She considers the world to be filthy and unworthy for the child that is pure and safe in her womb. She seems to have higher sensitivity and higher worries than common mothers. She has the normal approach of a good mother, and has given birth and brought up four children, proving to be a caring mother. The common features of the horrifying modern civilization violate her sensitive temper. She believes that in such a world children cannot be held healthy:

How could civilization survive, how could the child? How could she hold them whole and pure and un-impeached in the midst of this bloodshed? They would surely be wounded, fall and die (55-56).

Her reluctance to give birth to the baby is in a way symbolic of her wish to prevent the very experience of suffering and violence. In a hot discussion with Raman, she bursts: "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" (35). What she actually wants to achieve is a wholesome world of purity and love. She longs for such a world where there would be no selfishness or treachery. She rebels against the modern civilization and human degradation. Her rebellion becomes a universal one. She wants to stay whole mentally and emotionally. This calls to her mind

a desire to escape. She wants to keep the unborn baby forever safe from the cruelty and violence of the real world of masculine values of war and violence.

Therefore, when she finds that she is about to bring another human being into the world something snaps within her. She informs her husband that she will not have the baby. When he asks if she means to abort the child, she answers: "I want to keep it - I don't it to be born" (35). She thinks that she can somehow prevent the birth by going back to the mythical Manori, where strange miracles are known to occur. She imagines that she can contain the conception inside her. Instead of opting for abortion, she dreams of a miraculous evaporation of the child. Her desire of escape emerges from the fear of a doomed and destructive human predicament.

In order to escape from all the predicaments of her life, she tries to find an answer in the myth of the *Magic Island*. What she knows inwardly, she refuses to accept outwardly. Manori the island of myth and miracle vies the critical realism of the present metropolis. Her childhood home Manori stands just opposite to the critical realism of Bombay. It is also clear that as a mother and wife her life in the realist mode is limited. Therefore, she goes away to Manori dragging her daughter Menaka and son Karan with her in search of her lost individuality. Her retreat to the

island is only to prevent her fifth baby from being born into the world where destruction came so naturally. She wants to return to her past, to her childhood days. Longing for her childhood days, she utters to her daughter:

I wish I had your talent, I would nurse it so carefully like a plant—make it grow, grow. I used to think—after I left this island and had to think what I would do next—that if only I could paint, or sing, or play the Sitar well. [...] I should have grown into a sensible woman. Instead of being what I am [...] I should have known how to channel my thoughts and feelings, how to put them in use. I should have given my life some shape then, some meaning. At least, it would have had some for me—even if no one had cared (86).

On the island she wants to achieve a miracle, an immaculate conception in reverse. Her decision to go to Manori during the monsoon is an act of rejection, which Raman terms as madness. But for her, the escape to Manori from the hostile civilization is an attempt to regain her sanity. When Raman interprets her escape as desertion she refuses:

No, no - desertion, that's cowardly. I wasn't doing anything cowardly [...] I was saying No-

but positively, *positively* saying No. There must be someone who says No, Raman! [...] Perhaps I never ran away at all. Perhaps I am only like the jellyfish washed up by the waves, stranded there on the sandbar. I was just stranded here by the sea, that's all. I hadn't much to do with it at all (108).

Sita's escape to the island not only suggests her social rejection. It also indicates her quest for peace and solitude. Since she fails to look into herself in the dull life of Bombay, she moves away from it to probe the essence of her being. Her journey becomes the journey from the stark realities of life to the illusive world of fantasy. This is also a journey involving her self-research. She runs away from the humdrum of life just to attain what she calls wholeness. Manori in her dream is a place of miracles where she hopes to achieve the miracle of not giving birth to the child. As Desai writes: "The island had been buried been buried beneath her consciousness deliberately, for years" (57).

Sita embodies the theme of rebellion against the evil of the world in the form of rejection of procreation in such a world. As she is upset by the gross decadence of the world, she is made to reject the very process of procreation. As a mother, she is not ready to reconcile herself with such a civilization

where her child would be born. She confesses: "That's what I refuse to do, you know - have it born to such - such a life" (143). Her revolt is against the norms of society which considers a woman inferior to man. It is because she sees beyond those norms. She cannot stand finitude but wishes to attain her pure being, or what Sartre calls being for itself or *pour-soi*. In her revolt and subsequent resolution, she reveals a strong assimilation of the modern and the traditional outlook of Indian woman (Bande 183). Desai portrays her as a new woman with a strong Indian personality. She is a blend of western temperament and Indian grace. She breaks social norms and traditional values. She declares herself and also breaks the classical image of the Sita of the Hindu myths. Alienation and quest for love are the central motif of Sita. Evidently the two concepts, alienation and quest are complementary and lead to one another. She not only rejects the unconditional acceptance of the secondary role but also rebels against the entire system of patriarchal social relationships.

An escape into myth and fantasy as a possible alternative to the torment of alienation can also be studied in *Fire on the Mountain*. Like Sita in *Where Shall We Go this Summer*, Nanda wishes to retreat from her responsibilities of adult life into a realm of solitude, where she could indulge in the fantasies of her childhood. But unlike Sita, she has fulfilled her

duties as wife, mother and grandmother. She chooses to escape only after the death of her husband and after all her children and grandchildren are grown and married.

Being upset by her social life, Nanda acquires a lonely house named Carignano on a remote hill. What pleases and satisfies her at Carignano is its loneliness. In her lonely house, she finds herself free from all the burdens of family and also to be able to make her free choices. She does not consider her age as a hindrance in her search for peace and solitude. She wants to achieve total freedom from the world of duty and responsibility like a sannyasian.

Nanda's stay at Kasauli not only signifies her love for a secluded life away from the din and tumult of her family life. It also indicates her quest for selfhood, her identity and Truth. Like Manori in *Where Shall We Go this Summer*, the mountain of Carignano plays the role of a dreamland in the life of Nanda. What she aspires for is peace and solitude, away from the tension of family life. As Desai describes; "All she wanted was to be alone, to have Carignano to herself, in this period of her life when stillness and calm were all that she wished to entertain" (17).

The responsibilities of family life had been a barrier for her to reach the core of her being. Her

busy and pleasure-loving husband had nothing to do with her private self. He let down her emotions by loving another girl and refusing to take notice of her feminine sentiments. Her relationship with her children was not intimate either. They had betrayed her by refusing to accept her motherly affection. Nanda feels that her involvement with social life had only bred frustration by placing a hindrance in the path of her quest for identity. When she is finally able to rid herself of all social and family burdens, she is rather satisfied. "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" (30).

Although she is disgusted with the present realities of life, she could never quench her fantasy of a glorious past. On one stormy day, when she finds herself in a forced companionship with Raka, her great granddaughter, she tells the stories of her mythical childhood. She tells the stories of her own father's trips to Tibet, the land of myth and magic, where he had undertaken daring feats. Her longing to keep the memory safe is indicative of her quest for adventure and freedom. Although she cannot actually return to the past, she lives in its glorious memories. She keeps alive the memory of her legendary father as an adventurous voyager. She narrates:

He was away in Tibet - oh, for years, years. He went every step of the way on horseback, or on foot; the Mustagh Pass, the Baltoro glacier, the Aghill Pass [...] a terribly hard dangerous route. [...] He went to Lhasa, saw the Potala [...] there he ran into the strangest people of all, Lamas and sorcerers [...] with the strangest powers. They could do magic: they could make idols speak, turn day into night... (83-85).

Desai's interest does not lie in mirroring the externals. It lies in exploring the inner recesses of individuals. Writing for her "is an effort to discover, and to underline, and finally to convey the true significance of the things" (Dalmia, 13). Desai not only seeks to investigate the inner crisis of her characters, she also deals with the independent existence of the individual as being solely responsible for his choices. The various characters in her novels confront their own existence. She is also interested in analysing the hidden self of the individual as a tremendously potential in dealing with the torments of alienation.

Her characters take up various ways of dealing with the absurdities of their existence: by committing suicide and homicide, hoping for the better and also living with it. The subject of living with it and

confronting their existence bears more importance for the novelist. Their attempt professes that life is more important than death. Her characters possess a positive attitude to life. They have inner frustration and mental turmoil but still they dare to live, and some even venture to transcend this frustration and gloom. They see a light even in the midst of darkness and sorrow.

A study of the novels of Anita Desai is always a soul-searching process. She not only deals with the exploration of human predicament but also with man's perpetual quest for meaning and truth. She unravels the torturous involutions of sensibility with subtlety and fineness, and her ability to evoke the changing aspects of Nature matched with human moods is another of her assets (Naik, 243). Her attention is transferred from the mere observation of the outer world to the revelation of the inner-self of her characters. The novel with her becomes either a psychological drama or an existential allegory. She attempts to delve deep inside her character to explore the mystery of life and also to analyse the situations responsible for man's tragic condition on the earth.

A search for higher ideal also motivates most of her characters. A quest for meaning in life through poetic creation is typified in her novel, *In Custody*. Deven, a humble lecturer in a college, tries to seek

meaning in his life through his involvement in poetry and music. His sense of quest emerges from his compulsion to shut his poetic mind in order to earn his livelihood by teaching in a college. He is a poet who had long ago set aside his ambition to write poetry to live and to earn. But he is forced to put aside his love of Urdu literature and instead get a job as a lecturer in Hindi, a field in which he had little interest and skill.

Unable to find comfort in his real life, his poetic mind escapes into fantasy and myth of hero worship. What is denied to him in the real world seems attainable in the shadowy world of Nur's poems. A meek and credulous young man, he is swayed by an idea of creating a work of lifetime and is prompted to take an interview of Nur. He does not seek to compromise with his sense of alienation. A search for vocation accompanies him. His search is for poetic truth and beauty. He is portrayed as seeking meaning in the emptiness as typified by Nur, who himself is confused and frustrated. When Murad, the editor of Urdu literary magazine, *Awaaz*, assigns him to take an interview of Nur, he is happy. "He went on reciting that great poem of Nur's that his father had loved to recite and that he still read, ceremoniously, whenever he felt sad or nostalgic and thought of his father and his early childhood and all that he had lost" (44).

In order to give meaning to his poetic interest, he accepts his interview of Nur, the greatest living Urdu poet. Nur becomes the image of perfection as a poetic model for him. "He had pictured him living either surrounded by elderly, sage and dignified literatures or else entirely alone, in divine isolation" (51). He visits Delhi for the said assignment and traces the whereabouts of Nur. When he enters the house of Nur, he feels as though he is truly about to leave behind his dross and drab life and ascend to a wonderful world of poetic beauty and mythic splendour:

It was to him as if God had leaned over a cloud and called for him to come up, and angels might have been drawing him up these ancient splintered stairs to meet the deity... this, surely, was the summons he had been waiting for all these empty years... he had never conceived of a summons expressed in a voice so leonine... a voice that could grasp him, as it were, by the roots of his hair and haul him up from the level on which he existed—mean, disordered and hopeless—into another, higher sphere. Another realm it would surely be if his god dwelt there, the domain of poetry, beauty and illumination (39-40).

In his quest for poetic beauty, Deven deludes himself by overestimating Nur. He mythicizes the poet,

in whom he fancies every possibility of transforming his ordinary life. He considers his life as a Hindi professor to be futile and meaningless. And now he attempts to find his meaning in the poetic world of Nur. He intends to transcend the dull and monotonous life of a college professor and materially disappointed life of his wife in the economic and cultural backwardness of Mirpor by chronicling the life and poetry of Nur. He seeks to acquire distinction in the college through association with the living poet. His artistic motive is also harmonised by a more materialistic one of getting promotion through the publication of an article.

Desai seeks to explore the roots and background of her family especially that of her German mother, Antoinette Nime, in her next novel, *Baumgartner's Bombay*. Concerning the theme of family roots in the novel, she herself has stated in an interview with Andrew Robinson, "... all these years I have been searching for a way to return to my background, and only found the key a few years ago" (1988, 2). And her findings find their expression in this novel. She has explored the German roots of her mother whose search for cultural roots and self-identity are typified by Hugo Baumgartner.

The very sense of alienation creates a quest in Hugo Baumgartner. Failing to adjust himself in his own

homeland, he comes to India searching for a self-identity and also security. Perhaps here he would find himself a new Identity, one that suited him, one that he enjoyed (62-63). Although he is uprooted from his native land, he tries to establish himself in his new-found land, India, where he desires to bring his mother also. Even after the war, he still desires to re-establish himself in Calcutta, and then in Bombay. His search for establishment, his attempts to find a new identity even in an alien atmosphere speak of his dignity and give meaning to his existence. He refuses to compromise with pessimism and continues with his quest for his identity. His very existence leads to a search for the roots. His staying in India converges in a quest. Desai presents a cultural quest of the individual in alien land.

One day Hugo meets a dying cat. He brings it home, but it dies. This incident creates in him a new sense, a new idea. He begins to collect homeless cats to his flat for his company. But it makes his visitors less and less. Even his best friends cease to come to his flat. One cannot be accustomed to loneliness. He needs company. Therefore, Hugo has pet cats, stray cats, sick cats, starved cats, and homeless cats. Because of his cat collection, he gets different titles like 'Pagla Sahib' or 'Billiwalla Sahib'.

When an individual finds no sense in existing realities and objective values, he moves towards subjective truth that cannot be expressed in comprehensive language. Language becomes insufficient to explain the whole truth. The search for subjective truth is the outcome of a mature mind. The ordinary people who are satisfied with mere food and sex, home and children have no concern with truth or identity. They cannot cross their limit of phenomenal reality. Only when the dividing wall of ignorance and reason are knocked down, then the search begins. What concerns her most is the search for those sensitive or inquisitive individuals who dare to seek their identity, truth and self.

Journey to Ithaca provides a different idea of quest. The novel basically speaks about the spiritual journey of Matteo into the Indian mysticism. The only child of affluent Italian parents, he is restless since his very childhood. When he reads Herman Hess's book *The Journey to the East*, a desperate longing for India and her mystic beauty arises in him. In the year 1975 along with his wife he undertakes his 'journey to the east', hoping to understand India. In India, he visits swamis, gurus and ashrams searching for spiritual fulfillment and meaning in life. He believes that everything in India has a sign, a design. He also reads from *Katha Upanishads*, which teaches him that one has to follow the path of joy, not pleasure. To attain

spiritual enlightenment, he encounters several monks and swamis: clothed, naked, and half-naked. In order to receive the eye of faith to see beyond through meditation, he makes himself a recluse. He becomes more and more silent, distant and detached with the world around. He tries to find the meaning universal mystery in Indian religiosity:

Then feeling himself alone in his lack of faith, Matteo began to keep to himself. He felt disabled, without the skills the other possessed, a kind of leper amongst them. So he rented a room for himself where he might be alone and meditate and concentrate upon his need for the extra faculty that he desired and required if he was to survive. He had begun to feel that if he could not have a vision of spiritual truth then he could not continue to live - not here, not as he had done (66).

His search for real India makes him frenzied and dishevelled. He sees universe in stone (68), goddess in a doll (69), and guru in a drunkard (69). He wants to be someone else, different than he is. After running from pillar to post in search of a guru, he reaches to an ashram on the mountains in the North. He meets the Mother, the head of the ashram. In her presence he finds peace, joy and deep contentment. He seems to get closer to his goal under her blessing and guidance. The

Mother takes him with her on her search (88). The Mother impresses him to think and meditate only on her. He listens to her message of universal brotherhood and equanimity. Her words arrest him. He thinks that without her he is lost. "He felt that only thing in his life that mattered was to retain those impressions" (106). Her every word is like nectar to his thirsty soul. He considers her as a passage between the temporal and the eternal, between vanity and void.

Thus his journey seems to end in total surrender to the Mother. She becomes identical with the India of his imagination. He considers that she is the "one who can reveal the unknown to me" (141). The Mother addresses her devotees that "the only purpose of our existence here is to experience fully, to be full" (100). As Matteo listens to her he experiences "the revealing of a great luminous bloom" (99). He wanders: "over there (the west) people do not know there is a mystery" (58). It is this mysterious essence of existence that Matteo tries to capture and desires to be identified with. There has all along been an element of bewilderment or a gap between his self and the world around. He tries to fill the gap with the solidity of the Mother.

Matteo has a goal of attaining nirvana or void. He follows it single-mindedly. He is so obsessed with his pursuit that he simply does not care for his parents,

wife or children. Like many Indian monks, he seems to have been devoid of such personal feelings. He becomes an unfeeling idealist. He does not change gradually. He desires to replace himself with someone else.

Matteo carries out a literal and metaphorical 'Journey to the East'. The journey here refers to spiritual gratification for his wandering and searching soul. The search for a home is related to the search for identity. The name 'Ithaca' refers to a mythical place, which motivates his nostalgia of a long lost home. India and Ithaca merge into one another. His search for spiritual gratification can also be related to his search for self-identity. He believes that there is no happiness for him who does not travel (190). The idea of journey is linked up with theme of quest, rooted in his collective unconscious. What keeps him preoccupied here is the idea of a persistent journey. It is something like the concept of Ananta Yatra which is embedded in the Indian philosophy of life.

Matteo's search is existential. Like Nirode, he rejects everything. His search makes him conscious of his alienation from his family members also. As a born seeker, he exhibits signs of worldly failure from the very beginning. Even as a boy, he fails to conform to the social and domestic norms. "His thoughts begin to crystallize and soon he targets the path of joy in preference to the path of pleasure" (24). Actually, he

does not existentially belong to the humdrum of the world. His parents cannot understand him. Even his wife fails to communicate with him. He is existentially divided from the rest of the world. He accepts a choice of following the life of a mystic by resenting everything he has. Like Nirode, he jumps from one failure to another one, from one illusion to the other one. Both of them are portrayed as archetypal figures fathoming the truth of human existence. Nirode searches for freedom at any cost whereas Matteo desires to reach a state of emptiness where he himself desires to merge into. He seeks neither independence nor dependence, neither attachment nor detachment. Finally he discards even the desire to be desireless. Like Buddha, he seeks to realize a state of void fulfilling Patanjali's maxim, *chittanivrittam* or negation mind.

It is, therefore, the search, which makes the characters of Anita Desai different from their fellowmen. They try to create and preserve their own values of life. In order to protect their self-identity or self-created ideals, these characters adopt various measures. Maya pushes her husband off the roof with the intention of protecting her world of sensuous abundance. Monisha sets fire on herself to reach the core of her being. Sita escapes to the magic island in order to rediscover and protect her lost wholeness. Deven seeks to define his life with the meaningless existence of Nur. Nanda retires herself as a complete

recluse in search of peace and sanity. Bim forgives her unforgivable brother and Matteo searches for his identity in the mystified being of the Mother. These characters face the agony of living without giving up their incessant battle against the oddities of life. Thus alienation is not synonymous to defeat to them and they fight a good battle in their lives. They never give up their battle against the ferocious assaults of existence. They are not even static figures. They make an effort to know themselves. In the process of their search they also undergo transformation leading to self-knowledge. Their soul is unyielding; their will to power is perpetual. They make spiritual journeys, soaring higher than phenomenal world. All these are human attempts to reach and capture the holistic vision of life. In all these cases, the search for truth, the quest for an identity, the hunt for a meaning in life, and the desire for a moment of balance has remained the most essential feature in her novels.

CHAPTER FIVE

SURVIVAL OF THE SELF

... at the surface level man's self-posing nature entails denial or negation of his unity with nature, but the more reflective moment of his life makes him conscious of how much he owes and belongs to nature. This consciousness negates his essentially alienative consciousness. By negating his earlier negation, alienation from nature, man not only returns to nature but also does so with added qualities and depth of consciousness. By the negation of a negation, by the de-alienation of alienation, man return to richer to the 'lost' spiritual unity of man and nature. This second stage of alienation has been characterized as basically an exercise in de-alienation.

(Krishna Roy, *Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*,
1989, 165)

SECTION ONE

Meaning of Survival

The conditions of alienation and quest bring about a revolutionary change in the individual consciousness and spiritual evolution in the novels of Anita Desai. Her characters are portrayed as coming to the vital realization that the torments of alienation can be transcended through knowledge of the self. They also know that difference itself does not necessarily create a sense of despair. They attempt to overcome separation and distance in order to attain survival. They also come to know that turning away from the stark realities of life is not at all the solution of the torments of alienation. By facing the critical situations of life with an openness to communicate and transcending them by way of realization, they achieve an ideal solution of their predicament. Most of them arrive at their survival by involving themselves with the world around. It is only in a living communication with the world and his fellow beings that they discover their identity and survive in this hostile and mysterious world. The panacea for most of them lies in their heroic struggles and thus working out their individual aesthetics of life.

The term survival is a self-explanatory one. It is "an idealist passion for unity, an obsession for integral experience, a search for unity against the divided nature of consciousness" (Levi, 261). It can be understood as an attempt at the spiritual unification of human kind or as an inner freedom. It includes the survival of human dignity and in the end the survival of some human warmth. It is the ability to reach and touch others. This also refers to the return to the self. It is an attempt at an inward journey of the soul by the individual. It is also a "notion of transcending alienation by re-uniting subject and object, and also by reconciling man to the world" (Bannet, 250). As an attempt to overcome the torment of alienation, it can be understood as man's return to the self in which he becomes his own highest goal and an end to himself.

Sense of survival is very much related to the feeling of alienation. The very feeling of alienation paves the way for quest and survival. A conscious being does not let the torment of alienation destroy his sense of values and positive attitudes towards life. He knows that he has every right to differ from the other. Alienation does not provide self-destruction but points towards survival. It is a necessary step for survival or without alienation there is no survival. It can also be said that if there were no experience of alienation, there would not arise any urge for quest

that might lead an individual to realize the still higher level of survival.

In Anita Desai, survival can come only through knowledge, spiritual salvation and faith in oneself. It can be attained only after a realization of the self as an independent and individualized entity. At the same time, it is by communication and involvement that an individual can achieve wholeness, a unity of body and soul, and also an understanding of life's splendours. When asked if she has anything to say about her views on life, she answers to Atma Ram, "I have nothing to add to what I have put into my novels" (1996, 99). Therefore we are free to assume that the realizations achieved by her protagonists form the philosophical insights of the novelist herself. Their attempts to create some lasting values in life through communication and communion consists the fundamentals of their survival. Their philosophical realization leads them to survival.

Survival may also be understood as an act of free choice. Since man possesses tremendous potentiality of becoming, he can transcend negative effects of isolation and come to realize his true identity. It is by knowledge and recognition that an individual can achieve wholeness, a unity of body and soul, and also an understanding of life's splendours. The ideal solution for human predicament can only be achieved by

facing the teasing situations of life with an openness to communicate, and also by transcending them by way of realization. Although survival refers to human relationship and acceptance of reality, yet it does not suggest a total yield to the social norms. Survival calls for individuality even in the midst of social interactions and relationships. An individual has every right to lead his life as his choice. But such choice should be a healthy selection. If the selection is shaky or unauthentic, it leads to total dilemma and confusion. A healthy selection leads to authenticity of being. Such authenticity is one of the much-needed essences of human life. Survival is the by-product of such realization of the self.

The notion of survival can be understood in two phases: detachment and transcendence. Detachment implies turning inward in order to realize the true inner self. It also refers to separation between the individual and the social. Transcendence refers to the realization of what man actually so that he might become what he truly or potentially is. It implies a victory over one's solitariness or isolation. It is also a turning to self-identity in connection with the re-attainment of unity. This second stage of survival can be reached only by realizing the true self of the individual. Instead of quarrelling with the indifferent world and environment, these individuals attain their survival as independent, self-realized and spiritually-

matured individuals. Survival also refers to the realization of spiritual unity by, what Krishna Roy calls, 'de-alienation of alienation' (1989, 65). An individual tries to return to the lost spiritual unity between self and the world around by such negation of negation, by de-alienation of alienation. Such process of growth is brought about by various factors including individual consciousness, recognition and realization of the self.

For Hegel survival refers to self-identification of the spirit. "Having taken up the notion of alienation from a social philosophy, Hegel transformed it into a metaphysical notion. He uses it to characterize the process of progressive and alternating self-differentiating and self-identification of the spirit, the main theme of his metaphysics" (Roy, 116). He believes that the self is free insofar as it maintains its identity and keeps simply and solely touched with itself, or maintains the undivided unity of its self-existence.

Most of the existential writers consider that the feeling of alienation not only hints at the loss of identity. It also points towards human freedom and survival. Alienation is an essential experience for a person. Kierkegaard views that one who conforms to the conventions has lost all senses of his individuality. He also expresses that when man conforms himself to the

familial or social personalities or obligations, there is every possibility of losing a sense of identity. He suggests man's inevitable return to God as an essential solution for his alienation. For him man's realization of the self as an inseparable entity from God is the true remedy from the torments of alienation. He argues that man as an "existing individual" with tremendous potentiality of becoming is always in process of becoming.

Nietzsche also considers man in the process of becoming and relies on the individual's self-potentiality of overcoming such predicament. As he prefers life to knowledge, he takes this world as will to power and individual as this Will to Power. For him 'not humanity, but Superman is the goal'. In his view, man is something, which must be surpassed. He is a bridge and not a goal. He is a rope stretched between animal and superman - a rope over an abyss (Copleston, 188). In his writings, man is portrayed not only as an alienated individual, but also as a seeker of the new dimensions of survival. His declaration of the death of God can be interpreted in twofold significance: first it indicates man's total separation from the concept of the supernatural and secondly, it refers to the individual's search for a new zenith to hang on to. It also suggests man's potentiality of becoming without any supernatural aid. When man returns to his true self by way of declining the concept of God, he becomes

independent. Such independence is one of the keynotes of existential survival

Sartre also strongly emphasises human reality and human freedom. His theory of freedom is based on his analysis of the 'for-itself'. According to him we cannot choose to be free or not, we simply are free by the fact that we are consciousness. Our sense of freedom cannot be separated from the 'human reality'. Human freedom precedes the essence of man and makes it possible. Giving much emphasis to human consciousness, he writes: "It is for consciousness that the world appears as an intelligible system of distinct and interrelated things. If we think away all that is due to the activity of consciousness in making the world appear, we are left with being itself, opaque, massive, undifferentiated, the nebulous background, as it were, out of which the world is made to appear. Being is. Being is in-itself. Being is what it is" (1992, 29). It is therefore improper to consider that the existentialists have discussed alienation only as a negative term. The sense of alienation as discussed by them is an essential element in recognizing the true self of an individual. A critic comments that:

According to existentialists, a non-alienated or inauthentic life is one in which man is not truly himself (Johari, 509).

An urgency of existential freedom leading to survival of the self forms the basis of the novels of Anita Desai. Her characters suffer from existential crisis of alienation, which leads them to their quest for existential freedom of choice and becoming. Some of them also recognise their self-potentialities to transcend their predicaments, especially their negative attitude towards life. Survival for them does not mean only a physical or spiritual but an existential one. Such a concept of survival seems to be developed through the dialectic of existence and essence, being and thought, materialism and idealism. When existence is said to predominate over essence, it becomes a call for materialism and humanism also. This leads the individual to preside over his destiny or his course of life. Such human existence enables the individuals to preside over their design or essence. They are shown to be struggling to prove their existence. They do not depend on external agencies or destiny in order to define their existence or being. They confront their own existence; they endure their survival physically as well as spiritually. Therefore, in her vision, survival has both physical and spiritual dimensions.

Realization of the self is therefore, the hallmark of survival. The individuals initially take the state of difference as a negative one. Through the process of quest and recognition, they come to the knowledge that difference has to be there, but one should not divide

and distance the other because of such difference. They also realize that being different from another entity is a necessary step towards a spiritual unification of the self. It is an essential element in acquiring individual identity. There are various phases of realization that they come to attain. They undergo various trials and errors before coming into the grasp of the true nature of their being and their relationships with universe and society. When they find themselves alienated and differentiated, they take everything around them as indifferent and hostile for their being and becoming. This leads them to rebel against those supposed alienating objects, and also to search for their true identity. Some of them also come to realize that objects or situations are not responsible for their condition of becoming, but they themselves are. When such insight occurs to them, they start to divert their outlook from the outer world to the inner self. They also begin to cultivate their own sense of responsibility. Their survival comes after such realization, when they learn to communicate, accept, tolerate and value the existence of other individuals. Such is the true survival of human relationship, survival of human dignity, survival of some warmth in human love.

SECTION TWO

Realization of Survival

The characters of Anita Desai realize the meaning of their existence from various perspectives. Most of them are more concerned with being and realization than with achievement. A mere carrying on of life is not a true survival for them. Survival should be meaningful, insightful and deep. Their knowledge helps them to do away with the false peace and unreal security. They also come to the knowledge that difference does not alienate but points towards knowledge and brings about realization. Their final realization leads them to profess that life cannot be comprehended objectively. Life itself is a paradox and human beliefs are ambivalent. It is more mysterious and enigmatic than philosophy and religion could comprehend. But such incomprehensibility should not be equated with confusion or chaos. Rather this should be understood as the scope of human soul to search beyond peripherals, to jump outside phenomenal reality, and enter into the unfathomable. These characters fight against the alienating conditions of their life in various ways. These conditions are distance and division in human relationships, lack of communication, and ignorance of the self. Some of them are caught up in a dilemma whether to create an isolated mythic world or to accept

the burdens of reality. Yet most of them are portrayed as transcending the torments of alienation by way of knowledge and recognition of their selves as independent, self-sufficient and also capable of rising above the ordinary.

Although some of the female characters of Anita Desai fail to achieve the warmth and dignity of physical love, yet their very quest for meaningful life makes their existence meaningful. Their mighty struggles to rise above the chains of confined life can be understood as human efforts to rise above the shackles of tradition. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* actually fails to achieve her desired love and dignity physically. But her higher aspiration for spiritual unification with her husband translates her into more than an ordinary fun-loving woman. Although she does not really survive on the physical level, yet she can be said survive on a higher level of human spirit. Monisha in *Voices in the City* also experiences futility and emptiness in her life, but she never gives up her higher pursuits and superior aims. Failure does not make her defeated. She is destroyed but not defeated. Though she does not survive in the physical realm, the values she dares to add to her life; the meaning and beauty that she always aspired for do survive. Instead of living a drab life, these females opt for freedom and choice. It is the element of choice that makes them survive.

In *Voices in the City*, Desai presents her idea of survival through the portrayal of Nirode whose whole life is marked by freedom and choice. He dedicates his life to the search of individuality. He comes to realize the value of human relationships at the conclusion of his career. The death of his sister, Monisha, brings him into realization that his quest is incomplete without human communication. He even realizes that utter freedom is not only impossible but also destructive in certain respects.

Although initially Nirode takes the world of Calcutta as hostile and inimical towards him, later on he comes to know about his own ignorance of the environment. It is not that Calcutta can be friendly or hostile to him. Though the external environment may influence an individual in certain respect, yet the sole responsibility lies on the individual's self-determination or choice. But such realization comes only after a long process of acceptance and rejection, trials and failures. As life itself is a process or a movement, every intelligent soul, unlike the drab ones, move forward to grasp the meaning of change and recognition. Nirode also, as an intelligent soul, moves from one ideal to another one. He becomes ready to change, ready to sacrifice everything to meet his goal of total freedom. He wants to be done with happiness or suffering, and see beyond them to the very end (40).

His very motives of change and sacrifice make him capable of realizing the truth of his being, the value of human dignity and also the meaning of human freedom. He makes an ardent search for a deeper meaning and a purpose of life. He comes out with the conclusion that one has to work for something higher than happiness or agony to arrive at the 'equanimity' (222). He believes that one has to rise above pleasure and pain, and go beyond passion and nihilism.

Nirode attains his spiritual survival when he rises above Camus's idea of suicide. He reads from Camus that 'in default of in-exhaustible happiness, eternal suffering at least would give us a destiny. But we do not have even that consolation, and our worst agonies come to an end one day' (40). For Camus, nihilism should lead to suicide. But instead of getting his consolation in death, Nirode finds his ultimate survival in human interaction and communication. He rises still higher than the concept of nihilism. Unlike Camus he discards the philosophy of suicide and gets consolation in communication, lasting human relationships and love. He becomes aware that only a healthy communication can lead humanity to peace and happiness and also freedom. The sickly psychological obsession of unfulfilled passions and the decay of consciousness are replaced by healthier life spectacles at the finale of this novel.

From the very beginning we see him rising above the concepts of success and failure, affluence and poverty by his higher pursuits. For him attachment to the material or the transient is disease and detachment from these is health. He believes that pursuit of happiness only leads to a dead end and a blind alley. He wonders what worse death there can be than at the hands of happiness? The world would come to a stand still (94). Whenever he gets any hints of his attachment, he just jumps off as if shaking the dust off from him. He is not ready to sacrifice his ideals. Desai describes him as a unique character:

No, no, he's unique in this city of commerce. He's unique in this city of compromise and relative values (169).

He realizes that transitory things cannot satisfy the need of the human soul. Such insight makes him capable of valuing life above all. He gives importance to sanity and the purity of one's inner soul. He admits to his sister Amla that at the end, he realized that the only thing he wanted to protect, that any sane man needs to protect, is his conscience. One may call it individuality or conscience, or anything, but there must be this essence inside us, and we must keep it: keep it secret in order to keep it - bearable. Mixing, diluting, muddying it - that's the disease (183-184).

His confessions give us an idea about his earlier mistakes of his reckless quest for failure:

You know, I once told a friend [...] that life lived to be a success only follows one success after another, but eventually has to bend with the arc and arrive at the bottom. And since I never was any good at going along with the others, I thought I would take the other direction and follow failure after failure and reach the bottom of the arc much quicker, while I was still young enough to see and feel and understand with every one of my senses. But that was the mistake. [...] You can't descend to such a complete darkness, such complete isolation, all exposed. That's where you most need your covering, your carapace. That's where you most need to know how to hide, because not only is it unbearable to expose yourself to such agonies, it is also pointless, it wears you away and leaves you - nothing (184).

The death of Monisha brings Nirode and Amla, his younger sister into knowledge of their bond. Both of them realize the importance of feeling, love and communication, caring and reaching out to others. Amla feels that Monisha's death had pointed the way for her and would never allow her to lose herself. She knew

that she would go through life with her feet primly shod. She would involve herself in her drawings and with safe people like Bose, precisely because Monisha had given her a glimpse of what lay on the other side of this stark, uncompromising margin (248).

Even more revolutionary is the change in Nirode. The loss of a family member, especially the one who cares for him the most both physically and emotionally, brings him to the knowledge of human value. He resolves now to care for the ones who are living, chiefly Amla and the other members of the family. Desai describes the condition of Nirode, sitting with his sister and aunt, watching over Monisha's body till morning:

He seemed unable to remain still or silent, he was filled with an immense care of the world that made him reach out, again and again, to touch Amla's cold hand when he saw it shake, or embrace the old woman in the battered wicker chair when he saw her weep. He pressed them to him with his own, which till now had been agonisingly neglected. There was no much he wanted to tell them - to reassure them that no outrage had been committed, that Monisha had died from an excess of caring, in a fire of care and conscience, and that they too must accept, with a like intensity, the vigilance of heart and conscience, allowing no need of

indifference or incomprehension to drift by, but seize each moment, each person, each fragment of the world, and reverence it with that acute care that had driven Monisha to her splendid death (248).

For Nirode, the way of attaining his survival of the self comes with his caring for others, and not by withdrawal and isolation. It is only by avoiding his mythic ideals of solitude and rejection, and by accepting instead the realistic attitude of communication and involvement that he finally attains a wholeness, a unity of body and soul, an understanding of life's grand design. As Desai describes him, he felt himself elevated to an unimaginably high vantage point from where he could see the whole fantastic design of life and death. This lucidity made him transparent, allowing night and sorrow to merge with his own ecstasy, till everything became one, became unified, and understandable. He had listened to silence, till out of silence music had sprung (249).

Desai values the question of human development through the process of choice and action. Her novels give the idea that survival cannot be forced upon oneself. One has to know that he exists. He has to create his self-identity by himself. He has to be responsible for his acts of free choices. The degree of

such realization differs from person to person. Every individual is not an enlightened soul. Although the individuals realize the truth, the degree of realization does vary considerably.

The study of her novels also reveals her idea of true survival as innate in lasting relationship between myth and realism, between poetic vision and phenomenal truth. She is in favour of authentic living that comes out of a realization of the value of communication and a balanced relationship between the two worlds. Her characters ultimately subordinate their mythic imagination to moral vision in order to attain survival. She values a realistic approach to life. This refers to an interest with life and acceptance of responsibility. It also refers to the fact that a glorious past is nothing but a myth which cannot be regained. The idea of achieving some kind of mythic retreat from the burdens of reality, no matter how attractive, is rejected by Desai in her novels.

The way of attaining true survival is therefore, not by withdrawal and isolation, but through involvement with others. Call for a heart to heart communication leads most of her characters to social survival. Many characters like Amla, Nirode, Bim or Deven try to give meaning to their existence through communication and responsiveness to others. She articulates her views that past and its memories have

to be met sensibly. Man has to be reconciled with reality. Turning away from the stark realities of life is not the solution of the torments of alienation. The ideal solution for human alienation is only by facing the tormenting situations of life with an openness to communicate, and transcending those situations by way of realization. Her idea of survival refers to the fact that one must accept the burdens of reality. Destroying myth in order to come into close contact with reality is thus one ideal survival for her characters. For many individuals myth and illusion has only intensified the torment of alienation. Those who adopt myth as an essential part of their survival are sooner or later frustrated, tormented and lost. But the ones, who recognize myth as unreal and unsupportive, have survived in order to face and conquer the indifferent environment that they live in.

Desai portrays her characters as attaining such survival through a process of search and growth. When some of them finally recognize the cavity or vacuity of their long cherished myth or fantasy, they come to a state of realization. In the vision of Anita Desai, the very realization of the truth leads to true survival. In *Bye-Bye Blackbird* Adit goes through various experiences before realizing his true self as an individual. The different phases of his character may be interpreted as the process of birth and rebirth. A sense of recognition of what he really aspires for and

what he really is comes to him only after his experience of alienation in London environment. After a visit to Sarah's parents, his attitude of life undergoes a radical transformation. A great change coupled with a sense of nostalgia begins to increase in him. His wistfulness assumes great proportions making him to feel stifled. He starts thinking himself as a stranger in London society. His innerself seems to be essentially Indian. His traumatic experience in a distant country allows him to realize what lies at the core of his being. He finds himself as an exile in an alien land, caught in a hostile milieu, torn between acceptance and rejection. He also perceives that his crisis of identity is the outcome of such alienation.

Initially, his recognition of such alienation works adversely on him. He gradually realizes the fact that even after a long stay in London, he still remains a misfit. He also realizes that the assimilation of another culture is difficult. His marriage with an English wife does not enable him to get rid of his feelings of uncertainty or humiliation in an alien land. His increasing sense of alienation with London makes him conscious of his deep-seated Indian tradition. The oriental Adit cannot fully become an English gentleman. Although he tries to adjust in other cultural realms, his self always remains alien to another. He becomes nostalgic about his homeland and longs to return and see something Indian, like "a slowly meandering creaking bullock cart... or a monkey-

wallah with his frocked and capped monkeys jingling the bells on their delicate ankles, or a marriage procession proceeded by a brass-band decked in marigold and tinsels" (87).

When Adit finally realizes his real self, he throws away the garb of his self-created myth of Englishness and accepts his original nature as an Indian, as a Bengali. Desai writes that his vowels had become short and sharp, his consonants long and hissing, as they had been when he had first arrived from India (230). He gradually moves from self-sufficiency to even more fretful isolation and loneliness in England. Ultimately he takes the decision to return to his homeland along with his wife. His self-awareness helps him to get rid of his illusion. He wants to escape the artificial life of London that he is living. He records that:

Little India in London. All our records and lamb curries and singsongs, its all so unreal... Whatever it is, it will be Indian; it will be my natural condition, my true circumstance (232).

The decision of Adit brings a great havoc and conversion in the spiritual or psychical disposition of Sarah, his English wife. In seeking his own self Adit is totally unaware of the loss of self that his

decision implies for Sarah. Previously, Sarah had tried to find solace in the myth of India: India of distant mysteries and uncommon wisdom. Her search for perfection in an Indian myth is shattered during her encounter with her Indian husband and his changing nature. She staggers between reality and unreality on her way of realization. But consequently she comes to know that India of her fantasy is fake and unreal. When Adit decides to return to India, she shudders in the beginning. She is unsure of her well being in an alien land. It seems that her identity would be lost in the taboo-ridden Indian society. But there is no loss of identity in her case. She is optimistic that at least in India she would have an identity. Adit's resolution brings her dilemma and quest to an end. Therefore she also accepts his decision and resolves to follow him to an alien land. Her final decision is not based on fantasy or myth. Her choice stems from a genuine belief in unity in diversity across different races and cultures. It is her spirit of openness which enables her to enter into a different culture and acquire a different self. She considers this as an adventure mixed with some regret. Her final decision translates her into a realist from a creature imprisoned by myths.

Such insight enables her to submit her personality and her interest in order to get accommodated in an alien land of different culture and tradition. It is not that she decides to follow her husband out of compulsion. She does so out of hope and courage that

she would be able to transcend the barrier of cultural and racial differences in order to establish her true identity. She comes to know that humanity is above racial or cultural barriers. She also realizes the meaning of difference in an alien situation. In other words, she is not alienated by her difference from the other in her alien future. The very insight enables her to cope with the unknown realities of life yet to come. Desai portrays Sarah as being transformed from a pitiable figure to a brave warrior, who is ready to battle with the ups and downs of life.

The novel traces the evolution of Adit and Sarah. There is significant moral and spiritual growth in Adit's rejection of England and Sarah's acceptance of India. Adit finally transforms from a mythical dreamer into a realist daring to face reality. His remark reveals his realization of the futility of his mythic quest. "All our records and lamb curries and singsongs, it's all so unreal. It has no reality at all. We just pretend all the time" (204).

An urge for balanced relationship between objective reality and subjective truth also constitutes one important survival principle in the philosophical stance of Anita Desai. The other form of survival consists in man's return to himself, a journey within and knowing his self-potentialities in facing the absurdities of existence. Most of her characters mentally develop through delusion, fragmentation and

realization. These characters dare to live although their lives seem not worth living. There is a significant growth in age as well as in the awareness of her central characters. Their final realization suggests a kind of unification and consolidation of various levels of experiences.

The individual's return to the self by rejecting the myth of past is an essential phase of survival. Such idea of survival may be studied in *Where Shall We Go this Summer*. In order to escape the artificial life of Bombay, Sita escapes to the island of Manori. Her flight to the island is indicative of her wish to have eternal happiness or something passionate which does not belong to this world. When she comes to stay in Manori, she perceives the vacuum hidden within her. She also realizes her liability for her life. She gets ample time to examine herself in the island. It leads her to realize her true selfhood, her worth and self-identity. She also comes to know that the island of Manori is not a place of miracles that would enable her to achieve a marvel of evaporating the child in her womb. She learns that the island is no place for her refuge nor does it have any magic of its own. She finds that she has arrived "at the old house on the once Magic Island to find the past all burnt to white ashes" (37). She gets no magic prevalent there, and she begins to sense that the magic had long since gone. She also feels that the 'pastoral haven' her father had

supposedly created on the island was a myth in the most literal sense of the world. Thinking back to the first time she had ever glimpsed the island when she had first arrived there with her father, she feels that even then she had sensed that there was no perfect magical retreat where one could escape from the realities of life. Desai describes the magic of the island only as a myth and illusion that Sita has to break with:

She saw the island as a piece of magic, a magic mirror - it was so bright, so brilliant to her eyes after the tensions and shadows of her childhood. It took her some time to notice that this magic, too, cast shadows (63).

Since the island of Manori fails to provide her with a proper meaning of her existence, she feels herself as much alienated and frustrated there as in the society. The rugged road and bullock cart, the grove and the fields only reveal the ravages of time to her. She does not find any key to unlock the magic of the past glory there. She realizes that the magic or the illusion itself is a mere fraud. She comes to the knowledge that an 'immaculate conception in reverse' is impossible. Finally she admits that there was no magic here - the magic was gone (112).

When the myth of the magic island is shattered, Sita gradually begins to feel the warmth of family love and responsibility. She finally comes to the knowledge of her own insufficiency, which she tries to bridge and also to correct. She realizes that running away from the realities and responsibilities of life is not the answer to her problem. Though she feels sorry for her lost childhood, which she identifies as her self or the whole, yet she admits her escape to the island in order to stay whole was an act of cowardice. She also feels that she has a natural concern about her husband's troubles. This leads to free flow of affection between the two. She now starts worrying about Raman's problems:

His boys at home must have worried him, while he was at work in the factory, which was not without its problems either - he looked worn, much older than his years. Nor could he stay here, resting, as she was doing (138).

Such great transformation in Sita does not develop out of mere compulsion or her duty-consciousness. It develops through her knowledge of the futility of her long-cherished myth of 'Miracle Island'. It is the result of a realization of her self-potentiality to live along without any illusion. It enables her to challenge and reject the lure of a mythic past in order to re-enter the present and future. There are no easy

solutions to life's problems. Running away from responsibilities will certainly not solve any problem. When Raman comes to take Menaka and Karan back to Bombay in time for school, she realizes the worth of his critical realist mode of life. When he persuades Sita to get to a hospital, she accepts his proposal. She thinks that Raman is full of balance and moderation:

He never hesitated - everything was so clear to him, and simple: life must be continued, and all its business - Menaka's admission to medical college gained, wife led to hospital, now child safely brought forth, the children reared, the factory seen to, a salary earned, a salary spent. There was courage, she admitted to herself in shame, in getting on with such matters from which she herself squirmed away, dodged and ran. It took courage. That was why the children turned to him, sensing him to be the superior in courage, in leadership (139).

She also realizes the importance of a balanced relationship between the ideal and the real. It is when a sense of balance is lost that things go wrong. The very realization brings Sita into her survival with awareness. She decides to return to the world of social responsibility, along with her husband and children.

When she returns home, she does not need any illusion to survive now. She now becomes able to reconstruct her links with life. She resumes her life in symbolic manner by taking a ritualised mud bath, and tries to get over her isolation by learning to laugh.

Sita's struggle and realization represent the rebellion and recognition of a rational and responsive woman against the social conceit. Her final return to normal life does not suggest her compromise with a routine life. It indicates her good sense and courage to fight back the teasing uncertainty of life. When she finally understands the value of Raman's practical wisdom, she decides to accept life with its reality. She comes to an affirmative conclusion that there is no freedom and fulfilment without involvement. She also becomes conscious of the knowledge that purely subjective vision does not suffice in giving her a true identity. She also realizes her inability to establish a rapport with subjective reality and her self-created illusion. When she comes to the grasp of such knowledge, she rises above her self-created illusion. She attains her true identity by keeping a deep faith in life and on its blessings. Her newfound positive attitude towards life and its responsibility gives her true survival.

The character of Sita can be related to the character of Anita Desai herself. Both the characters

are seekers of perfection and truth. Both have a deep faith in life and individuality. The following statement that Desai makes in an interview with Atma Ram reflects her life-affirming faith in human spirit. She refers to her protagonist Sita in these words:

If one opts for life, one must compromise with it like Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Drawing a line means certain death (1983).

Desai's sense of survival also demands that every conscious individual should be free from all bondages and controlling agents; both natural and supernatural, and at the same time arouse in oneself a sense of self-independence and self-sufficiency. Her purpose is not only to portray the conditions that alienate individuals from one another, but also to indicate those situations that create and strengthen a sense of freedom, which would enable the individuals to make independent choices. In her vision, all the selections and decisions are to be made by the individual himself and should crop out of one's own inner conscience and realization. Most of her characters also rebel against social and universal absurdities. For Desai, struggle for survival becomes one kind of remedy adopted against universal absurdity and futility. Her characters seek equilibrium between soul and body, mind and matter, essence and existence.

Survival also refers to an authentic existence and integrated personality. Her imagination looks motivated by the possibility of finding new dimensions of survival against the malaise of modern life. A combination of myth and realism provides some solution to the problem of creating an authentic identity in the face of modern dilemmas. Idea of true survival thus remains in lasting relationship between myth and realism, poetic vision and phenomenal truth. Desai is in favour of authentic living that comes out of a realization of the value of communication and some reasonable relationship between the two worlds. Her novels finally subordinate her poetic and mythic imagination to a moral vision of life. She exalts individual awareness as to face life and take responsibility.

In *Fire on the Mountain*, Desai portrays Nanda Kaul as realizing the truth of her existence in the evening of her life. Although she tells fantastic stories of her childhood days and her father's great exploits in Tibet and her wonderful dreamlike childhood in Kashmir to her great granddaughter, yet she knows that she cannot return to her glorious past. When Raka asks her: Why did you come here... instead of going back to Kashmir? Nanda replies that one does not go back (93). She knows that if one cannot return to the past, one should move forward and face the present realities. Rejection of present and escape from the duties of life

is just an illusion. She also realizes the futility of her action in running away from the responsibilities of life in order to cherish an unreal world of myth.

When Nanda stays for quite some time in the lonely house of Carignano, she gets ample opportunities to look into herself. It helps her to realize a great void inside her. She had somehow tried to live peacefully there away from the great treachery and selfishness of her children and grandchildren. Still her painful memories of past do not let her peace to be undisturbed. She feels that her father had never been to Tibet. They had not had bears and leopards in their home. Nothing but overfed dogs and bad-tempered parrots were there. Her husband had not loved and cherished her and kept her like a queen. He had only done enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a life long affair with Miss David, the mathematics mistress. Her children were also alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them. Her attempts to captivate Raka were only a fabrication. They helped her to sleep at night. They were tranquillizers or pills (145).

Realization of such truth makes her to realize her hollow existence. It also helps her to wake up from disillusionments. She feels that her life in the mountain is nothing but a heap of lies, sorrows and painful memories. She becomes able to realize the vacuity of her fantasy. Although she cannot return to

her children with this realization, yet her recognition is worth considering. She comes to the conclusion that she is the master of her own life. With this knowledge, she stops blaming others for her misfortune. She also comes to the knowledge that revenge or resentment are not the ideal solutions for human alienation.

The novel also presents the theme of rebellion as an essential element of survival in the life of Raka. The little girl has grown more and more impatient with Nanda Kaul's fantasies and fabrications. She herself is only interested in the truth of things - stones, pinecones, solid objects. Finally she sets fire to that whole illusory world. She rebels against the social or familial oppression of a girl. Her setting fire to the mountain can be seen as an act of refusal to be submissive. It is also a protest against the structures of oppression which threatens her identity. This may be the authority of her family or of a larger institutional hegemony. Her reaction is to destroy and to deconstruct what has displayed the virgin mountain forest.

Desai never seems to conclude this novel in a conventional manner. When asked about Nanda's death, Desai replies that she never meant the book to end in suicide or even in death. "I'm perfectly ambivalent about the ending myself. I have no idea what happens to Nanda Kaul I don't visualize her end. It's over for me

with the fire" (Johae, 41). If Nanda Kaul is not dead, there is every possibility for her to recover something from the ashes of the burnt-out landscapes. Her attempt is now to shatter those falsifying images and myths that she had kept in order to escape from the torments of alienation. She draws a line between illusion and truth, myth and reality. Carignano, the mountain of solitude is a myth to her. She seeks a getaway from the stark realities of life by escaping into illusion. But her final realization helps her to transcend such myth. She is now willing to come in contact with real life. Her survival gives a different meaning to her alienation.

Bim in *Clear Light of Day* embodies Anita Desai's vision of the new Indian woman, who longs for an independent and self-supporting life. She refuses to play the usual role of a docile wife and attempts to be a truly liberated woman. Unlike many traditional girls, she refuses marriage and opts for the life of a spinster in order to follow the career of her choice. She gracefully accepts her way of life despite its limitations. The novelist has portrayed her ascending from one level of understanding to another one. She undertakes a kind of journey from ignorance to experience and then to self-realization, from where she has every opportunity to proceed towards self-knowledge and wholeness.

Bim ventures to achieve her childhood vision of becoming a heroine. She truly follows her dream and her ideal. She gladly pays the heavy price required for her search by giving up the contentment of a married life. She plays the roles of Florence Nightingale and Joan of Arc within the confines of her family. When she was young, she nursed her brother Raja who was down with tuberculosis and looked after her ailing aunt with the utmost care and devotion. She is disappointed when aunt Mira dies and Raja deserts her apparently with a view to achieving his own dream. But she spends her declining youth devotedly looking after Baba, her brother, who needs her till his last breath. Thus Bim, unlike Raja, achieves victory in realising her dream. Although the betrayal of Raja haunts her, she constantly tries to organize herself into some sort of order and happiness. She works her way out through the maze of loneliness and torment. Her routine life of teaching at college comes to be of great help in maintaining her sanity. Her fortitude helps her to be a normal being against all odds. Such a heroic attempt transports her from a wretched creature to a brave warrior.

Bim looks for her spiritual survival in forgiveness and love. Her alienation and quest are suggestive of her journey to transcend the past. The main theme of the novel is thus the renewal of the self or seeing the light or knowing the truth. She finally

takes in the unbreakable bond among the family members. She also knows that her approach towards life was an extreme one and her familial love was fragmented. She now wishes more than anything to recover that wholeness. The following lines from the novel underline the maturity and fulfilment of her consciousness:

Although it was shadowy and dark, Bim could see as well by the clear light of day that she felt only love and yearning for them all, and if there were hurts, these gashes and wounds in her side that bled, then it was only because her love was imperfect and did not encompass them thoroughly enough and because it had flaws and inadequacies and did not extend to all equally (165).

She dismisses every jealousy, guilt, revenge and anguish. In dismissing these feelings, she also throws out from herself a past of hatred and bitterness. When such recognition dawns upon her, she feels unburdened. She also realizes that Raja is not a hero but only an imitator. She realizes that she had clothed him in a hero's mantle by mistake. She feels illuminated as if all the debris accumulated from the past has been cleared. She attains new awareness, and her self-knowledge makes her crumple and discard the false romantic image of Raja.

It is not only a moment of realization but also one of reconciliation. For her, it is a rare moment of illumination. She clears the dreadful debris of the past by tearing off the papers and letters, including the offensive and unpardonable letter of Raja in a forgiving state of mind. Her transition from hatred to love also indicates her transition from alienation to accommodation, from rejection to acceptance, from egotism to altruism. She makes an evaluation of her own self and rejects all that has hindered her growth into a truly liberated soul. Towards the end of the novel, she attends the music programme arranged at Misra's where Mulk's guru sings. She realizes that the only way to make her whole is to forgive and forget her grudges against her brother Raja and his unforgivable letter, and move into the future through present.

Bim attains a unity of the self by forgiving Raja and by making peace with her past. She realizes that she belongs to Raja, Tara and Baba, despite the gulf in between them. She attains self-knowledge, reflects upon her own unbreakable ties with her brothers and sister, and truly assesses the significance of time in relation to eternity. Such recognition of the past with all its myths and illusions lead her to wholeness. Myth and realism, past and present finally infuse. She is suddenly overcome with the memory of reading, in Raja's well-thumbed copy of Elliot's *Four Quarters*, the line:

'Time the destroyer is time the preserver'

Its meaning seemed to fall out of the dark sky and settle upon her like a cloak, or like a great pair of feathered wings. She huddled in its comfort, its solace. She saw before her eyes how one ancient school of music contained both Mulk, still an immature disciple, and his aged, exhausted guru with all the disillusionments and defeats of his long experience. With her inner eye she saw how her own house and its particular history linked and contained her as well as her whole family with all their separate histories and experiences—not binding them within some dead and airless cell but giving them the soil in which their roots, and food to make them grow and spread, reach out to new experiences and new lives, but always drawing from the soil, the same secret darkness. That soil contained all time, past and future, in it. It was dark with time, rich with time. It was where her deepest self lived, and the deepest selves of her sister and brothers and all those who shared that time with her (182).

Bimla's self-discovery thus lies in her love for all. At the time of this realization, she shows a flood of affection rising in her heart for everyone. She

sends a loving letter to Raja through Tara suggesting him to visit her and Baba, and also informing him that she would be waiting for him (176). She realizes that the very bitterness is a great burden and bondage for her to attend that state of independent being, self and sovereign. Her final act is not a duty. It is an act of selection and decision which is done in total freedom. She draws out that forgiveness from her own within after contemplating and reviewing her whole past. When she forgives Raja, she becomes totally independent both from within and without. She holds neither hope nor despair of Raja's return to home. But she lives as independent and responsible for her choices and decisions. This is truly an awakened freedom of choice that Desai bestows upon Bim.

Desai disregards her characters as being simply representatives or cardboard creatures. She herself has confessed: "I don't like to generalize about my characters: for me they are individuals, and an individual acts out of her own impulses" (Johae, 39). She talks of spiritual freedom more than social freedom. The main issue is the question of knowledge of the self. Her characters are not lunatics or idiots. They are the ones whose thoughts and behaviours are beyond mental calculations and above rational assumptions. They are guided by intuition and not by mere intellect. They are the examples of wisdom who press on to spiritual freedom disregarding all material

comforts and social approval. They are conscious and capable of transcending the torments of alienation by way of their personal quest and realization. In her melioristic vision of life, people can come in contact even in their differences of mind and culture.

Deven Sharma, the protagonist of *In Custody*, disregards his material comforts and social approval of the life of a lecture before his higher ideal of poetic truth. He wants to transcend his ordinary life through creating a literary masterpiece by publishing a book on Nur. Desai does not discredit his quest for higher ideals. But she discredits his idea of mythicising Nur, whom Deven worships as a hero or as a poetic legend. Nur is only an old man tormented by financial needs and social problems. But Deven glorifies his existence. Desai tries to show such kind of human folly as overstatement or fantasy. To do away with all sorts of myths and fantasies and find the truth within self is the final message of this novel.

Deven journeys through fantasy and ignorance to struggle and realization. The novel shows a significant broadening of the horizon of the views and ideas of Anita Desai. Deven's sufferings pave the way for his quest and realization. He finally realizes the vainglory of Nur as a poetic legend. He also comes to know the folly of his desperate quest in finding meaning in the vanity of the so-called great poet:

But what vainglory it had been to try to find and entry into Nur's world - the world of drama and revolving lights and feasts and furies; how inadequate he had proved to its demands and expectations. No, all he could measure up to was this - this shabby house, its dirty corners, its wretchedness and lovelessness. Looking around it, he felt himself sag with relief and gratitude. At the same time his shoulders drooped in defeat (67).

Initially he is swayed by the idea of creating a work of lifetime. Consequently he finds himself defeated by his own helplessness. Since his very being is capable of realization, a clear awareness of universal betrayal and recognition of human limitation do help him to break away from the present wasteland and to move towards genuine understanding of the totality of life. He realizes that his final and true identity lies in his attempt to reconcile his subjective vision with world and its demands. This enables him to achieve an openness to look at things as they really are.

As a keen artist, Anita Desai never brings her views into focus abruptly. As she believes in the process of becoming, she lets her characters evolve

through the process of choice and action, failure and success before their final realization. Deven Sharma also as an individual, amply evolves into maturity and realization. His self-discovery at the final moment of crisis is neither abrupt nor incredible. A close analysis of his character shows that he is not one of those self-alienated individuals, who lack the capacity to feel and cope with life. He is not the one who yearns to express himself but feels incapacitated. He has, no doubt, his share of intense conflicts. But he possesses the talent to get out of his dilemmas with the help of self-analysis and self-awareness. His transformation is effected through an aesthetic experience. "The new Deven at the end of the novel is transformed from illusion into reality.

Anita Desai considers human relationship marked by a healthy communication as an essential element of survival. In her vision, an individual cannot survive when he becomes utterly devoid of purpose. He cannot stay whole when he keeps himself totally cut off from every religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots. He needs some place to stand and some roots to nourish him. Desai brings into focus an existential survival of Hugo Baumgartner in her novel *Baumgartner's Bombay*. After being rejected from everywhere, Hugo comes to know that although he desires to befriend all, yet he belongs nowhere. The realization of such nowhere-ness occurs to him in the concentration camp, "where he had

been and what he had been doing before his arrest, what he would do after his release himself" (109). But even after such experience, he establishes relationships and communication. He pets sick and homeless cats. He cares for Lotte and Kurt, the two unfortunate Germans. He makes lifelong friendship with Chimanlal, and goes to horserace with him. He realizes that human relationships safeguard against the torment of universal alienation. Although he meets indifferent and hostile people, he does not stop being friendly to them. He realizes that the only thing which can sustain his life is human relationship.

In the vision of Desai, the sense of alienation points towards knowledge and brings about realization. As Desai is more concerned with being or realization than achievement or goal, a mere carrying on of life is not a true survival for her. Survival should be meaningful, insightful and deep. It refers to doing away with the false peace and unreal security. Considering this way, those who opt for myth or fantasy, do not actually survive. Their illusion is never transcended; they never come out of their private cells to communicate with the other. Their survival is only a servile one, a selfish participation with unreality. True survival lies in subjective vision rather than in objective reality. Through her character portrayals Desai professes that life is not an object that can be explained in words. Life itself is a

paradox and human beliefs are ambivalent. But this incomprehensibility is not confusion. Rather it is a possibility of human mind to search beyond peripherals, to jump outside phenomenal reality and enter into the realm of Truth.

Knowledge of the self is thus the final survival that the characters of Anita Desai attain. To know is to be awakened. To know that one is to be alienated from the other is to realize the truth of one's being. To destroy the illusion means to come out of darkness into the light. This refers to the understanding of alienation and transcending the torments of alienation. Most of her characters experience alienation and come to learn and grapple with its meaning and significance in their lives. It is their wisdom and enlightenment that elevates their sense of dignity and human value. They learn to accept life with the help of their knowledge. From alienation they move on to a quest for self-identity through their struggle with life. By learning more about themselves, they come to realize their own existential situations. They confront it physically and spiritually through their understanding about life. Herein Desai's characters come to learn the lessons of survival, which has multiple aspects - physical, economic, moral, social, and primarily the existential.

CONCLUSION and SUMMING UP

In ten minutes how can I sum up
This life, this voyage on uncharted
Sea, this flight over radarless ports
This endless worship at plundered shrines
This love transformed into mere pain and
This emptiness that hangs from brackets
Of withered arms, the strangers who have
Come to wipe my tears, the oyster's ache
For the pearl it has lost, the scent of talc on
Baby-skin tended three decades ago
Still lingering on. Change the world with
Rhetoric? Never; cynicism
Takes the driver's seat for time perhaps
Personified as stillness, all its
Fury gelled, tanned. Life spreads its moulting
Wings to sicken me but do not judge
Me harshly, I am your kith and kin
I gathered your laments into a song.

(Kamala Das: *Summing Up*)

So far we have discussed the themes of alienation and quest, self and the other, ignorance and knowledge, past and ancestry of the characters woven into the very fabric of the novels of Anita Desai. As her strength lies in her ability to speak in many voices, she exposes her sensibility to the diverse facets of life. Her novels become the portrayals of searching souls, humanized by pain and turbulence. In the perspective of her novel, search is related to survival and its recognition is the condition for the defence of individual awareness and realization.

An overall critical perspective on Desai explores certain basic notions of literature and literary reading. We can read her works in varied ways in order to get a variety of things. An empirical reading of a work, as to agree with Jeremy Hawthorn, "can generate a range of different reading experiences, over time, between cultures and groups, (or within them) and even for the same individual, leads necessarily to the question of the status and authority of these different reading experiences" (1994, 240). Although it seems difficult to read her novels from every literary perspective, yet we can briefly explore the various facets of the writings of Anita Desai.

The themes of alienation, quest and survival has brought about great revolution in the spiritual

evolution of her characters. Her novels portray man as a stranger in an indifferent, if not actually hostile world. Yet the very sense of alienation paves the way for his quest for identity, consequently leading to realization of the self. It also helps him to recognize his self as different entity from the rest of the world. In this way Desai uses the idea of alienation in two senses - alienation as a deterioration of the self and alienation as a way to a realization of the self. Alienation also makes room for self-dignity and the separate identity of individual. It can be understood as a process of bringing man into a unity within himself. Such alienation can be characterized as self-differentiation and self-identification of the individual.

Anita Desai shows her characters fighting against the alienating conditions of their life. Some of them are caught up in the dilemma whether to create a mythic world or to accept the burdens of reality. Creating an isolated and mythic world remote from the unpleasant realities of life is not a mere escapist indulgence. Situations arise in human life when one likes to transcend reality. Such attempt of transcending reality is mighty psychic effort which proves how chained and tied we are and how desperately we long for freedom from the mundane. Her novels point towards infinite possibilities and the dynamic growth of humanity through the independent act of choice. Their great

struggles to transcend time and space, and the chains of confined life can be considered symbolical of human efforts in transcending the shackles of tradition and to plunge into new unexplored regions of experience.

Most of her characters try to give meaning to their existence through communication and involvement with others. When some of them finally recognize the cavity of their long cherished myth or fantasy, they come to a state of realization. Desai seriously considers the enduring human condition against human destiny through her characters that are essentially existential in nature. They exercise their free will trying to define themselves by their actions, both conscious and unconscious. Although the freedom of choice does not offer them much hope, yet their exercise of freedom makes them appear courageous and meaningful, leading to immortality. They grow and develop through their acts of individual choices. The thematic development of their mental experience can be traced through the three stages of self-delusion, fragmentation and finally visionary intuition. They journey from ignorance to knowledge, from alienation to quest and finally to survival. The sense of mutability and their capacity to know and realize make them capable of transcending the torments of alienation.

Characterization is a significant feature of Anita Desai. She chooses to analyse exceptional characters in

exceptional circumstances. According to herself her aim is 'to express the truth or the final essence of subjective life and consciousness' (Kumar 84). Her characters display significant vigour and variety. They may be considered as higher human species, gifted with deeper emotional and artistic powers. They are conscious of their individuality and refuse to conform to the mundane reality of life. Mostly rooted in some infinite experience, they suffer from a kind of obsession. Their awareness or sensitivity in both physical and mental faculty leads them to several dilemmas. They attempt to know themselves and in the process undergo revolution leading to self-realization.

Anita Desai adds depth to her works by introducing deep and subtle themes. Most of her characters are shown as working for communication and perfect wisdom. She presents her important characters as realizing the worth of communication and communion in life, the principle of getting involved and working for higher goals. As a conscious artist, she works with care and caution building her plots and people so as to produce the result she has in her mind. She also attempts to bring into play the subconscious and unconscious of her characters. We can trace a string of thought working in her writings, the most abiding point of her mind and art being a process of growth, which adds to the philosophical depth and psychological insight to her novels.

The problem of existence is faced and discussed but not solved. Even after the quest and realization existence still remains inexplicable and indifferent. But her characters are shown as achieving true knowledge and also courage to survive on the higher plane of understanding. Desai presents them as recognizing the true nature of their existence after a long ordeal of search and research. They also realize that nature is not actually hostile though it appears to be irrational and indifferent. Nature and man have parallels, if not unity between them. Once the individual realizes the true nature of the universe as indifferent and inanimate, he can develop the right methods of dealing with it. It is futile to aspire something from an inanimate object. Desai seeks to break down the illusion that nature is a nursing mother or a benevolent guide. She does not consider it as being step-motherly either. Nature has not been considered friendly or hostile, but as an object. Since nature plays quite insignificant role in individual growth, the sole responsibility comes upon the individual. Desai not for a single moment considers nature as responsible for human becoming.

Desai also hints at her cosmopolitan view through her character portrayals. In her view, an enlightened mind may become the meeting-point of east and west. Through her mother she inherits European tradition

characterized by cosmopolitanism. The inheritance from father's side may be explained on the level of broad nationalistic and philosophical concern coupled with altruistic motives. She disallows culture and race in its extreme force. Her characters opt for interracial or intercultural coexistence in order to achieve their survival. The search for cosmic culture as a remedy for cultural alienation is often seen in their survival. Since they maintain a resilience of spirit and great dreaming capacity they consequently come to know that concepts of western dominance or eastern supremacy are false. It is the superiority of the self or primacy of the spirit that leads to human dignity and spiritual survival. They also recognize their liability to create justice, order and unity which they have sought in vain in social orders. Such realization creates an effort to create their own cherished values and order on the path of their survival.

Anita Desai brings a new dimension to Indian English fiction. Instead of delineating her characters in terms of environment or social milieu, she creates them as individuals, solely responsible for their being and becoming. Instead of merely telling a story, she seems more interested in character analysing, where the plots play secondary role. The environment too is presented as important only in so far as it helps the readers in understanding the characters. Her plots are

sketchy and thin, yet these are sufficient in conveying her idea of survival.

Desai uses the technique of interior monologue in most of her novels yet the universal observer technique is still predominant. The device of interior monologue or loud thinking is frequently used to convey the mental states of the characters. In *Cry the Peacock*, the story is narrated in the mixed technique of omniscient third-person narrator and also the first-person narrative. In *Voices in the City*, third person universal technique is employed except in Monisha's account of her own dilemma in documentary diary technique. The stream of consciousness technique is used to supplement plot, characterization and also the style. She exploits memory flash device in order to transcend the past, present and also the future. *Baumgartner's Bombay* is written in stream of consciousness technique. In *Journey to Ithaca*, both the techniques of omniscient third-person narrative and memory device are employed. Her latest novel, *Fasting, Feasting* is exclusively written in third-person narrative, yet the stream of consciousness technique is frequently touched upon. The employment of interior monologue, the extreme inwardness in characterization, refutation of phenomenal reality and justification of sensible and delicate feelings, and her attempts at psychoanalytical studies of the principal characters are some of the main features of her fiction writing.

She uses sensitive, highly responsive, rich and dynamic language in her novels. It also displays high-strung lyricism and poetry. Her vocabulary is often elevated and demonstrative of her capabilities.

Even in the midst of success and appraisal, her art is not without limitation. Most of her characters hail from the upper middle class of Indian society, whose problems are not social or economical, but psychological or spiritual. The ordinary problems of day-to-day life are rarely touched upon. Her sole interest becomes exploring the workings of the minds of the middle class people, who have nothing to worry about for a four square meal. Her concern of revealing the inner working of consciousness not always interests the reader. Her vision is confined to the life of cities, where external details are few and far between. Since her range of vision is constricted to the serious life spectacle, humour and comedy are yet far from her fiction world. Therefore, it is erroneous to take Anita Desai as a finished writer. She is not complete but only sailing through the core of her literary career with an immense possibility of a mighty advance. Despite such limitations, her works still evoke sustaining thoughts vital for humanity.

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