

THE WOMAN QUESTION IN ANITA DESAI
A Study of Her Novels

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For my wife and children

PREFACE

For centuries, women have been denied justice – social, economic, political and constitutional and largely devalued as ‘the second sex’. According to Simon de Beauvoir, ‘one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman ... it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature’ (Simon de Beauvoir 1949, Rept. 1987 : 295). The mid-twentieth century saw the upsurge of the new awareness about women’s marginalization, resulting in the birth of Women’s Liberation Movement that professes ‘ personal is political.’ Its politics was directed at changing the power relations between men and women in the existing society. Literature, as a discursive practice, does not remain unaffected but explores the ‘Woman Question ’ extensively and vociferously. In recent times feminist scholarship participates in the large efforts to liberate women from the structures that have marginalized them and as such it seeks not only to reinterpret the world but to change it.

Anita Desai, an outstanding postcolonial woman writer, articulates her deep concern over women’s victimization in her works. Her multicultural affiliation enables her to imagine and convey the battle between the sexes artistically in the postcolonial condition. In all her novels published during the period from 1963 to 1999, which this dissertation seeks to study in Foucauldian feminist perspectives, Anita Desai resurrects ‘ the subjugated knowledges’ of different Third-world and western women seen against the background of a patriarchal capitalist society. In resurrecting ‘the subjugated knowledges’, Anita Desai, like a genealogist, locates many discontinuous individual women’s struggles against different forms of power in patriarchal capitalist societies. In their struggles they are made either to take different positions of resistance or negotiate in power relations. The struggles are mainly organized from two strategic positions : appropriation and abrogation. As a corollary of this, the female protagonists selectively appropriate and abrogate different social institutions and cultural practices to serve their personal ends. The protagonists are neither selfless, passive and docile nor conventional and traditional, rather they are equipped with oppositional consciousness and even sometimes endowed with a vision of an alternative world. She can be therefore said to have effected an ‘insurrection of subjugated

knowledges' thereby positing herself as a postcolonial feminist novelist with a vision of women's sub-culture that underlines a bond of mother-daughter in opposition to an aggressive patriarchal culture and prefers multiculturalism to a purely national one.

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INTRODUCTION : POWER, DISCOURSE, SUBJECTIVITY : THINKING FEMINISM THROUGH FOUCAULT

“Discursive practices”, for Foucault, ‘are rules, systems and procedures which constitute and are constituted by, our will to knowledge” (Foucault in D.F. Bouchard (ed.) 1977 : 199). In this sense, Feminism, which now exists in multiple forms, can be treated as a discursive practice because the recent emphasis on ‘difference’ has led it to discursive struggles over the construction of meaning of the subject ‘woman’. The women are not only different from men, they are also different from one another by class, race, caste, religion, sexual practice and so on. Again, many of the factors that divide women also unite some women with some men – factors such as racial or cultural or religious. From this it appears that the issues of difference create problems in conceptualizing the subject ‘woman’. However, women have been conceptualized in quite a few different ways. Firstly, they have been the objects of our male gaze. Secondly, they are seen as actors and subjects, but only accepting male prerogative in decisions. Thirdly, they be viewed living within the patriarchal ideological structure without the power of articulation. Finally, they can be viewed as individuals or members of a group living in an open-ended discursive field, exercising as agency or resistance in power relations. The last one is my preferred position because there is a relationship between language and power. The power of phallogocentric discourse is not total, rather, as Foucault says, discourse is ambiguous and plurivocal. It is a site of conflict and contestation. Women can adopt and adapt language to their own ends. They may not have total control over it but then neither do men. Choice, chance, and power govern their relationships to the discourses they employ.

Now the problem is what sort of subjectivity is to be ascribed to women? To resurrect the Cartesian subject in another form is to engage in a perpetuation of the oppressive effects

of an epistemology based on the principle of a clear and unambiguous distinction of subject and object in knowledge. It is not only that the subject / object dualism relegates women to an inferior position, but also all dichotomies are hierarchical. Therefore, they should be replaced by knowledge that is pluralistic. In such a vision the subject remains, because as long as we acknowledge the existence of consciousness and language itself, we have to retain the notion of subject. But this subject is radically different from the Cartesian subject-knower-actor, not merely a reconceptualization of it. The very dichotomy is now challenged by a postmodernist argument that knowledge is not some abstraction created from the process of an autonomous subject, working on a separate object, rather knowledge, along with subject and object, is constituted through discourse in power relations. The dichotomy is also challenged by a tenet that knowledge is in no case unitary and acquirable through one correct method, rather it is plural and heterogeneous, with truths being the norm, not truth. Recognition of this leads us to a situation where we cannot replace men's truth with women's truth, men's voice with women's, or subject presently constituted with a new subject differently constituted.

Anyway, in the first instance we may resist the dualism by paying attention to Foucault who has rejected the 'philosophy of subject'. For Foucault, the subject is simply an effect of power and in this sense he charts the death of the Cartesian subject whose existence depends on its ability to see itself as unique and as self-contained, distinct from others, because it can think and reason. By refusing to refer to the subject as a unitary being, Foucault is very much part of post-structuralist thinking which questions the very fundamental bases of liberal humanist ideology, rooted as it is in the notion of the individual self with agency and control over itself. Post-structuralist psychoanalytic theory questions the unity of the subject, finding it more useful to analyse the subject-in-crisis or the subject-in-process, that is, the disintegration of the notion of the unified subject. This focus on a range of shifting and precarious subject positions means that the subject is no longer seen to be in control. But Foucault goes further than these models of the self and tries to formulate a way of examining historical processes without relying on the notion of subject. However, some feminists turn away from Foucault's technique and try to define feminine sexuality in terms of essences and absolutes and thereby fall into the trap of

Enlightenment epistemology. Feminists should oppose discourse on sexuality that characterizes the modern episteme because it is a discourse that gives rise to the totalizing aspect of modern ideology and thereby defines women as passive objects without granting them the power of representation. Again, we cannot replace a masculine subject by a feminine subject. This is because doing so would not remove the essential dualism that characterizes modern, Eurocentric knowledge. What is needed is to conceptualize the category 'subject' itself differently. To continue with the dualism even while instituting a female subject that refuses domination by a male subject will not fulfil the feminist agenda of rescuing women from an unprivileged position in both knowledge and society.

So if the subject is not free, autonomous, rational, identifiable and predictable like modern western man, the question that arises is : how do we constitute an appropriate subject?

This we may do by adopting a Foucauldian approach, which consists of dispensing with the 'subject' in favour of 'genealogy'. As Foucault puts it :

One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that's to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework. And this is what I would call genealogy, that is, a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of the objects etc. without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history (Foucault 1980 : 117).

This genealogical method, as Foucault argues, is designed to facilitate 'an insurrection of subjugated knowledges' (Ibid : 81). By 'subjugated knowledges' Foucault refers to two things : historical contents that are obscured within functionalist histories and those forms of experience that fall below the level of scientificity. The latter, as Jana Sawicki observes, include 'the low-ranking knowledge of the psychiatric patient, the hysteric, the midwife, the housewife and the mother, to name only a few'. (J. Sawicki 1991 : 57). In addition, she argues that 'because this disqualified knowledges arise out of the experience of oppression,

resurrecting them serves a critical function. Through the retrieval of subjugated knowledges one establishes a historical knowledge of resistance and struggle'. (Ibid : 57)

Furthermore, Foucault's genealogical critique, as J. Sawicki observes, is 'not a theory of power or history in any traditional sense, but an anti-theory' (Ibid : 52) in that it adopts a skeptical stance towards the modern discourses on emancipation because of their claim to universal truth and to represent the Archimedian leverage point from which society might be moved. For a genealogist, no discourse is inherently liberatory or oppressive, it is a matter of historical enquiry. It is not the empirical claim that male domination has appeared in all societies, the naming of patriarchy, which a genealogist would resist, but the attempt to deduce it from a general theory and to privilege a single locus of resistance. Anyway, for a Foucauldian, as J. Sawicki observes, 'patriarchy is the name of a global effect of domination made possible by a myriad of power relations at the micro-level of society' (Ibid : 59)·

'Feminism', as Chris Weedon says, 'is a politics' (1987:1). If this be so, Foucauldian feminism has a politics, which, as Jana Sawicki observes, is the ' politics of difference ' (1991 : 28). In the ' politics of difference' all differences cannot be bridged, although the differences would not make any obstacle to effective resistance. However, for this politics, it must retain a subject, which would be unlike the unified one, rather it must be coterminous with its politics of difference. Here one may take note of the tension for feminist writing on account of the philosophical inability in the face of political need. As Sara Mills observes, 'the less clear the focus on the subject, the better for the feminist writing' (1997 : 102). This is because, as she argues, 'whilst within 1960s and 1970s the notion of the female self and the focus on the difference of female subjectivity was important, it has become clear that this self is produced at the expense of other less visible selves'(Ibid : 102).

Here it is pertinent to note that in many articles Foucault calls the self into question and proclaims the 'death of man ', since he is attempting to write history without the subject (that is, without the liberal humanist notion of a stable, cohesive ego). Rather than focusing on the self as a fragmented and unstable amalgam of the unconscious and the conscious,

Foucault sees the self as the effect of discursive structures, but which is not foundational in itself. Adapting Foucault, Sara Mills says that 'this more unstable notion of the self is one which has been exceptionally productive for current feminist theory in that it does not privilege one form of homogeneous self for a group, and neither does it assume that the subject positions which can be adopted by a particular group are adopted uniformly even by members of that specific group ... the adoption of certain subject positions is a type of action that has consequences' (1997 : 103). However, Jana Sawicki locates Foucault's notion of self 'in the relation model of identity which does not privilege one particular relationship as central to the identity formation, rather it highlights the many relationships through which individuals are produced' (1991 : 63).

But Nancy Hartsock, a leading feminist theorist and a prominent critic of post-structuralism, is suspicious of Foucault's moves to reject the subject and universal theories of history at a time when many marginal groups are finally breaking silence, rejecting their object status within dominant discourses, and constructing oppositional political subjectivities, theories and progressive visions of their own (Nancy Hartsock, in Linda J. Nicholson (ed.) 1990:163-64). However, employing a feminist revision of Marxian standpoint epistemology, she argues for the epistemic privilege of the feminist standpoint. Among the features that she identifies as essential to the revised theory are as follows :

First, rather than getting rid of subjectivity or notion of the subject, as Foucault does, and substituting his notions of the individual as an effect of power relations, we need to engage in the historical, political and theoretical process of constituting ourselves as subjects as well as objects of history ... second, ... if we are to construct a new society, we need to be assured that some systematic knowledge about our world and ourselves is possible ... Third, ... we need a theory of power that recognizes that our practical daily activity contains an understanding of the world ... 'a standpoint' epistemology based upon the claim that material life ... not only structures but sets limits on the understanding of social relations, and that, in systems of domination, the vision available to the rulers will be both partial and will reverse the real order of things (Ibid : 170 - 172).

However, in response to Nancy Hartsock's critique of Foucault, Butler, in a brilliant and imaginative effort, argues that feminist politics without a feminist subject is possible and desirable. She observes that the identity-based politics tends to assume that an identity must first be in place in order for political interests and actions. In other words, the pre-discursive 'I' is taken as the ground and support of the identity-based politics. In Nietzschean fashion, Butler argues that 'feminism need not assume that there is a doer behind the deed, but rather that the doer is invariably constructed in and through the deed'. (Judith Butler 1990:142). Despite this, she states that 'construction is not opposed to agency, it is necessary scene of agency'(Ibid :147) and thus counters the post-structuralist critics who posit that the subject discursively constituted precludes the possibility of agency. Furthermore, elaborating upon the Foucauldian view of the self, Butler describes identities as self-representations, 'fictions' that are neither fixed nor stable. The subject is not a thing, a substantive entity, but rather a process of signification with an open system of discursive possibilities. The self is a regulated, but not determined, set of practices. One such practice involves the reification of the subject itself. We have mistaken the self for a thing because of our participation in Cartesian and Hegelian discursive traditions, which postulate a subject/object dichotomy and identify liberation with the epistemological project of the subject's discovery of itself in the objective world. Following Heidegger, Butler challenges the Hegelian and Marxist tradition upon which Hartsock's feminist subject is drawn and links the subject / object dichotomy with an instrumental rationality that leads to domination of the Other.

However, Butler recommends that the feminists should consider the epistemological account of identity more as one possible discursive practice and that it should not serve as the adjudicator of all other possibilities. In her view, discursive practices that construct gender are rule-governed structures of intelligibility that both constrain and enable identity formation. What post-modern conception of agency Butler finds within the view of subject as a regulated practice of signification is, according to Jana Sawicki, the liminal types, which include the 'assertive females', 'effeminate men', 'the lipstick lesbian' and 'the macho gay'. (J. Sawicki in Gary Gutting (ed.) 1994 : 301). In Sawicki's view, these are all figures – lived realities, 'subjugated experiences' – that lie outside the hegemonic gender

norms, challenge its coherence and stability, and prefigure other identities – perhaps, other genders. Thus it is clear that Foucault does not deny that feminists can or should constitute themselves as subjects as Harstock alleges, for, as J. Sawicki observes, ‘this is unavoidable’ (Ibid : 301). What is questioned by Foucault is the foundationality of the subject.

Another post-structuralist feminist Donna Haraway’s ‘Cyborg image’ (Donna Haraway in Linda J. Nicholson 1990 : 191) is Foucauldian in spirit because, as Jana Sawicki observes, ‘it responds to Foucault’s challenge to think beyond existing emancipatory traditions and categories’ (J. Sawicki in Gary Gutting 1994 : 295). The ‘Cyborg image’, which is a hybrid of machine and organism, defies categorization and takes pleasure in the fusion of boundaries (human-animal, human-machine, nature-culture) is premised on affinities or ‘political kinship’ in opposition to modern innocent origins and unified identity. Jana Sawicki observes that ‘it is an identity politics with a difference’ (Ibid : 245).

Again, Jana Sawicki salvages the practice of consciousness-raising from the remnants of humanist emancipatory politics. She finds the feminist practice of consciousness-raising not incompatible with Foucault’s genealogy. In some models, as she observes, the aim of consciousness-raising is simply to develop critical consciousness and a recognition of oppression, not to uncover an authentic and shared experience. Destabilization of identity is often the most profound effect of consciousness-raising, not the creation of a unified sense of self. This notion of consciousness-raising, according to J. Sawicki, is not unlike Foucault’s genealogy. Both are designed to challenge current self-understandings and to create space for new forms of subjectivity (Ibid. 307). But in Foucauldian feminism, Foucault’s emphasis on ‘self-refusal’ and ‘displacement’ could be risky in so far as it might undermine the self-assertion of oppositional groups and suppress the emergence of oppositional consciousness.

Now in order to handle the radical notion of difference we need a fresh perspective on power. To develop such a perspective we need to discuss Foucault whose conception of power fruitfully interrogates those of the liberals and the Marxists.

As Supriya Akerkar observes, 'Classical Marxists have always associated power with asymmetry, i.e., in a field of domination and subordination. Power is thought to be unidimensional and unidirectional, i.e., its flow is always thought to be from dominant to dominated. Power operates through ideological distortions. In this Marxian perspective, power works to distort knowledge in the interest of the dominant. This discourse thus regards power in a negative sense, that is power to repress. Power operates in a centralised and linear way. The notion of emancipation works with the notion of what ought to be, i.e., an ideal state to be reached' (EPW April 29, 1995, 10). Akerkar also observes that in this normative framework, the notion of empowerment works towards the redistribution of power, i.e., the attaining of certain equilibrium and symmetry. In other words, within this discourse, 'empowerment' means either giving more power to the dominated or taking off the power of the dominant so as to attain the symmetry. At the level of symmetry, there will be equal power for everyone, i.e., power will be zero-sum game. In our view, such a perspective on classical Marxian concept of power cannot facilitate our way of handling the radical notion of difference, since in such a perspective, every difference, in the final instance, is subsumed under the notion of symmetry. Though difference is granted only within an identity of class, yet this logic of identity actually suppresses and denies other differences.

Again, Gramsci, a post-Marxian, with his emphasis on multiple contradictions and antagonisms in the society, uses the concept of hegemony to show how power operates through these plurality of antagonisms and multiple social agents. Gramsci, using the concept of hegemony, shows that power operates through the consent of the oppressed, through a whole range of the ideological field of culture. The conception of hegemony makes power dependent upon a mutual recognition, i.e., consent cannot always be a fabrication. In other words, power does not work through crude coercion. Further, by arguing that hegemony works through culture, Gramsci opens up a struggle for cultural stakes. This leads to the following consequences :

- a) This formulation then argues for localisation of struggle since struggle has to be fought on concrete terrain of cultural representations.

- b) Hegemony calls for localisation of theory as no meta-theory can tell us how to conduct localised struggles over cultural representations.
- c) Hegemony refers to a notion of dispersed power instead of centralised power, since 'culture' in itself is a vast complex terrain, likened to a system of symbols, which enable us to give meaning to our life.

The above consequences, viz, localization of theory, localization of struggle and dispersion of power, show that Gramsci attempts to give 'difference' some centrality within his overall perspective of struggle. However, as Akerkar argues, 'this radicality of Gramsci too has its limits, insofar as he too argues for a vanguard party of proletariat, who alone will be able to lead the revolution' (Ibid : 10). Thus, although Gramsci gives a centrality to difference within his overall struggle perspective, he too, in the final instance, does not grant these struggles an autonomous existence as he argues that they be subsumed under the economic logic through which these different struggles retain their coherence. Thus, although Gramsci works with a dispersed notion of power, he, too, in the final instance, gives the working of power some kind of centralised status through the notion of revolution to be led by the proletariat. Gramsci's normative framework too provides us with a logic of symmetry, which in actuality suppresses the difference, in so far as the class identity, in the last instance, subsumes all other identities in the moment of symmetry.

But in a Foucauldian perspective, power operates in a dispersed fashion not through ideological distortions, but through different discourses with their claims to truths. As Foucault says, 'power is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable' (1978, trans 1990 : 93). In this understanding of power, empowerment ceases to be a simple redistribution of power or taking off the power from the oppressor because power can never be a zero-sum game. Since power emanates in the discursive articulations, there cannot be an apriori understanding of power as liberatory or repressive. In an open-ended discursive-field, one can negotiate or resist power, yet the existence of the relational character of power relationships depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence, as Foucault says, 'there is

no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt. Instead, there is a plurality of resistance, each of them a special case' (Ibid : 95-96). So in this perspective, multiple forms of resistance are privileged, instead of a single locus of resistance. Moreover, in this understanding of resistance, emancipation undergoes a radical change; instead of one form of emancipation, we may think of different forms of emancipation. From this position, a Foucauldian can argue that there can be no one privileged struggle or theory to control the forms of domination. In this sense, Foucauldian feminism is inclusive and pluralistic, yet, as Gayle Rubin and Jana Sawicki think, 'it will be a mistake to view feminism as capable of providing a total account of domination and oppression' (1991: 12).

Since the Foucauldian perspective on power emerges out of Foucault's 'analytics of power' and resistance, it is worthwhile to enumerate them vis-à-vis 'Juridico-discursive model of power'. The latter, according to Foucault, 'governs both the thematic of repression and the theory of law as constitutive of desire' (1978 trans. 1990:12). In Juridical system all modes of domination, submission and subjugation are ultimately reduced to an effect of obedience: a legislative power on one side and an obedient subject on the other side. But as Foucault observes, the juridical model of power is 'utterly incongruous with the new methods of power whose operation is not ensured by right but by techniques, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control, methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus' (Ibid : 89).

However, as Jana Sawicki observes, the Juridico-discursive model of power involves three basic assumptions (1991 : 20-21):

1. Power is possessed (for instance, by the individuals in the state of nature, by a class, by the people).
2. Power flows from a centralized source from top to bottom (for instance, law, the economy, the state).
3. Power is primarily repressive in its exercise (a prohibition backed by sanctions).

Foucault proposes that we should think of power outside the confines of state, law or class and locate forms of power that are obscured in the traditional theories based on the Juridico model. Thus he frees power from the domain of political theory in much the same way as radical feminists did. Rather than engage in theoretical debate with political theorists, Foucault gives historical descriptions of the different forms of power operating in our society. He does not deny that Juridico-discursive model of power describes one form of power. He merely thinks that it does not capture those forms of power that make centralised, repressive forms of power possible, namely, the myriad of power relations at the micro-level of society.

Foucault's model of power differs from the Juridico-discursive model of power in three basic ways:

1. Power is exercised rather than possessed.
2. Power is not primarily repressive, but productive.
3. Power is analysed as coming from the bottom up.

In what follows we shall elaborate Foucault's reasons for substituting his own theory of power for traditional theories of emancipation based upon Juridico discursive model.

1. Foucault claims that thinking of power as possession has led to a preoccupation with questions of legitimacy, consent and rights. (Who should possess power ? When has power overstepped its limits?) Marxists have made it further problematical by introducing a theory of ideology. Foucault dismisses this theory on three grounds : 'First, ideology always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth. Second, it refers to something of the order of subject. Third, ideology stands in a secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material' (1980:118). For these reasons, Foucault suspends any reference to humanistic assumption in his account of power. Moreover, he believes that humanism has often served more as an ideology of domination than liberation. This is why by focusing on the power relations

themselves, rather than on the subjects related (sovereign-subject, bourgeois-proletariat), he gives an account of how subjects are constituted by power-relations. Power is not so easily contained, but it, in the form of relation or action between people, is negotiated and never fixed or stable.

2. That subject is constituted by power relations brings us to the productive nature of power. Foucault is skeptical of the repressive model of power for two reasons. First, he thinks if power were merely repressive, then it would be difficult to explain how it has got such a grip on us. Why would we continue to obey a purely repressive and coercive form of power? Second, what makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. Thus Foucault emphasizes that the most effective mechanisms of power are productive. So rather than develop a theory of history and power based on the humanistic assumptions of a pre-social individual endowed with inalienable right (the liberal state of nature) or based on the identification of authentic human interest (Marx's species being), he gives an account of how certain institutional and cultural practices have produced individuals. These are the practices of disciplinary power.

Disciplinary power is exercised on the body and soul of individuals. It increases the power of individuals at the same time as it renders them more docile (for instance, the basic training in the military). In modern society disciplinary power has spread through the production of certain forms of knowledge, such as positivistic and hermeneutic human science, and through the emergence of disciplinary techniques such as techniques of surveillance, examination and discipline, which facilitate the process of obtaining knowledge about individuals. Thus, ways of knowing are equated with ways of exercising power over individuals. Foucault also isolates techniques found in medicine, psychiatry, criminology and their corresponding institutions, the hospital, asylum and prison. Usually the divisions like healthy/ill, sane/mad, legal/delinquent are experienced in the society at large in more subtle ways, such as in the practice of labeling one another or ourselves as different or abnormal.

For example, in *The History of Sexuality*, vol.1 Foucault has shown how modern individual has come to see herself as a sexual subject and how the dimensions of personal life are psychologized and have become a target for the intervention of experts. Again, Foucault has attempted to show how the discourses of psychoanalysis and the practices based upon them have played more of a role in the normalization of the modern individual than they have in any liberatory process. However, he calls for a liberation from this 'government of individualization', for the discovery of new ways of understanding ourselves and new forms of subjectivity.

3. Finally, Foucault thinks that focusing on power as a possession has led to the location of power in a centralized source. The Marxist location of power in a class, according to Foucault, has obscured an entire network of power relations 'that invests the body, sexuality, family, kinship, knowledge, technology ...' What is noteworthy is that Foucault does not deny the phenomenon of class (or state) power, but simply denies that understanding it is most important for organizing resistance. His 'bottom-up' analysis is an attempt to show how power relations at the micro-level of society make certain global effect of domination, such as class power and patriarchy. Moreover, Foucault's histories put into question the idea of a universal binary division of struggle. To be sure, such divisions do exist, but as particular and not as universal historical phenomena. Of course, the corollary of his rejection of the binary model is that the notion of a subject of history, a single locus of resistance, is put into question.

Despite Foucault's neglect of resistance in *Discipline and Punish*, in *The History of Sexuality* he defines power as dependent on resistance. Foucault speaks of power as dependent on resistance in the following terms :

Where there is power, there is resistance and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power (1978, trans 1990:95).

I'm not positing a substance of power. I'm simply saying: as soon as there's a relation of power there's a possibility of resistance. We are never trapped by power: it's always possible to

modify its hold, in determined conditions and following a precise strategy. (Quoted in J. Sawicki from Foucault 1980:13).

There are two claims in the above remarks. In the first claim, power relations are only implemented in cases where there is resistance. This means that power relations only arise in cases where there is conflict, where one individual or group wants to affect the action of another individual or group. In addition, sometimes power enlists the resistance forces into its own service. One of the ways it does this is by labeling them, by establishing norms and defining differences.

The second claim- 'wherever there is a relation of power it is possible to modify its hold'- is stronger than the first one. Foucault also states that 'power is exercised only over free subjects, and only in so far as they are free' (Foucault in J. D. Faubian (ed.) 1994:342). Free subjects are subjects who face a field of possibilities. Their action is structured but not forced. Thus Foucault does not define power as the overcoming of resistance. While restraining forces are overcome, power relations collapse into force relations. The limits of power have been reached. So while Foucault has been accused of describing a totalitarian power from which there is no escape, he denies that 'there is a primary and fundamental principle of power which dominates society down to the smallest detail' (ibid:345). Foucault rather describes the social field as a myriad of unstable and heterogeneous relations of power. It is an open system which contains possibilities of domination as well as resistance.

Now it would not be out of place to focus on Foucault's concept of 'bio-power' (1978, trans 1990:140). According to Foucault, 'bio-power' is unlike the sporadic violent power exercised over a relatively anonymous social body under the older monarchical forms of power. It emerged as an apparently benevolent, but peculiarly invasive and effective form of social control. Foucault says that this power over life evolved in two basic forms, which are not antithetical: disciplinary power and regulatory power. And in his view, 'this bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of Capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic

processes' (ibid:141). However, as Jana Sawicki argues, if bio-power was an indispensable element in the development of Capitalism insofar as it made possible 'a controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production', then it must also have been indispensable to patriarchal power insofar as it provided instruments for the insertion of women's bodies into the machinery of reproduction. And if claiming a right to one's body only makes sense against the background of these new life-administering forms of power and knowledge, then the history of modern feminist struggles for reproductive freedom is a key dimension of the history of bio-power (1991:68).

The recent feminist history of bio-power addresses the social and political implications of the emergence of new reproductive technologies. Both the Foucauldian and the radical feminists assume that new reproductive technologies pose dangers for women. They also regard these technologies as potentially insidious forms of social control. But while the radical feminists describe the relationship between patriarchal technologies and dominations as total, the Foucauldian feminists observe that the disciplinary technologies' control over women's body is not secured primarily through violence or coercion, but rather by producing new norms. This emphasis on normalization as opposed to violence accounts for why women willingly subject themselves to the patriarchal disciplinary model of power and how it has become effective at getting a grip on women.

However, the Foucauldian feminism not only tries to identify the ways in which new reproductive technologies threaten to erode women's power over their reproductive lives, but also tries to locate the potential for resistance in the current social field, that is, what Foucault refers to as 'subjugated knowledges'. This means that the Foucauldian feminism looks not only at the discourses of men who develop and implement the technologies, but also at the different ways in which women are being affected by them. What makes new reproductive technologies especially dangerous to women is, according to J. Sawicki, not so much that they objectify and fragment bodily processes, but that they are designed and implemented by experts in contexts where scientific and medical authority is wielded with insufficient attention to the prerequisites for democratic or shared decision-making. Sawicki also observes that 'the often unchallenged authority of experts make possible an

imposition of treatments and regimes that is in fact dangerous to women. Physicians and health care practitioners must be exhorted to further efforts to ensure that women are not treated solely as bodies, but also as subjects with desires, fears, special needs and so forth' (1991:92).

Now for feminist analysis of literary text, we find Foucault's theory of 'discourse' more useful than 'ideology' because his discourse theory provides us with certain advantages. To make the point clear it is worthwhile to quote two lengthy quotations—one from Foucault and the other from Cameron. As Foucault states :

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it (1978, trans 1990:100-1).

Deborah Cameron, on the other hand, says:

The movement for so-called politically correct language does not threaten our freedom to speak as we choose, within the limits imposed by any form of social and public interaction. It threatens only our freedom to imagine that our linguistic choices are inconsequential, or to suppose that any one group of people has an inalienable right to prescribe them. (Cameron 1994:33 Quoted in S. Mills 1997:45).

These two quotations help us understand two different analytical positions : the first one discourse analysis and the second one ideological analysis. Since the latter is premised upon the model of power, which Foucault calls Repressive Hypothesis, it is forced to represent the female subjects as passive victims, unable to intervene in the process whereby they are repressed. But in discourse theory perspective, discourse in which knowledge and power join together, is considered to be an arena where just as some males are sanctioned in their attempts to negotiate a powerful position for themselves in relation to women, so women can contest or collaborate with these moves. Besides this, in this perspective, the

complexity of power relations can be effectively dealt with. In ideological perspective, the hard-line Marxists would still consider class to be the most important factor in the oppression of certain groups, and gender simply as a form of secondary exploitation. But in discourse theory perspective, a Foucauldian feminist would see class concern integrated with concerns about gender. According to a Foucauldian feminist, people are not oppressed because of their class separately from their oppression because of race or gender, although one of these factors might feel dominant at any particular moment. In this connection mention may be made of McClintock who, in her book, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Imperial Contest (1995)*, observes that there is an impossibility of separating gender, race and class. As she wrote:

Imperialism cannot be understood without a theory of gender power. Gender power was not the superficial patina of empire, and ephemeral gloss over the more decisive mechanisms of class and race. Rather, gender dynamics were, from the outset, fundamental to the securing and maintenance of the imperial enterprise (1995:6-7).

On this view, Sara Mills argues that 'gender is always already formed through the vectors of race and class' (1997:79).

Moreover, as in radical feminism, so in Foucauldian perspective, the famous slogan of the Women's Movement of 1960s-'personal is political'-is still held good. The inclusion of the slogan in its agenda leads a Foucauldian to politicize the personal domain and thereby oppose the liberal thinking that childcare, domestic labour, sexual abuse, domestic violence and issues of reproductive rights belong to the private sphere and therefore are outside of power. But unlike in radical feminism, power, in discourse theory perspective, is not located in any monolithic structure or central institution such as pornography or compulsory heterosexuality. Here power is redefined by drawing upon Foucault's revising model of power relations:

To say that 'everything is political', is to affirm this ubiquity of relations of force and their immanence in a political field; but this is to give oneself the task, which as yet has scarcely even been outlined, of disentangling this indefinite knot (Foucault in Colin Gordon (ed.) 1980:189).

Again, femininity, in discourse theory perspective, is viewed as something structured in discourse. In other words, discourses structure both our sense of reality and our notion of our own identity. On the view of femininity as discourse, women can be seen to be actively working out their subject positions and roles in the process of negotiating discursive constraints. But an ideologically inflected feminist theorizing sees femininity simply as an imposed ideological category, which is considered to be homogeneous one affecting all women in the same way. It ignores different ideological structures for classes or sexual orientations. It does not spell out why women should accept the structures of femininity, which are portrayed as limiting them. Furthermore, it gives no sense of how, if femininity is such a negative characteristic, it can be resisted, rather than simply rejected wholesale.

But in discourse theory perspective, the notion of a discourse of femininity is used to move our attention away from the view of femininity as social construct being imposed on passive female subjects. Construction of different meanings of femininity is made possible with an assumption that discourse structures are discontinuous, that is, they change over times because of women's resistance to them and the changes in social structures. Also, since discourse is something that one does (rather than something to which one is subjected), engaging with discourses of femininity constitutes an interactional relation of power rather than an imposition of power. Femininity does not have a single meaning, but depends on a wide range of contextual features, such as perceived power relations, for its interpretation and effect. As Bidy Martin puts it, 'power... is the relation between pleasures, knowledge and power as they are produced and disciplined' (quoted in S. Mills 1997:88). In this perspective, power is enacted within relationships and thus seen as something, which can be contested at every moment and in every interaction. As Smith explains:

To explore femininity as discourse means as shift away from viewing it as a normative order, reproduced through socialisation, to which women are somehow subordinated. Rather femininity is addressed as a complex of actual relation vested in texts. (quoted in Ibid :88)

This textual / discursive nature of femininity, as Sara Mills says, makes it open to act of reinterpretation (Ibid).

The confessional discourse which Foucault has discussed in relation to disciplinary society in *Discipline and Punish* (1979) has now been adapted by the feminist discourse theorists toward the analysis of certain type of text and the relation between confessing and submitting to a relation of power. For Foucault, the confessional is one of the practices by which subjects are disciplined. In his view, those who confess and display themselves as complicit subjects, in the process construct themselves as compliant subjects. But feminist discourse theorists explore that even in the process of producing oneself as someone who has emotional difficulties, there can be possible sites of resistance produced at the same time.

What is more, in discourse theory perspective ‘the notion of discourse’, as Dorothy Smith says, ‘displaces the analysis from the text as originating in writer or thinker, to the discourse itself as an ongoing inter-textual process. In the context of Foucault’s archaeology, the concept of discourse has some of the force as structuralism in displacing the subject or reducing her to mere bearer of systemic processes external to her. Analysis of the extended social relations of complex social processes requires that our concepts embrace properties and processes, which cannot be attributed to or reduced to individual ‘utterances’, or ‘speech acts’. Ongoing organisation and relations co-ordinating multiple sites are produced by actual individuals, but the forms of organisation are not intended or fully regulated by a set or sub-set of those individuals. Members of discourse orient to the order of the discourse in talk, writing, creating images whether in texts or on their bodies, producing and determined by the ongoing order which is their concerted accomplishment and arises in the concerting’ (Dorothy Smith 1990 : 161-62 quoted in Sara Mills 1997: 85-86). In this interpretation of discourse, Dorothy Smith locates individual agency without submitting either to extreme interpretations of Foucault’s views of discourse as disembodied or to naïve formulations of individualism. She has here conceptualized discourse as more socially context-bound, which is attentive to what individual subjects, do within and through discursive structures. Lastly, a Foucauldian perspective would assume

that texts are determined not by one discourse, but by several different discourses which are at work in their construction. Moreover, these discourses are often in conflict with one another.

This critical perspective in analysing fiction has proved to be radical and very fruitful. Here mine is a modest attempt to explore Anita Desai's fiction from this perspective and method known as Foucauldian genealogy.

Anita Desai is one of the most significant Indian women novelists who started writing fiction in English in the 1950s. During this period writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala and Nayantara Sahgal provided a new insight into the status and attitude of women in Indian society. On the Indian English literary landscape Kamala Markandaya appeared with her *Nectar in a Sieve* in 1954, Ruth Jhabvala with her *To Whom She Will* in 1955 and Nayantara Sahgal with her *A Time to Be Happy* in 1958. And Anita Desai appeared with her *Cry, The Peacock* in 1963 and took the literary world by storm. Of course, now there are a lot of Indian women novelists like Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Kamala Das, Nomita Gokhale, Rama Mehta, Gita Mehta, Arundhati Roy, making great strides in the Indian fictional world. Of these, Arundhati Roy did indeed create an unprecedented furore as her novel, *The God of Small Things*, first came out, but the critical attention that has so far been given to Anita Desai is unparalleled. Anita Desai has now a world-wide recognition as a powerful post-colonial writer.

Every writer is a social product. More or less s/he is influenced by the age in which s/he is born and brought up. Anita Desai is no exception to it. Though she denies that she is influenced by the social issues of her times, yet her novels show that she was not closed against social institutions and practices and some national policies. She belongs to the post-independence era of India. In 1937 in Mussorie, India, she was born of a Bengali father and a German mother and educated at Delhi. Besides reading books, she is fond of classical music, painting, travelling and gardening. She is married and has four children, including Kiran Desai, author of *Hullabaloo In The Guava Orchard*. Her published works include eleven novels and two collections of short stories, besides stories for children, articles and interviews. Among Indian women novelists, only Kamala Markandaya has done so much

work. Desai's eleven novels are *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* (1981), *The Village by the Sea* (1982), *In Custody* (1984), *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), *Journey to Ithaca* (1995) and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999). For her writings Anita Desai has received many awards in India and abroad and held many prestigious posts in India and other countries of the world. She won Royal Society of Literature's Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize for her *Fire on the Mountain* and the National Academy of Letters Award in 1978. Her *Clear Light of Day* was shortlisted for the 1980 Booker Prize. Again her *In Custody* was shortlisted for 1984 Booker Prize. In 1999 her *Fasting, Feasting* was also shortlisted for the Booker Prize and ended as a runner-up in the hot race.

As an academician, Desai ranks among the great personalities of literature in the world. She is a member of the Advisory Board of English for the National Academy of Arts and Letters in New York and of Girton college at the University of Cambridge. She teaches the writing programme at MIT and divides her time between India, Boston, Massachusetts and Cambridge, England. Her novel, *In Custody*, has been filmed by the Merchant Ivory productions.

The themes of her novels are related to women. The women characters of her novels are seen to react very strongly and sensitively to the oppressive forces of the male dominated society, yet it is interesting to note that Mrs Desai does not profess to be a feminist as some other women novelists like Shobha De and Nomita Gokhale do. Even the critics like Usha Bande (1983), S. Indira (1994), Rajib Sharma (1995), Sandhyarani Das (1996), Asha Kanwar (1989), Kunj Bala Goel (1989) and O.P. Budholia (2001) have analysed her novels from various points of view, but none of them has made an attempt to explore her as a feminist novelist. Of course, Sunaina Singh (1994) has studied her four novels in comparison with Margaret Atwood's four novels in a feminist perspective. And Jasbir Jain has passingly mentioned that Desai's work, if examined against the three phases – the feminine phase, the feminist phase and the female phase as traced by Elaine Showalter in her book *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), 'falls into the third phase, and directly relates

to it' (Jasbir Jain 1987 :157). But all these feminist readings have remained incomplete in some way or other. I propose to explore Anita Desai as a postcolonial feminist novelist. Here it is proper to mention that the feminist perspective in which Sunaina has studied her four novels is ideologically inflected one, with the result that she has failed to explore the complexity of power relations in her novels. My study is meant to fill this gap by adopting the Foucauldian perspectives based upon discourse theory consisting of a range of different theories developed under the influence of Foucault's work. My study therefore would not be author-centered. Rather it would be attentive to what the individual subjects do within discourse and through discursive structures and how they construct and are constructed by, different discourses.

Anita Desai produces truths through fictions about women's condition in patriarchal capitalist society. While exploring the relationships between the women's social and familial life along with their psychological states, she makes attempts at producing different meanings around their different issues like marriage, motherhood, spinsterhood, widowhood, dowry, child-marriage, sexuality, rape, vocation, independence, search for identity through the construction of different discourse about them. However, because of the contextual changes, these issues come to be constructed not as homogeneous in her fictional world. In *Voices in the City*, *Bye-Bye Blackbird* and *Fasting, Feasting* marriage takes on an oppressive form, though in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* it is less oppressive than creating an identity crisis because of its cross-cultural nature. Again, in *Clear Light of Day* and *Fasting, Feasting* marriage provides some women with the scope for negotiation of power and pleasure, and in *Baumgartner's Bombay* marriage is selectively appropriated by a western woman to resist the British Government's repressive measure. In *In Custody* a woman is made to admit that however tedious and painful the domestic works may be, a woman can enjoy a sort of power and position in the inner space of home. Besides this, through the construction of a muslim female artist, an attempt is made to show that artistic creativity is not the monopoly of man, woman can also parade in the domain of art, if she gets recognition. But spinsterhood, on the other hand, is posited as a form of resistance to the oppressive heterosexual marriage in *Clear Light of Day*, *Fire on the Mountain*. Again, in *Voices in the City*, *Clear Light of Day*, *Village By the Sea* and *Fasting, Feasting* the

unmarried young women's search for independent profession has been inextricably linked to their urge for power and independent earning. But in *Cry, The Peacock*, marriage creates desire for sexuality and dependence in a young woman, but as the desire for sexuality stands repressed, the marriage results in the act of her husband's murder.

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer ?* and *Fire on the Mountain* motherhood is constructed not as joy, though in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* the discourse of an expectant mother is shown to have the power to subvert the purity of the nationalist discourse.

In *Clear Light of Day*, widowhood is constructed as something highly inhumanizing and painful for the young widow, but in *Fasting, Feasting* this widowhood is constructed as enjoyment for an old widow.

In *Fire on the Mountain*, child-marriage is projected as male whim for earning money in tribal patriarchy, which manifests itself as a violent power through rape of a spinster social welfare officer who goes to organize a women's struggle against that child-marriage.

In *Journey to Ithaca*, a mother is empowered spiritually in order to show that spirituality is not the monopoly of man. Thus while constructing different meanings of different women's issues, Anita Desai makes her women characters appropriate and abrogate different social institutions and cultural practices and at the same time she shifts her feminist position from western feminism to postcolonial feminism because the more she advances the more she values composite culture over pure one, multiculturalism over pure nationalist culture, although sometimes she colludes with the discourse of traditional Hindu religion for empowerment of women in order to resist the dominance of colonial west.

However, in the chapters that follow, I shall try to resurrect the 'subjugated knowledges' of the women variously projected in Desai's fiction and thereby make an attempt to show how women as individuals can negotiate or resist power and its effects disseminated through various relations.

CRY, THE PEACOCK : A CONFSSIONAL DISCOURSE THAT EMPOWERS

Cry, The Peacock (1963), the first novel of Anita Desai, broke new grounds in Indian English fiction by tempting the critics to pass comments on it in regard to its validity and worth. Darshan Singh Maini considers the novel as 'the most poetic and evocative Indo-Anglian novel, next to Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope*' (D. S. Maini in K. K. Sharma (ed.) 1977:217). S. Indira appreciates the novel as 'a literary extension of a rich imagination with incessant clusters of images' (S. Indira 1994 :12). Prabhat Kumar Pandaya traces in the novel a conflict between two attitudes towards life – one fatalistic and the other rational and scientific (P. K. Pandaya in R. K. Dhawan (ed.) Vol. 3 1991: 80). Kalpana S. Wandrekar observes : 'The Forsterian aspect of rhythm as described in his *Aspects of the Novel* manifests itself in it' (Ibid : 47). Ravi Nandan Sinha argues that the novel reaffirms the validity of the Heraclitian doctrine that all living is essentially flux, and what is generally called 'being' is merely a change from one state of consciousness to another. In his view, the apparent dichotomy between flux and fixity of life is resolved through Maya (R. N. Sinha in V. L. V. N. Kumar (ed.) 1997:76). However, these studies have little in common with my study, which construes the novel as a feminist discourse, empowering a hyper-sensitive heterosexual woman to condemn her husband to death when she is denied love and sexuality.

Now it would not be an exaggeration to refer to Foucault's observation on 'right of death and power over life' in *History of Sexuality*, vol.-1 (1978 trans.1990:135-37). Foucault observes that the father of the Roman family was granted by the ancient *patria potestas* the absolute right to dispose of the life of his children and his slaves. Just as he had given them life, so he could take it away. In classical period, the sovereign enjoyed the same power over his subjects, though not in an absolute and unconditional way – only in

cases where the sovereign's very existence was in jeopardy. If he were threatened by external enemies who sought to overthrow or contest his rights, he could then legitimately wage war, and require his subjects to take part in the defense of the state. In other words, without directly proposing their death, he was empowered to expose their life. In this respect, he wielded an indirect power over their life and death. Again, the ancient right to take life or let live was replaced by a power to foster or disallow it to the point of death, as a result of which suicide was considered as a crime and was forbidden, since it was a way to usurp the power of death which the sovereign alone, whether the one here below or Lord above, had the right to exercise. But in course of time, suicide has come to be used as a private right that limits the political right that assigns itself the task of administering life. Foucault's observation above can be adapted to analyse this novel in order to resurrect the 'subjugated knowledge' of a hyper-sensitive young married woman in respect of her sexual repression and her husband's unpardonable indifference towards her. The knowledge is produced by her confessional discourse in which she represents herself as a duplicitous woman and thereby accrues power to herself and thereafter brings her action into alignment with god Shiva, the destroyer of evil, in order to gain the position of strength towards the killing of her husband, unresponsive to her sexuality and desire for love. After the murder of her husband, she commits suicide. Here it may be argued that in the structure of the patriarchal society women have been denied power of life and death on the ground that they can not produce life, though they have reproductive power. On the contrary, their well-being and security have always been undertaken by man. On this assumption, power over life and death has ever come to be devolved on man. But in this novel, Maya is empowered to take her husband's life, and exercises the 'right of death' over her own life and thereby challenges the validity and stability of hegemonic patriarchal assumption of woman.

In the triptyche structure of the novel, Part-I and Part- III occupy very small space covering three and eleven pages respectively. Both are in Third person narration focusing on the death of Maya's pet dog and Maya's suicide. Part-II is in the First person narration covering a large space in which the discursive ' I' allows Maya to take the subject position for the articulation of her repressed voice through the construction of a confessional discourse. The duplicitous woman that she constructs herself in the discourse is 'one whose

consciousness is opaque to man, whose mind will not let itself be penetrated by phallic probings of masculine thought and who has a different story to tell' (Gilbert and Gubar in Toril Moi, 1985 : 58). Phallic criticism may dismiss the truth-claim of Maya's discourse by labeling it as that of an insane woman. But in feminist perspective, her discourse has validity and worth.

Part-I narrates the situation that forces Maya to critique her past and present life and decide a course of action to free herself from her husband's governability. In this part Maya is constructed as a highly sensitive and dependent woman, reacting hysterically to the death of her pet dog, Tota. But Gautama is as much indifferent to the death of the dog as to his wife. His indifference to his wife seems to echo Bhatrighari's attitude to woman :

Remembered she will bring remorse; seen she makes the mind unclean; touched she nearly drives one mad; why call such a creature dear ? (Bhatrighari 600 A. D cited in Suniana Singh, 1994 : 9).

In Part-II aloneness and distance from her husband compel Maya to sink into her childhood and adolescence, and through a review of the past she discovers that the natural growth of her femininity was interfered by her doting father. As she confesses :

My childhood was one in which much was excluded, which grew steadily more restricted, unnatural even, and in which I lived as a toy princess in a toy world (89).

Through this confession Maya claims that in the exclusionary cultural practices of her father, her femininity was produced in accordance with her father's male desires. Her childhood, as she confesses, was given a dream-like quality by leading her into a world of fairytales through the acts of reading by her father, an inveterate reader :

As a child, I enjoyed, princess-like, a sumptuous fare of the fantasies of the Arabian Nights, the glories and bravado of Indian mythology, long and astounding tales of princes and regal queens, Jackels and tigers, and, being my father's daughter, of the lovely English and Irish fairy tales as well, that were read out to me by him, that inveterate reader aloud, so that a doll dress in pink I named Rose rather than Gulab, and the guards of Buckingham Palace were nearly as real to me as the uniformed cavalry officers who practised, in a magnificent

vertigo of yellow dust, on the maidan in the army cantonment where I was sometimes taken for a drive, in the evenings (43).

“Fairy-tales’, as Karen E. Rowe observes, ‘are not just entertaining fantasies but powerful transmitters of romantic myths which encourage to internalize only aspirations deemed appropriate to (their) real sexual functions within a patriarchy” (cited in K. K. Ruthven, 1985 :80). Not only that, “they are’, according to Marcia R. Leibesman, ‘training manuals for girls which serve to acculturate woman to traditional roles. A girl principally learns from the fairy tales that she is by nature a passive creature, like the princess who waits patiently on top of the glass Hill for the first man to climb it. She also learns that she is symbolically dead until brought to life by the man who will be man in her life. Submissive and helpless, she must expect to drift from one kind of dependency to another without ever exercising her autonomy, her consciousness of which has never been raised” (Ibid : 80). Maya was no exception to that case. She grew under the shadow of her father and internalized all romantic aspirations appropriate to her real sexual function. Passive, submissive and dependent that Maya was, she was never made to dream of a life beyond the Hindu patriarchal ideology :

Pita raksati kaumarye bharta raksati youvane raksanti sthavire putrali na Stri svatantryam arhati (Manu Smrti). The father looks after her during childhood, the husband protects her during youth, and the sons take care of her when she becomes old. The woman is never fit for freedom (Cited in S. Singh (ed.) 1991 : 98)

But her feminine self, though acculturated in Brahmin culture, got fractured by the discursive pressure of an astrological discourse constructed by the albino-astrologer who prophesied that in the fourth year of their marriage one of them would die ‘by unnatural causes’ (30). It created such a great fear in her delicate self that she abjured marriage : ‘I will never marry’ (31). But again her father enjoined her to mould her self in accordance with the circumstances and leave the rest to the fate. And in order to dispel the fear of death from her mind, he burnt the horoscope. From that very day he never uttered the word astrology or palmistry in her presence. But what is observed is that though her father made sincere attempts at driving the fear of death away from her mind through the acts of burning

the horoscope and exhortation about surrender to fate, the fear of death lay repressed in the inner structure of her mind to surface in no time.

Anyway, Maya toed her father's line without a feeble protest lest she should be deprived of his love and protection. On the contrary, her brother Arjuna refused to be moulded by her father's cultural codes, so he rebelled out of the perfectionist realm of her despot father. Adapting Kate Millett we may say that in that Brahmin patriarchy dominance was made on the basis of two-fold principles : (1) Male shall dominate female. (2) Older male shall dominate younger (Kate Millet 1969, Repr.1971:25). Arjuna could free himself from the dominance of his father. But Maya could not, because she internalized a life of submission in such an ingrained way that it became a ' second nature' to her. As a result, she began to depend more and more on her father. This was why, as she confesses, she could not but accept her father's proposal :

That I marry this tall, stooped and knowledgeable friend of his, one might have said that our marriage was grounded upon the friendship of the two men, and the mutual respect in which they held each other rather than upon anything else (40).

Maya hoped her husband would love her with equal intensity as her father did and fulfil her long cherished romantic aspirations : 'contact, relationship and communion' (18). But after marriage she gets the obverse result : 'no one else loves me as my father does' (46). She observes Gautama is impatient of sentiment and emotion; he is ascetic to the point of being intolerant and indifferent to feminine charms and even shrinks from them. Maya cannot make him understand how much the nights, filled with fragrances of several flowers, are important for their conjugal life. She feels that her femininity ,which was produced within the Brahmin familial structure, is now going to be repressed and fissured in the non-Brahmin familial structure. She suffers from both the excesses of sickly selfish love showered upon her by her father ['there is oil enough, too much of it – it has drowned the wick' (30)] and the total lack of it from her husband who is devoid of all sorts of emotion.

Coincidentally, Maya's pet-dog dies in the fourth year of their marriage. For a childless woman like Maya, the dog was something more than an animal. It was 'no less a

relationship than that of a woman and her child ' (10). Through that relationship she achieved a sense of wholeness. But with the demise of the dog, the sense of wholeness gets shattered. Aloneness and loneliness pounce on her. Love, understanding and communion or 'jouissance' can retrieve the fragmented feminine self. "Jouissance", according to Lacan, 'is a mysterious state of sexual joy, an erotic satisfaction which dissolves the boundaries of self and other' (Anthony Elliot, 1994 : 135). But all these panaceas are denied her, first by her husband's cold intellectuality and then by his age. Her longing for the sensuous enjoyment of life is again repressed by his liberal doses of the *Gita* philosophy of non-attachment :

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).

Not only this, her effusive emotionality is always countered by Gautama's analytical mind. As Kate Millett and Germain Greer argue :

The male's sexual antipathy provides a means of control over a subordinate group, and a rationale for that group's inferior status (Charvet , 1980 : 123).

On this view, it may be said that the motive behind Gautama's sexual antipathy towards Maya is to repress her sexuality and thereby cover up his own sexual weakness caused by his ageing.

Maya refuses to be repressed by her husband. Countering his logic in favour of sexual non-attachment, she argues :

I am not like you, I am different from all of you (117).

If power inheres in difference and is a dynamic of control and lack of control between the subjects, then Maya exercises power over her husband by asserting her difference from him. But her power over Gautama is for short duration because in front of Gautama's strong logic for detached living, she begins to feel 'innate sequaciousness rise ... within me and begin to drown, little by little, my struggling protests' (117).

However, Maya's failure to have a hold over Gautama lands her in a crisis. Her moral scrupulosity does not allow her to cross the bounds of marital morality. Nor is she able to

sublimate her powerful biological urge. So she bursts into a rage by 'giving herself up to a fit of furious pillow beating, kicking, everything but crying' (9). Of course, there are plenty of images in the novel that suggest Maya's erotic desire and its starvation. Maya's repeated references to the frenzied dance of the peacock for its mate, the cooing and mating calls of the pigeons, the heavy silk cotton trees, the male papaya trees, the withered pink carnations and red roses reflect her sexual desires. On the other hand, the words like 'chaste', 'virginal' and the 'moon', which are repeated several times, emphasise Maya's erotic starvation. As Freud argues :

A happy person never fantasizes, only an unsatisfied one, ... and every single fantasy is the fulfilment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality (Freud 1908 : 146, cited in Patricia Waugh 1989 : 168).

Again, Rosemary Jackson, discussing the subversive potential of fantasy, observes that it characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints (R. Jackson 1980 : 3). An unhappy woman, Maya thus experiences a symbolic gratification of her sexual desire through some hallucinatory visions of lizards and birds copulating in weird settings :

Of the lizards, the lizards that come upon you, stalking you silently, upon clawed toes, slipping their clublike tongues in and out, in and out with audible hiss ... they have struck you to a pillar of salt which, when it is motionless they will mount and lash, with their slime-dripping tongues, lash and lash again, as they grip with curled claws, rubbing their cold bellies upon yours, rubbing and grinding, rubbing and grinding (127).

But as reality again breaks upon her, she realizes that she and her husband are inmates of two different worlds :

His seemed the earth that I loved so, scented with jasmine, coloured with liquor, resounding with poetry and warmed by amiability. It was mine that was hell. Torture, guilt, dread, imprisonment – these were the four walls of my private hell, one that no one could survive in long (102).

But as a lover of life, she again endeavours to come out of the hell. Remembering the lovely time she spent with her father, she suggests Gautama to take her to Darjeeling whose scenic beauty and cool weather, she still believes, may soothe her tormented mind, but

Gautama quashes her proposal. Again, to her imploration to take her to the South, Gautama coolly suggests that she wait till a Kathakali troupe comes to Delhi. The most humiliating experience that she undergoes is in Gautama's male-party. Charmed by the vibrantly rich urdu poetry recited by the cultural wine-drinking gentlemen, Maya breaks an age-old rule and joins them. When the other men politely, but uneasily, respond to her presence, Gautama not only shatters her hopes of participating in the pulsating and poetry-charged atmosphere but also subtly drives home to her the truth that she does not belong there. This is what she confesses :

Turning his back to me, he stood talking to a friend, a glass in his hand, and his voice rose, in order that I might hear, when he said, 'Blissful, yes, because it is unrelated to our day, unclouded by the vulgarity of ill-educated men, or of overbearing women' (104).

However, in the life of suffering from deprivation of sexuality, companionship and love, the fear of death as predicted by the albino-astrologer surfaces. But the question that she now faces is whose death her husband's or hers ? Before deciding the question, she wants to understand other women's attitude to their own family lives. What she observes is that they have willingly surrendered to the oppressive structure of the patriarchal family; none of her friends has yet come out of it . Leila has accepted her lot without grudge or complaint. She is resigned because, unlike Maya, she has accepted what she has—the sick and teasing husband, one room house and the drudgery of life. She has never revolted and Maya pathetically confesses about Leila :

Had she raged, revolted I should have rushed to her now (59).

On the other hand, Pom, her other friend, has the typical problem of an Indian housewife living with the in-laws under restrictions and hence she talks so maliciously about her parents-in-law. Living there means 'like two mice in two small rooms, not daring to creep out, for fear they'll pounce on you, ask you where're you going, when you'll be back, why you aren't wearing the Jewellery they gave you' (61). So she is fed up with living with her in-laws, but not with her husband. Maya observes how her situation is contrasted by Pom's. While Pom is fed up with living with her in-laws, Maya craves for the company of her mother-in-law and does not get it.

After observing her friends' attitudes to patriarchy, she realizes how alone she is in her fight against its ideology :

I found myself alone with them after all. There was one of my friends who could act as an anchor any more, and to whomsoever I turned for reassurance, betrayed me now (64).

In her aloneness she finds out two options : to accept everything as inevitable and surrender to fate, or to revolt against the oppressive patriarchal Hindu ideology. With her dissatisfaction she feels 'like a lily upon water, rooted in water yet with its petal dry, untouched by it' (119). She cannot deny her biologism and refuses to play the role Gautama ascribes to her. Her repressed self is found to get reprieve in the 'dust-storm'. During the 'dust-storm', through a dance in a pent-up house, she seems to celebrate her release from bondage, from fate, from death, dreariness and dreadful dreams (S. Indira 1994 : 25). With this new-found consciousness of freedom, the repressed self in her resolves to murder :

The man who had no contact with the world, or with me. What would it matter to him if he died and lost even the possibility of contact ? What would it matter to him ? (175).

This is her 'unspoken decision' (195). More important is that she tries Gautama in her own court and condemns him to death by labeling him as guilty of sexual repression.

Now in order to implement her decision Maya adopts a duplicitous art by virtue of which she seduces Gautama to the terrace. Maya's ' unspoken decision ' still remains opaque to Gautama. He cannot fathom the depth of Maya's rage and anger towards him; his male probings fail to penetrate her invulnerable murderous mind. With a kind of composure, clarity of mind and purpose that the mad sometimes displays, Maya lures her husband to the terrace :

Gautama, let us go up on the roof instead, shall we ? My voice loud, animated. It – it'll be cooler there and we haven't been there – for some time. Come (203).

Beside this, she leads him out towards the varandah from where a flight of steep stairs leads up to the roof. But just before passing out of the room, she catches sight of :

The bronze Shiva, dancing just a shade outside the ring of lamp-light ... fixed. And yet there was nothing frozen or immobile in this pose of eternal creative movement ... graceful foot

upon the squirming body of evil, and the raised leg ... raised into a symbol of a liberation (203).

Here Maya is seen to produce an account of the dancing Shiva, Nataraj, who is believed to be god of destruction and liberation in Hindu religion. In describing Shiva as the god of destruction of evil and of liberation, she accepts god's dual powers and thereby constructs herself as a devout subject of Hindu religion. As a conforming member of that religion, she deserves a position in the society because good (obedient or devout) female is revered. But at the same time she assigns herself the god's other role and gains a position of strength needed for the killing of her husband whom she now condemns as evil, a threat to her feminine self. In murdering her husband, Maya usurps the god's power she needs to break the constraints of the Hindu patriarchal discursive structure. The fact that a Hindu woman speaks out against her husband, ending up killing him later is highly subversive of Hindu 'pativrata' ideology. Thus in constructing Maya as a duplicitous woman Anita Desai takes a radical feminist position against Hindu patriarchal ideology.

However, in Part-III Maya is found to commit suicide. Obviously it draws our attention to its aetiology. Prabhat Kumar Pandaya argues : 'Being a *sankari* Hindu woman she suffers from guilt and remorse for killing her husband and in spite of her rationalization in the end she kills herself' (P.K. Pandaya in R.K. Dhawan (ed.) Vol.-3 1991 : 92). Pandaya's argument appears to be androcentric. There is no denying the fact that Maya is a Hindu woman who was in need of love and understanding. But nowhere in the text we find that Maya betrays the symptoms of sufferings from guilt and remorse for killing her unpardonable husband. If there is any remorse in her, it is because of her seeing that the truth-claim of her confessional discourse stands challenged by her sister-in-law and mother-in-law whom she expects to support the cause of the murder of her husband and stand beside her in need. Both of them have already been constrained to repress their own passions, symptoms of which they still betray even while their son and brother are no more around them :

They sat there, knee to knee, but scrupulously avoiding contact ... Neither spoke, they dreaded speech now that they were so close together, as though their thoughts and ideas, safe and controlled by each within herself, would explode out of the bounds prescribed for

them and spill into the open, were the two to meet and touch. They dreaded this as their son and brother had dreaded passion, as wise men dread their flesh (216 –17).

In spite of their having experience of repression, they do not seem to give any heed to her discourse. Her mother-in-law dismisses Maya's discourse by labeling it as that of an insane woman and produces another account of it : 'It was an accident' (213). Nila, her sister-in-law, cannot but support her mother's discounting of Maya's story, whereas none but at least she should have stood by Maya, because like Maya, she is also undergoing the sufferings of an unhappy marriage.

Thus while Maya finds her mother-in-law labeling her as insane, taking a unilateral decision to send her to an asylum, she realizes that the life of a woman like her is absolutely of no consequence in the given structure of the family and she commits suicide.

The act of suicide has more implications than one. First, through the act of suicide, Maya creates a locus of resistance to the patriarchal power. Second, she refuses to be identified as an insane woman and through this refusal she asserts herself, her identity and her attitude towards life. Thirdly, through the act of suicide, she seems to have exercised her right of death over her life which is a mode of self-assertion that usurps the power of death which is that of Sovereign's alone, whether one here below or the Lord above.

VOICES IN THE CITY : DISCOURSE OF A MUTED WOMAN

In discourse theory perspective, commentary, though not an entirely selfless act, attributes richness, density and permanence to the text when it creates those values by the act of commentary (Sara Mills, 1997 : 68). On this view, Anita Desai's second fiction, *Voices in the City*, may be said to be gaining in richness, density and permanence because since its publication in 1965, it has been commented upon by different critics from different points of view. Madhusudan Prasad describes it as 'an existentialist fiction about the meaninglessness of lives devoid of commitment to a cause' (1981 : 22-86). Ramesh K. Shrivastava considers it to be 'a study of the predicament of the artist torn between aesthetic and material values' (R. K. Dhawan (ed.) Vol-3, 1991 : 95-101). Again Darshan Singh Maini looks upon Nirode, a bohemian male character, as the protagonist of the novel, ignoring the other two female characters, Monisha and Amla, who are regarded by him as artistic failures. He argues that seeing no way of carrying Nirode's story forward except through a vicarious involvement in the lives of his sisters, Desai has simply transferred his nihilism to Monisha's tragic life and her final suicide, whereas Amla's more 'gay and provocative existence does not quite fit into the pattern established by her Hamletian brother' (K. K. Sharma (ed.) 1977 : 221-222). Another critic like Subhas Chandra locates the 'Beat hero in Nirode—the Beat hero is a non-entity, courts anonymity, consistently fails or even seeks failure for he knows that in an otherwise ruthlessly competitive society where everyone is striving for success, only failure can give one a sense of being or identity' (R. K. Dhawan (ed.) Vol-3 1991:122). All these readings, though seemingly apolitical, are essentially androcentric. However, in a Foucauldian feminist perspective, this fiction can be explored to resurrect the subjugated knowledge of a muted woman about her victimization in her parental family as well as in her in-law's house which is produced through the construction of a confessional discourse in the

form of a personal diary in which she accrues power to herself by representing herself as a frigid muted woman. Besides this, the fiction can also be explored to see how her exhortative discourse and the discourse of her self-immolation make an effect upon Amla's subjectivity to construct her as a resistant female subject. Lastly, the figure of the widow in the novel can be studied as subverting the Hindu patriarchal ideology of widowhood.

Structurally, *Voices in the City* is divided into four parts, each named after one of the members of the Roy family. While Part-I, III and IV are in Third person narration, Part-II with the heading of 'Monisha, her diary', is rendered in the First person narration. This makes it clear that Part-II is differently designed to serve a special purpose in this context. In Part-I, III & IV one male bohemian and two female characters—Amla and Otima—are represented, one as an independent unmarried woman with the career of a commercial artist and the other as a sensual widow. In Part-II, however, Monisha takes the subject position to produce her subjugated knowledge about the patriarchal oppression towards her through the construction of a confessional discourse in the form of a personal diary in which she accrues power to herself by representing herself as a muted frigid woman. Monisha whose voice has been gagged in her in-law's house appropriates the means of writing personal diary in order to articulate her repressed self. Spatially, Monisha's personal diary may be construed as a no-man's land where she is privileged to enjoy power and autonomy which she has been denied in her in-law's house. And metaphysically, Part-II highlights the feminist consciousness of the victimization of the Hindu women in the structure of Hindu patriarchal society. It is so placed as to help develop other parts of the fiction in opposition to Part-I. Embedded into the traditional Hindu patriarchal ideology, its ulterior purpose is that of subverting or transforming it.

Part-I which is written from Nirode's perspective focuses almost exclusively on his life : his experiences as a ~~petty~~ journalist, his attempts to start a little magazine, his dealings with the Calcutta pseudoliterati and his existential musings upon life and death. What is significantly noticeable is that but for two letters from Otima to Nirode, it maintains a near-total silence on the woman question. Out of idle curiosity, only once in his narrative does Nirode think of his two sisters – to wonder what they thought of their father's funding for

Arun's education abroad rather than their own. Besides this, he does not seem to care to know anything about them.

As Harveen Sachdeva Mann observes, pursuing his own dreams single-mindedly and restricting the women to the margins of a male-dominated world, Nirode reflects the selfishness of the arrogant Indian Hindu men (Parker & Starky (eds.) 1995 : 155). Mann also adds that as a journalist he conflates Indian servitude under colonial rule with the Bengali Hindu women's modern-day circumscription, and projects the latter as 'one of those vast, soft, masses-of-rice Bengali women. ... They did make up a bit during the Independence movement, ... but they're back to their old beauty sleep of neglect and delay and corruption' (81). Although in his nihilism he is not so much hopeful for the betterment of men's condition, yet he recounts the stories of his known persons like Sonny Ghosh, Jit Nair and David Gunny sympathetically. But his accounts of the women's lives are dismissive and parenthetical. However, in Part-IV the discourse of Monisha's self-immolation contributes towards the transformation of Nirode's attitude to women's life, although he maintains a harsh attitude towards his mother whom he finally associates with Kali, blood-sucker of her own children.

Monisha is a not-common woman, but a highly sensitive and stubborn one, knowledgeable about European literature and the *Gita*, nonetheless she is victimized by male-hegemony. Out of malice towards her mother, her father gives her in marriage to Jiban : 'a boring non-entity, a blind-moralist, a minute-minded and limited official, a complacent quoter of Edmund Burke and Wordsworth, Mahatma Gandhi and Tagore' (198). Besides, her father treats her not as a human being but as a site on which he inscribes his masculine desires.

One may argue that Monisha's compliance with her father's decision on her marriage contributes towards the perpetuation of male-hegemony and thereby makes herself a compliant subject. But it would be a phallic judgement to label her as a compliant subject because though her father exercises a form of patriarchal power over her body, yet he does not know the inside of her mind and the secret of her soul. In other words, Monisha accepts

the marriage of his choice, but against her will which she does not expose to other persons. She is remarkably silent on this matter. As she confesses :

My silence, I find, has powers upon others, if not on me (130).

From her confession it is clear that her silence is a protest against patriarchal power. Protest may have different forms : here silence is one of the forms of protest against the patriarchal power which is exercised over her body only, but she is recalcitrant and intransigent inside her mind and soul. All this is revealed through her confessional discourse (personal diary).

Unlike the subservient and docile Indian Hindu women, Monisha is aware of the dominance of patriarchal culture. On the very day of her reception, Monisha observes that the traditional Hindu patriarchal culture enjoins her to be submissive and obedient. While she has no wish to prostrate before the heads of her husband's many-headed family, she is persuaded by her husband to do so :

In the small of my back, I feel a surreptitious push from Jiban and am propelled forward into the embrace of his mother ... who, while placing her hand on my head in blessing, also pushes a little harder than I think necessary, and still harder, till I realise what it means, and go down on my knees to touch her feet. They are rimmed red with alta. Another pair of feet appears to receive my touch, then another. How they all honour their own feet (109).

After the reception, Monisha observes that her bedchamber is not bedchamber but bridewell. The 'dark balconies', intricately criss-crossed metal railings and the impregnable iron bars may be regarded as the symbols of enclosure and incarceration which emphasise the barriers not only to Monisha's but also to all Indian women's articulation of an independent self in Indian joint families.

Monisha, as she confesses, is badly treated in her in-law's house. Though she is the daughter-in-law, she is not regarded as an integral part of the family. Rather she is excluded as an intruder and threat to the family :

Kalyani di who has begun to think me dangerous, an infidel ... I am too silent for them, I know : they all distrust silence (119).

The privacy and aloneness in which she can retrieve her wholeness are frequently disturbed by her sisters-in-law whose shallow talk about her saris and books on European literature is irritating to her. More painful to her is their open discussion about her barrenness : 'The ovaries, the fallopian tubes are blocked, it is no good' (Ibid). They indirectly try to make Monisha understand that the barren woman has no honour and dignity in patriarchal family. Critics like Jasbir Jain think that 'Monisha's barrenness is a recoil from her mother's voluptuousness' (J. Jain 1987 : 120). But refuting Mrs. Jain's remark, S. Indira argues that it cannot be so because Monisha does not make any mention of her mother's voluptuousness and only admits that she is whole and does not really require her children's reciprocation (1994 : 32). However, Monisha's barrenness may be construed both as a resistance to motherhood and a resistance to the perpetuation of patriarchal family. This is because Monisha longs for love 'that is not binding, that is free of rules, obligations, complicity' (135). But she finds that 'there is no such love' (Ibid) in a male-dominated world. What her husband offers her in the name of love is nothing but a domination over her feminine self. Once she understands this, she begins to behave like a frigid woman. Through her frigidity she opposes the heterosexual marriage norms.

The term 'power', according to Foucault, designates relationships between partners (Jame d. faubian (ed.) 1994 : 337). In power relations her husband and mother-in-law try to exercise power over Monisha, but their power ceases to get a hold on her body and mind because Monisha refuses to act as a subject of their power. They always try to have a control over her movement through a kind of surveillance. But Monisha refuses to be disciplined by them. She shows her disobedience to her mother-in-law by her act of going out with Nirode. Not only that, instead of complying with her husband's request to 'be a little friendly to them' (Jiban's sisters) (118), she labels both her husband and his sisters as mean : 'they have indoor minds' (139). Thereafter she shows a token struggle against submission of her subjectivity to Nirode by disallowing him to read Nirode's manuscript :

I snatch it away in fury. This violence of action—where has it sprung from? I thought I have subdued everything inside me, laid it in a dark and quiet place to sleep. Yet it has leapt out, this violence, and made me snatch manuscript out of Jiban's astonished hands... the humiliation of touch and communication – I'll save Nirode as much of it as I can; as I save my own self from it (133).

In disallowing Jiban to read Nirode's play she indeed resists the power Jiban tries to exercise over her as much as showing up an irresistible difference between herself and the traditional Bengali Hindu women who, as she observes, always follow paces behind their men. She feels ashamed when she thinks of 'the generations of Bengali women hidden behind the barred windows of half-dark rooms, spending centuries in washing clothes, kneading dough and murmuring aloud verses from the Bhagavad-Gita and Ramayana, in the dim light of sooty lamps. Lives spent in waiting for nothing, waiting on men self-centred and indifferent and hungry and demanding and critical, waiting for death and dying misunderstood, always behind bars, those terrifying black bars that shut us in, in the old houses, in the old city' (120).

Monisha refuses to identify herself with the passive Bengali Hindu women. Again she cannot take her bleeding heart as part of her life, or as her destiny. But she cannot find out her mode of release. She observes that life in a joint family is as much strangling as in city which is also full to the brim with grime, darkness, poverty and diseases, leaving no choice, no route of escape.

Monisha is not what she is accused of by her mother-in-law with a support from the latter's son. They again try to subjugate her by imposing an identity of a thief over her or by summoning her to massage her mother-in-law's legs, yet she is still tied to her own feminine identity by her self-knowledge. This is what she confesses in her diary :

For two hours my exile is lifted from me and I am summoned to massage her legs. I go and massage them. It is not difficult at all. My heart stays perfectly quiet, enclosed in a sheath of such darkness as none of them would ever dare to touch. And as I massage, I do not tell myself : she is Jiban's mother, her legs give her pain, I am helping to relieve it because she is

Jiban's mother and old. I tell myself : she thinks I am touching her. She thinks I am touching her feet. But I am not. I do not touch her, nor does she touch me— there is this darkness in between. They will never reach through it to me (139).

This confessional discourse, by its claim to truth, makes it clear how much recalcitrant and intransigent she is inside her mind. However, with this new subjectivity she faces two alternatives : 'choice between death and mean existence' (122). Mean existence means the surrender of her autonomy, which she cannot do. So finally she declares her 'Great No' to the patriarchal power by committing suicide. Her final words – 'No! No! No!' (242) – articulate that great refusal.

In the fiction Monisha's self-immolation is described as 'cloistered tragedy' with a note that 'no ashes of the fire drifted out over the city, no wind carried the smoke away to inform others' (242-243). The claim of this discourse is literally true, but not symbolically. Literally it is found that beyond the periphery of these two families none is affected by her death. Its impact is immediately felt as Jiban confesses his fault before everybody :

If this terrible thing is the fault of anyone – it is mine. Forgive me (246).

Not only Jiban's, Nirode's subjectivity too gets changed by the discursive pressure of Monisha's self-immolation. While Monisha was alive, he knew that Monisha was denied all sorts of freedom, that she was living a life of humiliation and incarceration, yet he showed no concern about her sufferings and torments. Now all his love wells up within him. His concern about Monisha's charred body bears testimony to the fact. Moreover, Nirode appears to be filled with an immense care for the world. He embraces his sister Amla and aunt again and again 'with the hunger and joy, as if he rejoiced in this sensation of touching other flesh, others' pain, longed to make mingle with his own, which till now had been astonishingly neglected' (248). This transformation has no doubt been brought about by Monisha's self-immolation. Monisha's self-immolation may be construed as a triumph over his bohemian self, because Nirode's claim in Part-I that in the face of cowardly compromise, it is 'better not to live' (18) is fulfilled by Monisha with a grand gesture of revolt against a form of patriarchal power.

Not only Nirode's, but Amla's subjectivity too gets affected by the discursive pressure of Monisha's self-immolation and her exhortative discourse : 'Amla, always go in the opposite direction' (160). Part-III focuses on Amla who, unlike Monisha, could escape the oppressive structure of marriage due to her father's sudden death. She is now in Calcutta, bubbling with enthusiasm. Young, extrovert Amla is enjoying her economic independence as a commercial artist in an advertising firm, although she is horrified to note that 'something had laid its hands upon her, scarred and altered her' (142), and her suspicion is confirmed by aunt Lila : 'It is this city' (Ibid). However, for self-fulfilment she tries to establish a relationship with Dharma, an artist. But surprisingly she discovers in Dharma an indifferent husband, a possessive father and a selfish artist and, above all, an exploiter. Actually Dharma used her candour and freshness as a model, enabling himself to break out of the stultifying surrealism into a fresh realm of realism in his paintings. After his use is over, he discards her in favour of other models.

However, Monisha's death makes her realise how insecure women's lives are in patriarchal society. Amla observes :

Her feet were still bare, that she had gone into the city in bare feet (247).

The insecure life of woman in patriarchal society is suggested by the image 'bare-feet'. Monisha's death also leads her to constitute a new subjectivity :

Monisha's death had pointed the way for and would never allow her to lose herself. She knew she would go through life with her feet primely shod, involving herself with her drawings, 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).

With this new subjectivity Amla decides to 'go in the opposite direction'. Instead of a marriage that identifies women with house-wives and mothers, she takes up her career of an independent commercial artist in collaboration with a safe man like Mr. Bose. What is clear here is that the dead Monisha is more powerful than the living Monisha as Caesar's spirit is more powerful than Caesar the king in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Monisha's death is no

doubt a sacrifice to save Amla from the life of subjugation. Not only this, Monisha's self-immolation symbolically is a clear warning to all women about the age-old patriarchal oppression and, at the same time, a call to resist it by reconstructing womanhood in terms of new-found consciousness of autonomy. Thus the truth-effects of Monisha's discourse of self-immolation belie the narrative's claim that 'no ashes of that fire drifted out over the city, no wind carried the smoke away to inform other of the cloistered tragedy' (242).

The effect of Monisha's self-immolation is also visible in her widow-mother Otima who is made to appear in the form of Kali, anomalous figure representing uncontrollable inherent female power. According to Hindu patriarchal ideology, a widow must be self-abnegating, dependent and passive. But Otima refuses to behave in accordance with that ideology. Since her husband married her for her inheritance, she has felt herself liberated by his death. Independent and sensual even in her middle age, she consorts with Major Chanda, thereby subverting the repressive pattern of sexuality and behaviour culturally prescribed for widows. Besides this, in Hindu patriarchal culture mother is expected to be marvellous, unselfish, all-suffering, all-caring and all-forgiving. But Otima is seen to maintain a distance from her children and lead an independent life. Though she has been pained by Arun's marriage to an American woman and is shaken by Monisha's suicide, she keeps herself detached from other two children, Nirode and Amla. In her repeatedly associating herself with the mountain Kanchenjunga, she asserts her position as an independent mother-widow. Thus *Voices in the City* is seen to inscribe a feminist discourse whose three female subjects go in the opposite directions to create different forms of resistance to patriarchal hegemony.

BYE-BYE BLACKBIRD : DISCOURSE OF AN EXPECTANT MOTHER

Bye-Bye Blackbird (1971), Anita Desai's third novel, has received a bit less attention of the critics, because of its thinness in texture and sparse imagery. Even when the novelist was asked if she was quite happy with this novel, she squarely admitted, 'No, that's one of the books I'd like to disown' (Anita Desai in Jasbir Jain 1987 : 13). Anyway, the critics like Usha Bande, Rajib Sharma, R.S. Sharma, Kalpana Wandrekar have undertaken its study. The theme of alienation in it has been focused on by Sandyarani Das (1996 : 84). R.S. Sharma, on the other hand, calls this novel a dramatic poem, as it employs the metaphor of voyage or quest to suggest "a pattern of action where each soul, after initial shock, puzzlement and anguish, discovers its own natural condition. The trisection plan of the novel, 'Arrival', 'Discovery' and 'Recognition and Departure' also seems to suggest this pattern" (*Literary Criterion* 1979 : 48). Again, Kalpana S. Wandrekar has considered it 'as a symptomatic study of schizophrenia' (R.K. Dhawan (ed.) vol. III Set I, 1991 : 148). All these readings are not feminist ones and therefore silent about woman's status in a cross-cultural marriage.

However, I would explore the novel in order to resurrect the subjugated knowledge of an English married woman about her identity crisis in a cross-cultural marriage. Besides, the novel can be further read as constituting an anti-colonial national discourse whose purity stands to be subverted by a discourse of an expectant mother, invoking hybridity.

Before I discuss the text, I would like to throw some light upon the relationship between colonialism and postcolonialism which, I think, would not be out of place.

As in his book *The Intimate Enemy* (1983) Ashis Nandy writes :

The colonialism colonises minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within colonised societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all. In the process, it helps to generalise the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and the outside, in structures and in minds (A. Nandy 1983 : XI)

What is clear from the definition is that colonialism is historical and psychological processes whereby the West attempts systematically to cancel or negate the cultural difference and value of the 'non-West'. Nandy's psychoanalytic reading of the colonial encounter avowedly evokes Hegel's paradigm of the master-slave relationship.

Hegel's brief but influential notes on 'Lordship and Bondage' are framed by the theorem that human beings acquire identity or self-consciousness through the recognition of others. Each self has before it another self in and through which it secures its identity. Initially, there is an antagonism and enmity between these two confronting selves; each aims at the cancellation or death and destruction of the other. Hence, and temporarily, a situation arises where one is merely recognised while the other recognises. However, the proper end of history requires, as Hegel expects, that the principle of recognition be both mutual and universal. But the peculiar human history of servitude, or the historical subordination of one self to another, belies the Hegelian expectation of mutuality. The master and slave, as Hegel maintains, are initially locked in a compulsive struggle-unto-death. This goes on until the weak-willed slave, preferring life to liberty, accepts his subjection to the victorious master. When these antagonists finally face each other after battle, only the master is recognisable. The slave, on the other hand, is now a dependent 'thing' whose existence is shaped by, and as, the conquering other. But if history is the record of failure, it also bears testimony to the slave's refusal to concede the master's existential priority. The slave then behaves like the slave figure in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* who makes such a revolutionary pronouncement :

I lay claim to this being which I am, that is, I wish to recover it, or more exactly, I am the project of the recovery of my being (Sartre 1969 cited in Leena Gandhi 1998 : 17)

This paradigm pertains to what postcolonialism as a condition of knowledge attempts to resist, resist the colonialists' so-called civilizing mission.

In the decolonising process, the total rejection of the colonial culture in favour of the pre-colonial national culture is an indirect re-inforcement of the old binaries which secures the performance of the colonial ideology and therefore it is considered to be a necessary evil. Hence the appropriation or 'subversion-from-within' is deemed to be the most effective strategy. It evokes 'Caliban paradigm'. Caliban learnt the master's language only to curse him. So in the postcolonial context, anti-colonialism is shaped by a complicated relationship of debt and defiance to colonialism's civilizing mission. It proposes a western critique of western civilization. In pursuing the terms of this critique, the postcolonialism inherits a very specific understanding of western domination as the symptom of an unwholesome alliance between power and knowledge. This no doubt refers to Foucault's notion of discourse, as elaborated in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) and *Discipline and Punish* (1979). This gives an indication of the postcolonialism's relationship with post-structuralism.

However, in the discursive practices like literature, the dynamics of the 'Caliban paradigm' are seen to generate a host of creative anxieties among anti-colonial literary practitioners. Often mention is made of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1936) in which the adulteration of English is made through its use in Indian spirit. 'If Rao's mimic mode subverts the authority of imperial textuality, it also forecloses, once and for all, any appeal to an authentic or essential Indianness', (Leena Gandhi 1998 : 151). Thus positioned as the iconic emblem of an indeterminate 'hybridity', the anti-colonial nationalist writers eagerly absorbed into a critique of Third-world cultural nationalism. And because of their multicultural affiliations, the postcolonial writers like Bharati Mukherjee (1940), Salman Rusdie (1947) tend to give stress upon hybridity that struggles to free itself from a past which emphasised ancestry and valued the pure over its threatening opposite the 'composite'. Like them, Anita Desai too has multicultural affiliation. Her father is a

Bengali, mother a German. This, as she says, 'has brought two separate strands into my life. My roots are divided because of the Indian soil on which I grew and European culture which I inherited from my mother' (Anita Desai in R.K. Dhawan ed. vol. III, 1991 : 149). This divide at her very roots seems to have made an impact upon this novel. On the one hand, she combats colonial problem and, on the other hand, gender problem at once. The colonial problem she tackles just from two strategic positions : appropriation and abrogation, the former emphasizing multiculturalism and the latter cultural essentialism. But the gender domination in the postnational context she resists through the construction of the discourse of an expectant mother that invokes 'hybridity'. And in invoking the hybridity in the postnational context she asserts her postcolonial feminist position.

In Part I of *Bye-Bye Blackbird* Dev's arrival and his despair in London are focused on. Part II gives an account of Dev's fascination for London and of Adit's disillusionment and difference with his mother-in-law, Mrs Roscommon James. Part III deals with Adit's nostalgia and his abrogation of English culture in favour of essential Indianness. For being pregnant, Sarah also departs England along with her husband perhaps with the hope of getting a better treatment as an expectant mother in Indian Hindu culture. And Dev's anglophobia changes to anglophilia. In postcolonial terms, Adit shifts his position from 'appropriation' to 'abrogation' and Dev, from abrogation to appropriation. During the transition of these characters, Sarah's identity is found to be in crisis. However, she intelligently overcomes it by switching over to her husband's side, but not without creating the prospect of overturning her husband's essential Indianness through her child who will have multicultural affiliation as Anita Desai has had.

Dev has left India in order to have a better education in London School of Economics. England, to him, is a material heaven. With full preparation he has come to get himself admitted to it. He is convinced that with the deep wisdom of his oriental mind he would be able to impress the professors. But on the first day after his arrival in London he is shocked to find the cultural differences of the two countries :

It was the first lesson his first day in London taught him : he who wants tea must get up and make it (6).

In India the tea would have been brought in either by a servant or by his mother fresh from the morning prayer. After that he is horrified to find the ill-treatment meted out to the coloured immigrants. He cannot stomach the insult a damson-cheeked boy inflicts upon him by calling him 'wog' (14). He immediately counters it by calling him 'Paji' (Ibid). Again, he vehemently reacts to the racial discrimination made at the public lavatories and the lambasting in the bus :

Laugh ... That's all you people do—you lazy immigrants ... You should go mad — when even schoolboys can call you names on the streets, when you find that the London docks have three kinds of lavatories – Ladies, Gents and Asiatics. But what did you do? You laughed (17).

But Adit who is the reverse of Dev ignores all such drawbacks because of the bitter experience he acquired in India at the time of seeking for a job there. He loves this country because he has got what he lacked in India. Instead of a job of two-hundred and fifty rupees in India, here he enjoys economic freedom as well as social freedom. He may be ridiculed as 'a boot-licking toady', 'spineless imperialist lover'(19), and labelled as the provider of the critique of Indian culture, yet he is not totally devoid of Indianness. His inability to 'part with the warmth of shared experience and shared humour, leaving Sarah to pick up empty cups and glasses and full ash-trays and yawn her way to bed' (27), bears testimony to the fact. The quotation in question also shows his indifference to Sarah and his tasting India through his association with other Indian immigrants. His predilection for 'chor chori', 'pokora' and other Indian dishes betrays his Indian self. Actually tasting Indian food in London he tastes India in a foreign country. At his subconscious level he remains Indian, while at his conscious level he is what Dev describes him to be :

Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect (156).

Dev, on the other hand, provides us with a critique of metropolitan London and of English culture. From a critical standpoint he decides that he should leave the country where he is insulted and unwanted. Out of bitterness he turns a cynic and hates to be

Macaulay's bastard, yet he cannot conceal his fascination for Battersea power station which 'threw him off his guard, shook him out of his normal attitude of cynical coolness' (53). But his fascination for Battersea power station is couched in 'Vedic hymn to Fire' (54). Tendency to give Indian colour to English material indicates his position of 'in-betweenness'. From now on he begins to use Indian values and scales to judge and appreciate anything of the West. For example, he compares the high streets of London with the Himalayan Mall. In spite of his attempt to 'connect' the two competing cultures of the two countries, he, like Dr Aziz of *A Passage to India*, hears the echo : 'no, not here', 'no not yet'. So, again he develops a psychological resistance to colonialism by constituting an anti-colonial discourse :

Let us abolish the British Railways : Down with Beeching, down with Bradshaw! Let us set up our elephant routs and let us abolish the vicarages and rectories and personages and build temples and mosques and gurudwars. Let us bring across our yogis and gurus, barefoot robed in saffron. Let us abolish the British public school. Down with Eton, Harrow and all the bunkum! Let us replace Latin and Greek with the study of Sanskrit classics and Punjabi swear words. No one shall cook stews any more, or bangers and mash. Let us feed them all on chilli pickles, tandoori chicken and rassum. Let all British women take to the graceful sari and all the British men to the noble dhoti ... (61-62).

What is evident here is Dev's desire to replace coloniality with pure, authentic Indianness.

Again, Dev is critical of English manners of living. The most painful thing to him is the indifference of the English people. Everyone is a stranger and lives in hiding, silently and invisibly. 'It would happen nowhere in India' (56). For this he feels 'like Alice falling, falling down the rabbit hole, like a Kafka stranger wandering through the dark labyrinth of a prison' (57). The contradiction in western culture cannot elude his critical look. He traces that in all respects the English people maintain privacy. But in the matter of sex they are quite unselfconscious unlike the Indians who are not in the least bit self-conscious about their persons, but very much so in their relationships. The English people like to flaunt themselves, their sex, their prowess, just the way Indian beggars enjoy flaunting their filth and their mutilations. Not only that, he also notices that the white women, married and

unmarried, like to expose their bodies which the Indian culture strongly discourages. But Adit, who is still a pucca Sahib, differs from Dev in this respect. He does not therefore forget to point out the other side of the Indian culture. He reminds Dev that Indian men and women may not like to do sexual matter in the open park, but they quarrel at home and 'in India too much goes on in the dark' (67).

However, the root of colonialism is so deep that it cannot be easily uprooted. Even the critic of the western culture that Dev is, he tends to forget that his convent education gave him as much courage to question it as to internalise its ideology. His recitation along with Adit from Wordsworth shows his fascination for a colonial text :

Earth has not anything to show more fair

Dull would he be of soul who could pass by (67).

So while at the conscious level he is cynic about western culture, at the subconscious one he remains an admirer of England's countryside and a part of the English culture. His unconscious mind is in search of romantic England, but not the industrial, standardised and regimented England. An oriental and romantic that he is, he, therefore, develops a fascination for the English people and the countryside, the daffodils, the sunshine, the streets, the parks, the piccadilly circus stand and the British museum.

Dev's newly developed attraction for England and his hatred for English culture put him into the 'Caliban dilemma'. 'To stay or depart' corresponds to Caliban's learning and unlearning master's language. However, his resolve to stay in England may be for keeping the wolf from his door. Still he perhaps remembers the insult the icon peddler inflicted on him thinking him to be a poor man. He therefore wants to appropriate the material opportunity the land would provide him. Hence his pronouncement :

I want freedom, not restriction. I want enterprises, not discipline. I want money ... I just want a job ... a real paid job (103)

Long before Dev unconsciously internalised the British romantic ideology through his reading of Wordsworth, Tennyson and Browning. So once he comes in touch with the countryside of England through his visit to Sarah's parental home, he undergoes a change. He tells Sarah :

There's something about your house that makes one dream golden dreams (154).

He tastes the euphoric sweetness of nature and the magic of England. He now feels he is no longer an outraged outsider.

But surprisingly the Roscommon's house makes an adverse effect upon Adit. To overcome humiliation and uncertainty in England he chose Sarah for company. He liked the quiet and reserved Sarah because she was like the Bengali women and unlike the white women. He might have thought that by marriage he would be one of the white people. But in his in-law's house it becomes patent that he is not wholly acceptable, as evinced in his mother-in-law's unconcealed hatred towards him or in Sarah's refusal to allow him access to her English private world. If an English marriage is not acceptable to the English society, why should he be subjected to that culture? His desire of being an international citizen ebbs away. His education, his feel for British history and poetry fell away from him 'like a coat that has been secretly undermined by moths' (182). Being again conscious of his true identity, he shifts his position from appropriation to abrogation and posits himself squarely against the British imperialist culture. Not only the white men, the white women also appear to be intolerable to him. This is why he now wants Sarah to put on sari instead of English dress. Disagreeing with Sarah's logic that the rain would ruin the hem, he ridicules the English people and their xenophobia by ridiculing Sarah :

You'll never accept anything but your own drab, dingy standard and your own dull, boring ways. Anything else looks clownish to you, laughable (193).

Here it is pertinent to note that the anti-colonial nationalism wants to mould the females in accordance with its norms, but when it fails to do so, it then despises them, with the result

that an animosity between post-colonialism and feminism crops up. This is why Sarah, without keeping silent, refutes him :

I never thought that, you imagine these things yourself and try and put them in my mouth (Ibid).

However, the outbreak of India-Pakistan war hastens Adit's decision to return to his own clan. He throws away the grab of a pukka Sahib. 'Little India in London', all records, lamb curries and sing-songs no longer appear real to him. The only real thing is departure from England which he loved more than his wife. He realises that whatever it is, India will be his natural condition. He resolves on returning to India against all odds, resisting thereby colonial culture by a new awareness of nationalism and racism.

Dev, in the meantime, has got the job of a salesman. Certainly he would try to fulfil his desires :

Not to return to India, not to marry ... *but* to know a little freedom, to indulge in a little adventure, to know, to know (emphasis mine) (123).

Now the question is why does he want to know more and more? Perhaps his will-to-knowledge is for power. He has perhaps learnt from his education that the dominant form of power can be resisted by producing an alternative form of knowledge. Perhaps keeping this view in mind, he wants to acquire more and more knowledge with proper enjoyment of economic freedom. In other words, he wants to counter the West with its own tool. Thus the odyssey of Adit and Dev can be construed as the shift from the appropriation to abrogation and from abrogation to appropriation. If Adit espouses cultural essentialism, Dev also multi-culturalism. This, no doubt, gives an indication of the indeterminacy in the text.

But from this indeterminate post-colonial position the novelist shifts to a determinate post-colonial feminist position in order to construct the discourse of heterosexual femininity and that of an expectant mother. The agent of both these discourses is Sarah whose identity is in crisis due to cross-cultural marriage. The novelist has also delineated other minor

female characters such as Mala, Bella, Ratna and the old Punjabi lady in order to show the customary contrast between East and West.

Sarah is oriental in gentleness and submissiveness, though of anglo-saxon origin. She perhaps was conscious of the repressive western patriarchal culture in which she was nurtured. Its set rules and rigid norms bored her in such a way that out of disgust she could not but say :

Ninety nine out of every hundred people here live lives exactly alike (127).

Even the perfectionism in her parental home was not to her liking. Her consciousness of the repressive western patriarchal ideology brought in a crisis in her life. To overcome the crisis she directed her attention to another patriarchal society which was less rigid, standardized and regimented. But it was not to her realization that sidestepping one crisis she was inviting another crisis by marrying an immigrant.

So after marriage Sarah finds her identity in crisis. She cannot bridge the gaps of the two cultures, more so for the language bar that makes communication with Adit's little India rather difficult. She finds her tastes different from Adit's. Notwithstanding her living with Adit, she suffers from aloneness. In playing two socially imposed roles – the role of Adit's wife and that of Head's secretary – she loses her real self. In any of these roles she cannot find the essence of her femininity. Problem crops up before her as she finds herself inadequate to her own British society, and, on the other hand, Indian culture appears to be insufficient for her. She does not make any attempt to connect her with India because she apprehends if Adit leaves her, she will be another Miss Moffit. However, we get an indication in her parental home that she is not willing to retain her English self. So as the opportunity comes, she, with a little hesitation, capitulates to Adit who grows determined to leave England. We hear Sarah confess :

It was her English self to which she must say goodbye. That was what hurt – not saying goodbye to England, because England would remain as it was, only at a greater distance from her, but always with the scope of a return visit. England, she whispered, but the word

aroused no special longing to possessiveness in her. English, she whispered, and then her instinctive reaction was to clutch at something and hold on to what was slipping through her fingers already (221).

What is noticeable is that however oppressive and repressive one's culture may be, one does not normally want to relinquish it, until it does not become compulsive or the situation does not demand. It is Sarah's pregnancy that compels her to bid farewell to her English culture. Perhaps she has somehow come to know that the expectant mother is given good treatment in Hindu culture. Motherhood, she anticipates, will be a joy there whereas it is painful in English culture.

Her unsaid anticipation is perhaps true. As Sudhir Karkar argues, the young Indian wife's situation in terms of family acceptance and hence emotional well-being, changes dramatically once she becomes pregnant. The prospect of motherhood holds out a composite solution for many of her difficulties. The psychological implications of her low social status as a bride and a newcomer; the tense, often humiliating relationships with other in her husband's family; her homesickness and sense of isolation; her identity confusion; the awkwardness of marital intimacy; and thus, often, the unfulfilled yearnings of her sexual self—these are tangled up in a knot, as it were. With the anticipation of motherhood, this knot begins, almost miraculously, to be unravelled (Rehana Ghadially 1988 : 65). Here one may equate Sarah's condition with that of Abraham's wife, Sarah, who was childless. 'She prayed to God for a child. God promised her that in her old age she would bear a child to Abraham. The child's name was Isaac' (The Wordsworth Dictionary of Classical and Literary Allusion, 1994 : 196). Anita Desai perhaps has recast the biblical character in the post-colonial context. Anyway, Sarah's anticipations that her pregnancy will deliver her from the insecurity, doubt and shame of infertility and provide her with adult identity, that her unborn child will be her saviour and instrumental in winning for her the love and acceptance of those around her, make her bid adieu to her English self.

In addition to that, Sarah's pregnancy may be interpreted by a psychoanalytic feminist theory which, in a Foucauldian feminist perspective, might be included as one among a plurality of tactics of resistance to male dominance (J. Sawicki, 1991 : 65). As Kristeva

observes in her *Women's Time* (Toril Moi (ed.) *The Kristeva Reader*, 1986 : 206), in pregnancy woman can recover a repressed relation to the semiotic maternal through the profound psychic experience of giving birth to her new born child. She also observes that pregnancy involves a kind of pleasurable, creative thinking with an other. Not only that, pregnancy reproduces the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject : redoubling of the body, separation and co-existence of the self and an other, of nature and consciousness, of physiology and speech. This mode of relating, according to Kristeva, involves a potential reconstruction of human social relationships, one in which a new relation to the semiotic body, its pleasures, and its dismantling of fixed oppositions (self/other, man/woman) can overturn existing masculine culture. Adapting Kristeva's theory we may say that Sarah's pregnancy in postcolonial context subverts the death-dealing fixed binary oppositions of semiotic/symbolic, self/other, man/woman, East/West and thereafter reconstructs a prospect of new human relationships of recognition and acceptance. The child to be born in India will, no doubt, be a hybrid child of Indian father and English mother. The child, like Anita Desai, will be brought up on Indian soil and inherit western culture from his/her mother. Does it not invoke multiculturalism in the post-national period? Thus resurrecting the subjugated knowledge of a married English woman through the construction of the discourse of heterosexual femininity and that of the expectant mother, Anita Deasi creates a form of resistance to the purity of the authentic essential national culture in the post-independence period.

WHERE SHALL WE GO THIS SUMMER ?: A STRUGGLE FOR REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM

Anita Desai's fourth novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), has been commented upon by different critics from different points of view. Vimala Rao and N. Pratima have given an analytic study of it (R.K. Dhawan (ed.) Vol. 3, 1991 : 171-189). T.S. Anand has tried to trace out the novelist's stance against negativism in it (Ibid : 166). K.P. Ambekar has focused on its symbolism in comparison with that of Virginia Woolf's *To The LightHouse* (Ibid : 201). Again, Usha Bande has re-examined it in the light of existential philosophy (Ibid : 165-206). But what is interesting is that many critics have criticised its conclusion as too unassertive and negative, a few feel that it suggests lack of finality, while others claim that it denotes a defeat of the individual. Darshan Singh Maini finds the ending weak. As he says, 'It does not connect. Nor are we prepared for the sudden glow and the decision to return to Bombay and to sanity' (K.K. Sharma (ed.) 1977 : 229). But there are others who praise the ending as 'life-enhancing' and appreciate Sita for accepting the realities of life. However, the novel has not so far been analysed in a Foucauldian feminist perspective. I use this perspective to explore and resurrect the novel's subjugated knowledge in the figure of a middle-aged pregnant mother who refuses to accept the medical solution to her pregnancy offered by her husband.

Like *Cry, The Peacock*, the novel has a triptyche structure : Part I is entitled as Monsoon'67, Part II Winter'47 and Part III Monsoon'67. Part I and Part III highlight Sita's existence in Bombay and Part II her life on Manori, an island. Again, Part II is dovetailed into Part I and Part III in order to make her undertake a see-saw journey between the island and the mainland in search for a salubrious condition for her new child. As S. Indira observes, 'her life in the city is depicted mainly through the images of violence and her life on the island is teemed with images of sea, sunshine, colour and flowers' (1994 : 70). However, from a feminist point of view, her life on two different regions may be construed

as her plight under two forms of Indian patriarchy : the life on Manori seems to represent her plight in traditional form of Indian patriarchy and her life on the mainland representing her plight in Indian patriarchal capitalist society.

In Part I Sita is seen to adopt a critical position to provide us with the critique of the Indian patriarchal capitalist society. Here it is pertinent to note an interview of Yashadhara Dalmia with Anita Desai where Anita Desai asserts that 'she is not interested in characters who are average, but in those who have been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against, or made to stand against, the general current' (The Times of India, 29th April, 1979). The novelist's claim is considerably true in this context because Sita, the protagonist, is not an average woman. She is conscious of what she is. In other words, she is conscious of her surroundings, of the period and the precise moments in which she is living. In a sense, she has the capacity to analyse the present situation and her self in relation to others. In providing us with a criticism of the post-independence Indian patriarchal capitalist society, she articulates her critical attitude towards its culture. Foucault defines the notion of critique in three ways – 'the art of not being governed in such a manner, the art of voluntary inservitude and a thoughtful indocility, in opposition to Kant's enlightenment, defined as the courage to use one's own reason, though Kant's concept of autonomy is grounded on obedience to Sovereign power.' (Michael Kelly, 1994 : 289-90). Adapting Foucault's views on critique, in this context we may say that in refusing to accept the male-defined medical solution to her pregnancy, she shows her art of not being governed by her husband and thereby takes a position of resistance to patriarchal medical interference to female experience of delivery.

Sita, a highly sensitive middle-aged woman, has had four children 'with pride, with pleasure – sensual, emotional, Freudian, every kind of pleasure – with all the placid serenity that supposedly goes with pregnancy and parturition' (31-32). Her husband is puzzled therefore when the fifth time she tells him she is pregnant. He stares at her with a distaste that tells her it is not becoming for a woman now in her forties, greying, ageing, to behave with such a total lack of control. All through their married life they preferred to avoid a confrontation. But now Raman finds her giving vent to her fears, her rages and her

resentments that she has allowed to accumulate inside her for long seven months. What infuriates her is his attempt to put the entire blame upon her for the pregnancy. However, he tries to persuade her to undergo parturition under the supervision of a doctor in the hospital :

You must stay where there is doctor, a hospital and a telephone. You can't go to the island in the middle of the monsoon. you can't have a baby there (33).

But she refuses to comply with his diktat with a declaration : 'I don't want it to be born' (35).

She has now become conscious of the meaningless life around her. She cannot reconcile to Raman's acceptance of life's ordinariness and feels discontented with women's life in post-independence India. She manifests her sense of freedom through her identification with a foreigner whom she meets on the roadside while returning with her husband from holiday at Ajanta and Ellora caves. While Raman thinks that the foreigner who wanted a lift to Ellora is a fool in that he does not know which side of the road to wait on, Sita refutes him by saying that it is not his foolishness but innocence that 'made him seem more brave not knowing anything but going on nevertheless' (52). Sita identifies herself with him because 'like her, the foreigner is so vulnerable - vulnerable to violence and criticism in the society' (K.P. Ambekar, in R.K. Dhawan (ed.) Vol. III 1991 : 204).

Moreover, for Sita, Raman's friends, acquaintances, relatives and business associates are no better than animals, because their life is concerned with 'nothing but food, sex and money' (47). Sita calls them animals who are neither pet, nor wild beasts but 'pariahs ... hanging about drains and dustbins, waiting to pounce and kill and eat' (Ibid). Not only this, she also feels suffocated by the 'vegetarian complacence' (49) of the well-fed women and rebels against 'their sub-human placidity, calmness and sluggishness' (48) by starting smoking :

A thing that had never been done in their household by any women and even men only in street – and began to speak in sudden rushes of emotion, as though flinging darts at their smooth, unscarred faces (Ibid).

Through her acts of smoking and wearing the garments of a demoralised washerwoman, which are ‘so limp, so faded, so bedraggled and ragged’, she abrogates Indian patriarchal family norms for the women and asserts her position in opposition to compliant women.

More interesting is that what is normal to her husband and her children is abnormal to her. The ‘small incidents’ that are nothing but trifles to them seem to threaten her existence. The sight of the crows forming ‘a shadow civilization in that city of flats and alleys’ (38) and making a feast of a wounded eagle unnerves her to the point of tears. Her husband’s remark – ‘they have made a good job of your eagle’ (41) – seems inhuman and callous to her. The small incident, as K.P. Ambekar observes, highlights the total absence of communication between Sita and those around her (R.K. Dhawan (ed.) Vol. III, 1991 : 203). Again, as S. Indira states, ‘this scene of murder and mutilation is reflective of an all pervasive violence and victimization, the world seems to gloat over’ (S. Indira, 1994 : 76). But Meneka, Sita’s daughter, thinks that her mother’s reaction to the eagle and crow incident is a mere act of drama to ‘embarrass the family’ (41). Here lies the difference between the mother and the daughter in their attitude to life. In order to find out the cause of their difference it is worthwhile to note Virginia Woolf’s comment in *Three Guineas* which builds around three causes : first to prevent war by helping a pacifist society; second, building of a woman’s college and third, establishing a society dedicated to helping women to enter the professions. For her, the three causes are interrelated and might help prevent war and eradicate fascism. Woolf observes that women have never made war, ‘scarcely a human being in the course of history has fallen to a woman’s rifle; the vast majority of birds and beasts have been killed by you, not us’ (Virginia Woolf, 1963 : 6). Opposing militarism and fascism Woolf proposes a society that would encourage the development of women’s ethic that is holistic, anti-militaristic and life-affirming. Sita seems to be in search of this sort of society and therefore she stages a symbolic protest against cannibalism and violence in patriarchal capitalist society which is misinterpreted by her daughter as an act of drama to embarrass the family. Actually, Sita envisions something

beyond the patriarchal capitalism while Meneka hopes to fulfil her aspiration with the appropriation of modern means existing in the civil society.

The newspaper 'headlines about war in Vietnam, the photograph of a woman weeping over a small grave, another of a crowd outside a Rhodesian jail; the articles about the perfidy of Pakistan' (55) lead her to understand that almost the whole world is involved in war of destruction. The war of destruction appals her to such a great extent that she begins to think how can the civilization survive, how can the child? She begins to lose all feminine and maternal belief in childbirth because she thinks that childbirth would be one more act of violence and murder in a world that has already had enough of it. However, she struggles inward to offer herself and her unborn child an alternative, 'a bewitched life'. She gains in courage from the Greek poet Cavafy's verse :

To certain people there comes a day
When they must say the great Yes or the Great No (37).

She realises that the day has come to say 'Great No' to violence in favour of a 'bewitched life' on Manori where her fabled father created magic. She believes that the magic still is there and that it will help her keep the child unborn. and retrieve the sense of wholeness. On these assumptions she shows her courage to say 'No' to Raman's diktat :

I will go. I am leaving tomorrow on the island – it'll be different (36).

Sita brings her two children, Karan and Menaka, to the island. But after twenty years the island too appears to her to be occupied by dilapidation, artificiality, drabness and tonelessness. Everywhere she is engulfed by a picture of despair :

The fields were only pits of mud and slush ... The Manori village was an evil mass of over-flowing drains, gaping thatched roofs and huts all battered and awry (22).

The picture of despair on the present island forces her to take shelter in the island of her memory. But through her review of it she discovers that the island of '47 did not have

magic of its own, it was created by her father on it. As she reviews her relationship and those of her sister, the villagers, his chalas, her mother, with her father, the unpleasant truths about him loom large before her. As S. Indira observes, 'the starred footprints of the white water birds on the sands give indication of her father's hidden desire to leave behind him a name for himself after his death' (1994 : 71). Sita recollects how her disillusionment with her fabled father began while she failed to find 'the well-water sweet'. But the villagers were hypnotised by his act of digging well and tasted the water sweet. However, she now realises that her father deprived her of good education and friendly advice. That 'she emerged as a moth from its cocoon not into sunlight, but into a grey nonlight that does not warm the damp wings or give them strength for flight' (76) implies that she was not made self-reliant but dependent. This consciousness of her victimization by her father makes her vicious. She becomes more vicious when she envisages that her father had a second wife, that there was an uncanny relationship between her father and her step-sister Rakha and that her mother was a run-away from her father's oppression. Sita's rage and anger that are articulated symbolically through the fury of Nature might be construed as the feminist rage and anger against the women's victimization by their sovereign-fathers in traditional Indian patriarchal society :

The sound of the dry palm leaves clattering and clashing together—suddenly, precipitately – in the salt wind (80).

Sita's fury and horror do not cease to rise in crescendo as she remembers how her father would crush her mother's jewellery and mix it in the medicine. Following Nimmie Poovaya's observation, it may be said that her father's use of the pulverized jewels in the medicine has a two-fold implication : he is symbolically avenging himself on the wife who had dared to defy him by running away, thus placing her actual person outside the orbit of his control; simulataneously he is using the jewellery to enmesh the women folk of Manori even more firmly in his power (Nimmie Poovaya in Narasimhaiah (ed.) Commonwealth Literature, Problems of Response, 1981 : 208).

Besides this, it may not be an exaggeration to argue that Sita's father may have been delineated to expose the contradiction between Gandhiji's vision of women's emancipation

and the Gandhians' exploitation of the ignorant and innocent village women. Sita's father who claimed himself to be a true Gandhian is discovered to have exploited, in the name of their welfare, the ignorant and innocent villagers, particularly the women :

He had cast an illusion as a fisherman casts a net, with the faintest sussuration of warning, upon a flock of fish in the sea. His chelas were the first to be caught, then the villagers, most inescapably the women (100).

However, the unpalatable past about her father that has so far been unearthed does not create trouble to her so much as the Manori of '67s does because she finds the place devoid of magic :

It was no place in which to give birth. There was no magic here – the magic was gone (112).

This harrowing realisation makes her feel a spasm of fear at her bravado. She lays her hands protectively on her swelling belly. She begins to think what if, as her husband warned her, something happens? For all her inspired words, she knows she cannot shelter the baby inside her forever. And she is worried as to who would help her when the time of parting comes. Mariam's name occurs to her. But at the thought of Mariam's burly arms plunging into her, handling the fragile skull of the infant with her fat, smacking hands, she gets horrified. Her escapade is as though beckoning one of those horror stories that appear in newspapers, of women giving birth in tree-tops during floods, in the middle of an earthquake, or inside an aeroplane. The vision of these horrors fragments her feminine self. She is in a dilemma as to whether she should meet the demands of her children by going back to the mainland or face what may come. She feels to be isolated from the children, although she sustains an inner struggle to come out of the torments and isolation. At last she makes a positive attempt to reach out to the children and establishes a relationship with them through playing mud-modelling with them. Consequently, she learns to identify herself with Nature and begins to get back the sense of wholeness.

In addition, another change comes upon her as she encounters Raman on Manori island. She observes that it is not only she but Raman too who has suffered :

During these weeks that she had been away – had suffered from worry and anxiety about her, the unborn child, Meneka and Karan, living alone on the island in this wild season. His boys at home must have worried him too, while he was at work in the factory which was not without its problems either – he never told her of them and she never gave much thought to it but the possibility struck her now. He looked worn, much older than his years. Nor could he stay here, resting, as she was doing (138).

With this sympathetic feeling towards Raman, she for the first time endeavours to connect her self with that of Raman. But as she comes to know that Raman has come not for her sake but for her daughter who had written to him, she feels to be betrayed by all of them. However, on Raman's query if she has never been happy, Sita refers to the only happy moment of her life when she encountered a Muslim couple in the Hanging Garden in Bombay :

So strange – that love, that sadness, not life anything I have seen or known. They were so white, so radiant, they made me see my own life like a shadow, absolutely flat, uncoloured. That, that was the happy ... (146-47).

This suggests her relation with Raman has been vitiated by a kind of internal negation. As Usha Bande puts it : 'Sita's ideal seems to be a kind of love in which she could stay whole and yet be in complete harmony with her lover. She cannot find this divine harmony in reality' (Usha Bande in R.K. Dhawan (ed.) 1991 : 198). However, what is noticeable is that Sita's confession draws only a bewildered response from Raman. Sita then realises that they run on parallel lines. Still she is not ready to give up her battle against Raman's logic. She argues that even though she is a mother of four children, she thinks that children are a source of anxiety, concern and pessimism, they do not provide happiness but sentimentality. Countering such ideas of Sita, Raman emphasises the value of sentimentality that, he thinks, makes one human. But Sita, dismissing his argument, valorises the love of the Muslim couple because it has enabled her to see that life has a

meaning. However, Raman can no longer argue with her : he releases her 'out of pure weariness with her, weariness with her muddle' (149). Thus maintaining a position of resistance to Raman's diktat she shows her mettle not to be governed by him. Now she is free to choose what is best for her and her unborn child. And exercising her full autonomy she resolves to accept life on the mainland.

Critics like N.R. Shastri and S. Indira look upon Sita's final attitude to life as healthy. They find in it the reflection of the novelist's new and positive attitude to life :

The novel seems to acquire a new idiom in that the death/suicide syndrome of her earlier fiction gives place to a sober, balanced acceptance of life (S. Indira 1994 : 69).

On the contrary, the critics like D.S. Maini find the ending too unassertive and negative because it suggests, in their view, Sita's defeat. But the fact is otherwise. Sita has an ideology that opposes violence, corruption and destruction in patriarchal capitalism. She hoped that her holistic and life-affirming ideology would be materialized on Manori '67. But her hope has been dashed to the ground. To stick to her stubbornness, she, like Monisha in *Voices in the City*, might have committed suicide, but she understands that the suicide would entail the destruction not only of her life but also that of the unborn child. Sane and brave Sita cannot allow herself to be accused of infanticide and thereby contradict her own ideology. She suspends the idea of refusal to medical treatment to parturition in favour of negotiation with it. Besides this, Sita refuses to be dominated by Raman in terms of power/knowledge relations. One may argue that it is Raman who has taught Sita to be grateful to life and accept the terms of life. But it is otherwise. If Sita has learnt the lesson of acceptance of life, it is from Nature:

Neither sea nor the sky were (sic) separate or contained – they rushed into each other in a rush of light and shade, impossible to disentangle (153).

What she has learnt from Nature is that as in Nature everything is inseparably linked to one another, in a heterosexual society man is incomplete without woman or vice-versa. In this sense, Sita should not be treated as the other of Raman in the power/knowledge

relations. As free subjects, both of them can claim to be the knowers and equal to each other. Again they are different from each other in their respective ways of acquiring knowledge of life. While Raman has learnt that life is only a matter of disappointment, but not disaster and that one should be grateful to it for that, Sita has learnt that one should accept the terms of life since nothing in the world is self-contained. Even her own self is not fully autonomous, its autonomy being contingent upon relationships. Hence keeping her relationship with the unborn child in mind, she comes to negotiate with Raman. Above all, her negotiation is premised upon mutuality that ensures her that she would be treated not only as body, but also as human subject with fears, desires, needs and so forth. Thus resurrecting the subjugated knowledge of a pregnant woman-wife-and-mother, the novelist creates resistance to the male-defined medical control over childbirth in patriarchal capitalist society.

FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN : A PLURIVOCAL FEMINIST DISCOURSE

Fire On The Mountain (1977), Anita Desai's fifth novel, is a woman centred narrative, portraying three women characters – Nanda Kaul, the widow of a university Vice-Chancellor, her great-granddaughter Raka and her life-long friend Illa Das. So far its criticism has tended to focus on Anita Desai's detailed study of these three female characters and particularly on her presentation of Nanda Kaul, the protagonist of the novel, although Ralph J. Crane, on the other hand, has focused on 'the patriarchal oppression' and considered it as 'the antagonist of the novel' (Ralph J. Crane in A. L. McLeod (ed.) 1996:94) Again, adopting a psychoanalytic feminist approach, Bettina L. Knapp has focused on the novelist's characterization and drawing upon Hindu mythology provided an interesting insight into Desai's naming of her characters and the novel's symbolism and imagery (Parker & Starkey (eds.) 1995 : 177-193). However, in a Foucauldian feminist perspective, the novel may be considered as a plurivocal feminist discourse, emerging out of the struggles of the three women characters against different forms of patriarchal oppression. In power relations they first experience oppression and then create resistance to it. In other words, they recreate the history of their oppressive life from their own standpoint and thereby assert their own subjecthood. While asserting their subjecthood, they take different positions of resistance to the oppressive forms of patriarchal power.

Like *Cry, The Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, this novel has triptyche structure, focusing on each of the three female characters in turn. Initially Nanda Kaul is shown to be at Carignano with which Raka and Illa Das come to be associated with the progress of the narrative. Carignano is a house in Kasauli on the Himalayan range. It was initially built by a British colonel with a concern for his wife's ill-health. Eventually, it came to be used by the neurotic maiden British ladies. After independence it became a haunted house as the British ladies were hurriedly shipped back to England in order to save them from rapes by the natives. The deserted house was up for sale and Nanda Kaul bought

it to give herself shelter from the oppressive demands of patriarchal family. Nanda has withdrawn into Carignano where she finds everything she wanted in her life. Residing in this quiet house, she fancies she could merge with pine trees and be mistaken for one :

To be a tree, no more and no less, was all she was prepared to undertake (4).

Her desire for identification with nature may be construed as her protest against the oppressive patriarchal ideology that forced her in the roles of daughter, wife and mother. She no longer considers the roles joyful. In the inner structure of her mind we find the indelible impression of the injuries she sustained in her roles as daughter, wife and mother.

Nanda Kaul's past is like 'a great, heavy, difficult book' (30) that tells us of a woman suffering from stranglehold of family ties : 'from nimiety, the disorder, the fluctuating and unpredictable excess' (Ibid). The wives of the professors and others would think 'the Vice-Chancellor is lucky to have a wife who can run everything as she does' (18), but it was beyond their understanding that the house she stalked through was 'his house, never hers' (Ibid). In spite of her discharge of all duties and responsibilities in 'his house', she had to bear a life of total neglect and lovelessness. One might visualise in her a perfect follower of Manu's code : 'obedience to husband is the beginning, middle and the end of female duty'. Marriage was a commitment to her. Whatever be its traumas, she left no stone unturned to fulfil the demands of her husband and his children. Her life was used up in cooking, sewing washing and mothering. She was not paid for the great service she rendered to her husband. A masculinist critic may argue that her husband paid her great attention by consulting her in respect of certain family matters. But for a feminist critic, the Vice-Chancellor's consultation with his wife was nothing but an eye-wash. The motive behind it was to divert her attention away from his liaison with Miss David and to cajole her into the prescribed roles of wifhood and motherhood.

As S. Indira puts it, Nanda Kaul's loveless conjugal life is suggested by the image of 'badminton court'. In her view, the badminton court evokes tension, anger, disapproval and distaste in Nanda Kaul. As the court is the place where her husband played games with his mistress, it becomes the symbol of treachery, and 'the broken and discarded shuttlecock'

suggests her loveless plight (S. Indira, 1994:103). Anyway, as a protest against her husband's perfidy towards her, she shifted her husband's bed from their shared room to a small dressing room, though her protest could not break the liaison. Besides that protest, she made no other attempt at breaking the liaison because of her consideration of certain factors. First, sagacious Nanda Kaul thought it beneath her dignity to question her husband's extra-marital sexuality. Secondly, she could not break the marriage bond lest she should lose the social status of a Vice-Chancellor's wife and plunge herself into straitened circumstances. Thirdly, her love for life forbade her to commit suicide to come out of the patriarchal oppression. However, in delineating this sort of husband-wife relationship Anita Desai makes us aware of the contradiction in patriarchal ideology. Desai exposes that monogamy in Hindu patriarchal society is meant for women only, but not for men because, according to middle class Hindu morality, the women's extra-marital affairs with other men are considered as an act of infidelity whereas the men's extra-marital affairs are in no way considered as an act of treachery towards their wives.

Nanda's relationship with her children was equally ungratifying. For her, motherhood was not a joy. This is why the years when her children were small now look to her 'like the gorge, cluttered, choked and blackened with the heads of children and grandchildren' (17). She was so fed up with them in the past that she now groans :

Discharge me ... I've discharged all my duties, discharge (30).

Actually, too much societal demands upon her forced her to choose a life of isolation at Carignano. This seems to indicate that 'there is no space beyond those of daughter, wife and mother that a woman in India can occupy' (Ralph J. Crane in A. L. McLeod (ed.) 1996:95).

However, after her self-imposed isolation at Carignano, Nanda Kaul tries to be a selfish woman. She does not want anybody or anything to intrude into her quiet life. Her selfishness may be construed as a protest against her previous selfless life. She craves no attachment except 'to be alone, to have Carignano to herself, in this period of life when stillness and calm were all she wished to entertain' (17).

But her quest for perfect stillness is thwarted with the sudden arrival of a letter from Asha, her elder daughter :

Darling Mama, ... Now I've persuaded Tara into going to Geneva and Rakesh into taking her ... I had a long talk with him, he is not really so bad as Tara might make you believe, she simply doesn't understand him, does not understand men, and she really is the wrong type of wife for a man like him so I can't blame him entirely although it is true that he does drink— well, I have to get Tara ready ... But there is one problem ... the problem is, of course, Raka ... Tara thought I could take Raka with me. But that is quite out of question ... she is very weak ... so Tara and I have decided it will be best to send her to you for the summer. And I know how happy it will make you to have your great-grandchild for company in that lonely house (15-16).

The discourse in the form of a letter affects her subjectivity because of two things : first, Asha's attitude to Tara and second, Raka's imminent presence at Carignano. Asha's attitude to Tara suggests that not only a man but also a woman can be the enemy of another woman. Anita Desai never forgets to notice this fact too. She traces a compliant woman in Asha who colludes with a woman's oppressor and thereby contributes towards the perpetuation of male hegemony. Instead of a protest against her daughter's victimization by her son-in-law, she takes sides with him and holds Tara responsible for the failure of their marriage. Again, Anita Desai delineates the male characters like Ram Lal and the grain-seller who are sympathetic towards Raka and Illa Das respectively, but not the oppressors of women. Thus Desai subverts the simple man/woman binary opposition in this fiction. However, Nanda Kaul is in dilemma. She cannot be unsympathetic and indifferent to Tara's predicament. Again she cannot allow Raka to intrude into her private life that hitherto eluded her. Finally, out of sympathy towards Tara she reluctantly accepts Raka.

Raka is unlike the other ordinary children in our society. Unlike them, she does not feel attracted towards the cheerful and gay aspects of Nature, but towards the uncanny places and things. Besides this, her love for freedom, privacy and seclusion makes her different from the other ordinary children. She is such stuff as recluses are made of :

If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, her great-granddaughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct. She had not arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice – she was born to it, simply (48).

But Usha Pathania argues that 'Raka is not a born recluse. She becomes an introvert because of the abnormal circumstances around her. She is the victim of a broken home' (Usha Pathania in R. K. Dhawan (ed.) set I Vol-III 1991 : 208). Usha Pathania is right in her argument because Raka is not a born-recluse, but has grown into a recluse out of her knowledge of the ambiguous life in diplomatic society and her experience of the patriarchal oppression in her parental home. Her observation of her mother's constant living in a fear-psychotic situation, her experience of her father's total negligence towards her for being a girl and her grandmother's collusion with her oppressor-father are also the factors that have developed in her a sense of rejection of human company and their so-called safe, cosy and civilized patriarchal society.

Solitude, therefore, never disturbs her. She is happy in Kasauli with its charred house on the ridge, with its fire-blasted hill-top where nothing sounds mercifully, but the creaking of the pines in the wind and the demented cuckoos. She remains absorbed in a world of her own and avoids human company and conversation and even Nanda Kaul's. Strangely Raka's indifference to Nanda Kaul makes the latter powerless. As a result, it becomes a goad, a challenge to her to exercise power over Raka by any means. She applies the age-old great-grandmother's or grandmother's technique of story-telling to the children. But the fantasy tales relating to her childhood and her father fail to catch the interest of Raka. Rather Raka rejects her friendly overtures and affection and prizes loneliness :

She would have to break out into freedom again. She could not bear to be confined to the old lady's fantasy world when the reality outside appealed so strongly ... And here she was hedged, smothered, stifled inside the old lady's words, dreams and more words (100).

What is noticeable in Nanda's life is that in her husband's family she was dependent on her husband, but after his death she adopts a separatist's position by plunging herself into a self-imposed isolation at Carignano where she asserts her selfhood not in relation to her

children, but in relation to quiet Nature. But with the arrival of Raka, a change begins to take place in her. She makes an attempt at relating her self to that of Raka and thereby tries to get hold on Raka. Raka is not willing to move an inch from her radical position which she maintains by shunning her father, grandmother, great-grandmother and even almost all human companionships. The feminist in Raka visualises an oppressor of woman in her sovereign-father. 'All the caged, clawed, tailed headless male and female monsters and the song of parental love in the club' oppress her mind so vehemently that she figures her father behind them :

Somewhere behind them, behind it all, was her father, home from a party, stumbling and crushing through the curtains of night, his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse –harsh, filthy abuse (71).

Not only this, the whole of the patriarchal world appears to her to be replete with animality.

After the club incident, Raka shifts her role position from the observer of the patriarchal oppression to the sympathizer of the oppressed. Symbolically, she plays the role of a sympathizer of the oppressed through her request to Ram Lal not to throw stone at the young monkey, 'pinched and anxious' (78). Identifying her position with that of the young monkey, she flings her feminist rage and anger through untimely north-wind against the oppressive patriarchal world :

A high wind whined through pine trees all afternoon, lashing the branches and scattering the cones... small white butterflies were being blown about like scraps of paper over the bleached grass (81).

Illa Das, a typical christian spinster with the symptoms of misery and misfortune on her face, is now a social welfare officer fighting against the ills of society. She stands foil to Nanda Kaul. With her arrival at Carignano, Nanda Kaul begins to feel as if 'the entire weight of the overloaded past seemed to pour onto her like liquid cement that immediately set solid, incarcerating her in its stiff gloom' (117). But as Ralph J. Crane argues, 'Illa Das's arrival at Carignano turns out to be more than the interruption Nanda envisages : it is,

in fact, a call to battle against a patriarchal system that has brutally oppressed all three women since birth” (A. L. McLeod (ed.) 1996 : 94).

However, Illa Das looks back to her past to see that she too lived a life of luxury and abundance in her parental home. Initially it appears to her that she was well-treated by her father who paid for ‘the very best, French lessons, piano lessons, English governesses’ (127) for his daughters. But she realises with hindsight that her expensive education left her ‘helpless, positively handicapped’ (Ibid). The critic like Ralph J. Crane points out, ‘it is an education that does nothing to prepare Illa for life outside the patriarchally acceptable sphere of female life – as daughter, wife and then mother’ (McLeod (ed.) 1996:100). The cruel treatment Illa Das receives from her brothers, which leaves her in poverty forces her to work, first as a lecturer and then as a social welfare officer. In both jobs she organises battle against patriarchal oppression. She resigns the job of a lecturership as she finds a junior promoted to the post of Principal over her head. Her resignation may be construed as a protest against the injustice meted out to her and the hegemony of another Vice-Chancellor. Illa Das is such a woman who is ready to face the dire consequences but never to bow to humiliation, corruption and injustice. So as a social welfare officer, she again tries to organise a struggle against the ills of society and male hegemony by educating the village women about the superstitious social practices and ill-health. She takes this step because she observes that ‘the women are willing ... to try and change their dreadful lives by an effort’ (129), although their efforts are stymied by their dominant husbands. Illa Das also gears up her fighting against child-marriage. A girl of mere seven years old is being given in marriage to an old widower with six children. What is indicated here is that a female child in patriarchal society is nothing but a commodity or a sex object. Her fight against the child-marriage brings her in direct confrontation with the village priest and Preet Singh, the father of the child. Here it is pertinent to note Rosenwasser’s observation :

Illa Das is an example of women’s courage and strength when confronted by male dominance in terms of inheritance and education which perpetuate dependency. From her own experience, Illa Das realises the importance of an education that will prepare woman for the world outside of home and the need for women to look after their own well-being. By challenging male authority, Illa Das espouses the feminist cause through her conscious

But her feminist voice is gagged by murdering and raping her, and the violent patriarchal power manifests itself through Preet Singh who rapes and murders her.

The discourse of Illa's murder and rape makes a tremendous pressure upon Nanda Kaul's protective self. The whole imaginative edifice that she has so far woven with the help of fantasy tales about her father crumbles down. She comes upon reality and confesses :

Her father had never been to Tibet—he had bought the little Buddha from a travelling pedlar. They had not had bears and leopards in their home, nothing but overfed dogs and bad-tempered parrots (145).

Nanda Kaul cannot remain detached and serene like the statue of Lord Buddha while Illa's rape makes her feel that the chastity of the entire woman community is ravished. Her confession about her father can be construed as a symbolic expression of feminist rage against the victimization of daughters by their patriarch fathers. Despite this, Nanda Kaul suffers from guilt consciousness that she is also involved in her friend's murder and rape because she refused to respond to Illa Das's unspoken, yet nevertheless clearly understood plea for a shelter at Carignano. This sense of guilt makes a tremendous pressure on her heart and she dies of heart attack before her cry for another battle against violent phallic power.

But Raka reacts to Illa's murder and rape in a radical way. She now moves to an action like violence for violence. She counters the violent patriarchal power by setting the forest on fire. Raka's setting the forest on fire may be taken as being symbolic of destruction and regeneration. By setting the forest on fire, she symbolically destroys the violent phallic power with the hope of regenerating a holistic and life-affirming women's world.

Thus three women take different positions of resistance to the oppressive form of patriarchal power. Nanda's fight is for her personal power and autonomy; Illa's for social transformation and Raka's for a new world based on women's ethics. So if Nanda's voice is regarded as that of an individual feminist, Illa's is akin to that of a socialist and Raka's is that of a radical feminist. These three different feminist voices are finally interrelated by another stout feminist voice raised against rape that is, after all, an omnipresent terror to all women of any class, race or caste. Thus *Fire on the Mountain* emerges as a plurivocal feminist discourse on women's victimization by men in different forms of patriarchy.

CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY : LOVE THAT RESISTS PARTITION

Clear Light of Day (1980), Anita Desai's sixth novel, consisting of four unnamed parts, has been acclaimed as 'a wonderful novel about silence and music, about the partition of a family as well as a nation'. Besides this, since its publication, the novel has been explored in various ways. Anita Desai states in her interview with Sunil Sethi :

My novel is about time as a destroyer, as a preserver and about what the bondage of time does to the people (India Today Dec 1-5, 1980 : 142).

Taking the cue from the novelist's statement, the critics like Madhusudan Prasad (1984), Asha Kanwar (1989) and Sandhyarani Das (1996) have explored in it the theme of time in relation to eternity. Again, Santosh Gupta has studied it as 'bridging the polarities of imagination and reason' (S. Gupta in R.K. Dhawan (ed.) Set I, vol. III, 1991 : 236). Usha Bande has studied the characters of the novel in the light of Third Force psychology in her book *The Novels of Anita Desai* (1988). And in a comparative study the theme of alienation has been explored by Rajib Sharma in *Feminine Sensibility : Alienation in Charlotte Bronte and Anita Desai* (1995). All such readings have ignored to focus on women's question. I, however, propose to break new ground by exploring the novel as a significant discourse on post-colonial feminism.

Though an avowedly subjective writer, Anita Desai does not forget to focus on women's question and their search for identity in the post-independence patriarchal society. In constructing the different women characters like Mira Masi, a widow, Bimala, a spinster and Tara, a married woman, the novelist insistently questions and opposes Hindu patriarchal ideologies. In constructing the discourse of widowhood, she seems to expose the nationalist project's failure to solve the problem of widowhood and the remarriage of the

girl widow. And in making a woman like Bimala abrogate heterosexual marriage and live an independent life, Anita Desai subverts the conventional gender identity and thereby suggests a prospect of emancipation for woman. But while Tara is taken into consideration, the novelist is seen to shift her feminist position towards the appropriation of the patriarchal institution like marriage and family for sharing sexual power and pleasure. Lastly, in preferring, through Bimala and Tara, a composite culture to the pure patriarchal Hindu national culture, she posits herself as a postcolonial feminist writer in this novel.

The novel opens with the mocking and enticing call of the koels that wake up Tara, who has come to visit their family at Old Delhi during summer vacation along with her diplomat husband Bakul. Her visit rakes up all the bitter memories of the past in her elder sister Bimala, a lecturer-in-history in a local college, a spinster living in that old house. The whole incidents of the novel shuttle between time past and present. Through the memories of the two sisters we are provided with the vignettes of their childhood, their parents, the elder brother Raja, the political changes in the country and their effects on the household.

The old house at Old Delhi seems to represent the middle class Hindu patriarchal family of the pre-partition period. The house, as S. Indira says, is associated with 'sickness, indifference, unnaturalness and apathy' (1994 : 127). The mother, a diabetic patient, is confined to bed or to a card-table; the father is totally engrossed in his wife, card games and visits to club. None of the parents takes care of their children. Baba, the newly born baby, has to be nursed, but the mother is unable, so a Mira Masi is searched out.

Mira Masi's plight is so bad that it beggars all description. Her victimization appears to be total, rendering her inarticulate. Vrinda Nabar has pointed to the picture of Mira Masi. In her opinion, 'though Desai has convincingly brought out the essence of her presence – her smell, yet the picture is still somewhat amorphous since it does not really individualize Mira Masi, but merely puts her into a recognizable slot. Her story is dismissed in just one paragraph' (Vrinda Nabar in R.K. Dhawan (ed.) Set I, vol. IV, 1991 : 21). What Vrinda Nabar has failed to note is that in patriarchy the unproductive women are disallowed any space and voice, witch, lesbian and the widow for examples. In Hindu society the widowhood is considered to be so ominous that it is disallowed any space to avoid its evil

influence. In spite of being aware of all these proscriptions, Anita Desai has given her space, though very small one, by resurrecting her subjugated experiences in Hindu patriarchal society. In resurrecting her subjugated experiences she has also given her voice against the oppressive patriarchal structure of Hindu society.

As Mira Masi arrived, she was not however given a warm welcome, though she happens to be a poor relation of the Das family. In Hindu family a kith is always received and taken care of. But Mira Masi was searched out just to take care of the children as an additional hand to the Ayah. The narrative of this discourse now swerves back to her past life which is more painful and wretched :

Aunt Mira, though younger than their mother, looked so much older. At the age of twelve she married and was a virgin when she was widowed—her young student husband, having left to study in England immediately after their wedding, caught a cold in the rain one winter night, and died (108).

And for the death of her husband, her in-laws accused her horoscope very seriously :

It was her unfortunate horoscope that had brought it about (Ibid).

So she was coerced into slaving to perform works like scrubbing, washing, cooking, nursing, massaging, stitching. She was robbed of all her ornaments and saris. Her brothers-in-law made attempts to enjoy her sex. But when they failed, they called her a 'parasite' and threw her out as a 'cracked pot, torn-rag, picked bone' (108). However, she was not abandoned for ever, she was again searched out for Das family. But the irony is that it was not for alleviating her misery but for using her as an unpaid slave.

In Das family, the love-lorn widow forgot all about her past as the innocent children reciprocated by loving her back. She was given the honour of the role of Masi, mother's sister. The children observed that though Masi nursed them, took care of them, amused them with fairy tales, never commanded and chastised them, yet it was not she, but their mother who had the authority in the family.

However, after the death of their parents, Masi turned alcoholic and insane. The factors contributing to her alcoholism and insanity may be several. She might have understood that the children would be married and again in the fag end of her life she would be abandoned. The sense of abandonment perhaps made a tremendous impact upon her psyche, turning her mad. And to forget this haunting sense of abandonment she might have taken to alcohol. Anyway, her dancing with a glass of ale in her hand and her exposure of the blue-veined shrivelled breasts seem to suggest her tendency to go against the Hindu patriarchal ideology that imposes rigorous control upon a widow's body. It might also be construed as a symbolic protest on behalf of the Hindu widows against the oppressive Hindu patriarchal ideology.

However, we find the discourse of a compliant woman like Tara and the discourse of a resistant woman like Bim are in conflictual relationship with one another. One may think that in constructing Tara Anita Desai invokes the conventional narrative resolution of marriage. She seems to be encouraging Hindu patriarchal ideology about women :

Pita rakshati kaumaryan bharta raksati yauvane raksanti sthavire putrali na stri svatantryan arhati (The father looks after her in her childhood, the husband protects her in her youth, and the sons take care of her when she becomes old. The woman is never fit for freedom).

But in a Foucauldian feminist perspective, Tara's entry into marriage may also be interpreted in a different way. It is interesting to note that the marriage has not been imposed upon her by any male member of the family. Rather she has willingly entered it in order to serve her personal ends. The radical feminists would call her the agent of patriarchy. But in a Foucauldian feminist perspective privilege is not given to a single locus of resistance. It assumes that there can be taken different positions of resistance in power relations. Again, power can also be resisted from two strategic positions of appropriation and abrogation. Caliban in *The Tempest* appropriates his master's language in a selective way to sling curses and abuses upon Prospero. The subalterns appropriate the religion of the dominant group to have an access to the dominant culture. Tara is no exception to this case. She appropriates marriage for her protection and for negotiating power and pleasure with her diplomat husband, Bakul. Bimala, on the other hand, abrogates marriage in order to lead

an independent life and thereby subverts the patriarchal ideology that woman is never fit for freedom. Not only that, in leading an independent life she ushers in a form of emancipation for women.

Though a compliant woman, Tara is unlike other compliant women because, unlike them, she is very much selfish and active in respect of seeking happiness and pleasure of her life. Marriage has engendered a change in her. In her childhood period 'she would be dragged helplessly into the underworld of semi-consciousness by the romances she read' (120). While Bim would toss them aside in dissatisfaction, she 'needed facts, history, chronology preferably' (121). Thus there was a conflict between them. We find that in the early period of her life, Tara's subjectivity was produced by the effect of the discourses of romances and fairy-tales; Bim's, on the other hand, by the effect of the discourse of autobiographies of the western women. As a result, Tara was dominated by emotionality and Bim by rationality. The former did not consider romantic love as 'the pivot of woman's oppression', as Shulamith Firestone, a radical feminist, does. Rather for the appropriation of the ideology of romance she was waiting for the prince to be entrapped by her for her escape from the sick, indifferent, unnatural family atmosphere. It is true that she wilted when confronted by a challenge, had no friends; charity had, for her, the sour reek of vomit. Bim, of course, worshipped Florence Nightingale along with Joan of Arc in her private pantheon of saints and goddess, and 'Tara did not tell her that she hoped never to have to do anything in the world, that she wanted only to hide under Aunt Mira's quilt or behind the shrubs in the garden ... when challenged to name her own particular heroine, she looked vague, tried to shift away, saying she would think of it. Tara lacked the boldness to make an answer even if she could think of it' (126).

Tara, however, declared to be a mother : 'I am going to be a mother and knit for my babies' (112). This decision she perhaps took by seeing her own mother who, without actually performing the role of a mother, enjoyed power and pleasure in the family. She therefore enticed Bakul by making her worthy in his androcentric scales of value. She avoided being ugly, cruel, because she perhaps knew all such attributes would be undesirable to her man, and abandoned the widow and her headstrong elder sister by

marrying Bakul and fragmented 'the continuities of female life into discontinuous states' (K. K. Ruthven, 1984 : 80) .

After marriage Tara has changed a lot. She now looks elegant in pale blue nylon nightgown. She loves Bakul very much, shares his sense of nationalism. Whatever she now does she does for satisfying his male gaze and in so doing she gets pleasure. She adopts those norms of fashion and beauty which her husband chooses for her. This pathological torture of her husband she willingly enjoys. Now if Tara's position is judged by the radical feminism's concept of power, based on 'oppressive – victim' model, she would be adjudged the victim of patriarchal ideology. But what is noticeable is that Tara does not feel to be victimized or tortured by Bakul. In this context, Foucault's concept of power may well expose Tara's position in patriarchy.

Foucault's term is 'repressive hypothesis' which he uses to describe the function of power. John Frow puts it in this way :

If power is no longer thought simply as a negative and repressive force but as the condition of production of all speech, and if power is conceived as polar rather than monolithic, as an asymmetrical dispersion, then all utterances will be potentially splintered, formally open to contradictory uses. (Frow, 1985 : 206, quoted in Sara Mills, 1997 : 20).

This sums up the sense of Foucault's analysis of power, that is, power is dispersed throughout social relations, that it produces possible forms of behaviour as well as restricting behaviour. Power is more a form of action or relation between people which is negotiated in each interaction. Adapting Foucault's model it may be said that Tara , in each interaction with Babul , does not feel that Babul is all-powerful. She also takes the subject position and in producing certain forms of behaviour enjoys power. Mention may be made of her interaction with Bakul as the latter insists on her accompanying him to his uncle's house at New Delhi:

Tara said in a strained voice, 'but I had not meant to go anywhere. I only wanted to stay at home' ... 'I'll wait till the girls come. I'll go shopping with them', said she with an unaccustomed stubbornness. (11)

Bakul ... said, 'you surely don't mean that. You can't just sit about with your brother and sister all day, doing nothing' (Ibid).

Tara : 'But it's what I want – just to be at home again, with them ... I don't want to go to New Delhi at all'. (Ibid).

Besides this, though as a wife subjected to 'pativrata' ideology, Tara enjoys the power of socializing her children, the power of running the family very methodically and of arranging programmes, and behind her husband, the status of a diplomat's wife.

Tara also enjoys power by showing meek disobedience to Bakul who reacts to a rare gesture of meek disobedience by sermonising her to become strong and decisive :

I thought I had taught you a different life, a different way of living. Taught you to execute your will. Be strong. Face challenges. Be decisive (17).

Tara actually very submissively disobeys Bakul. This is what she confesses :

She had fooled Bakul into believing that she had acquired it (the desirable quality). But it was all just dust thrown into his eyes (32).

Tara now feels :

She had followed him enough, it has been such an enormous strain, always pushing against her grain, it had drained her of too much strength, now she could only collapse, inevitably collapse. (18).

Tara perhaps now realises that the present femininity which has been constructed by the pressure of her husband's gaze is not of her own. In this femininity she feels fragmented. So she shifts her position from the modern sophisticated life to her insecure past, to her childhood years in search of wholeness of her life. But situating herself in the present life she realises that some elements of her past cannot be accommodated to her present life. So out of anxiety she asks :

Why was the pond so muddy and stagnant? Why had nothing changed? She had changed – why did it not keep up with her (12).

Again, she eagerly wants to connect her present to the past and thus to keep continuity with the old family. Her journey along with her children and husband towards Hyderabad to attend the marriage ceremony of Raja's daughter suggests that she wants to maintain relationship with all members of the old family. Through the relationship with them she betrays her predilection for relational form of identity. She does not want to live only with her husband and her daughters in Washington delinking relationship with all members of the old house at Delhi. Thus by showing her sense of belongingness to an Indian family, Tara reveals her sense of Indianness which is surely not unmodified by her sense of western culture.

Now before constructing Bim, let us take note of other characters' comment on her.

Tara tells her husband : 'Bim seemed so normal and contented that she had found everything she wanted in life' (158). Bakul, slightly modifying her remark, says, 'she did not find it – she made it' (Ibid). Bakul's observation and understanding about Bim corresponds to Bim's self-analysis :

For all father cared, I could have grown up illiterate and – and cooked for my living, or swept. So I had to teach myself history, and teach myself to teach (155).

The discourse makes it clear that Bim educated herself to make her self-reliant. The unsatisfactory atmosphere, she lived in during the early part of her life, made her more ambitious at school because she thought 'education was a way out' (130).

The knowledge she gathered from school education enabled her to understand the gender-discrimination. Being enlightened she questioned, 'why did girls have to wear frocks?' (132). In her opinion, all that difference between male and female was due to the different dresses prescribed for females by patriarchal ideology. So challenging androcentric norms of dress, she put on trousers which gave her a sense of superiority,

independence and possessiveness. Even unknowingly through her act of smoking she violated the nationalist resolution on women's question that Indian women should not smoke. From the early part of her life she dreamt of leading an independent life. At school she was active, involved, purposeful, a born organiser, a bright student. But school to Tara was a terror. Unlike Tara, she never avoided going to hospitals on charity on Thursdays. In every respect Bim differed from Tara. Unlike Tara, she believed that marriage could not be an alternative to a profession, or equated with career. Countering Tara's query, 'what else could there be?' (140), she firmly added :

What else? Can't you think? I can think of hundred of things to do instead. I won't marry ... I shall work – I shall do things ... I shall earn my own living – and look after Mira Masi and Baba and – and be independent. There will be so many things to do (Ibid).

In this discourse Bim counters the heterosexual discourse that ascribes the role(s) of wife and mother to women. Moreover, the ideology she inscribes in her discourse goes against the patriarchal ideology that denies women freedom and independent profession.

In her later life Bim put her feminist ideology into practice. She nursed unselfishly her ailing brother Raja, senile Mira Masi and the handicapped Baba. Not that she was not wooed, but she was not in a position to accept the proposal of marriage. Rejected by her, Dr. Biswas thought that she had lost her willingness to marry because of her selfless devotion to the service of her sick and dependent brothers and aged aunt. But the fact was something else. In the tea-party she discovered Dr. Biswas was 'his mother's son' (92). Despite that, her subjectivity was deeply affected by two incidents of the victimization of women by men, namely the victimization of aunt Mira and of the Misra daughters who were recently divorced with no fault of their own. These circumstances strengthened her past resolution that she would not marry, but earn her own living.

That the eldest son would shoulder the responsibility of the family after the demise of the parents is the ideology of the Hindu undivided family. No wonder, Bim expected Raja to do the same. But Raja, her Byronic hero, disappointed her, as he left for Hyderabad in search of his own career. Now, because of her affection for Baba, her retarded brother, she

could not but accept the onus of the family, but without depending on anyone (male or female) economically or emotionally. Still in her mind she cherished the hope that Raja would return to look after the family. But her hope was dashed when Raja's bullying letter reached her :

... Perhaps you are also a bit worried about the future. But you must remember that when I left you, I promised I would always look after you, Bim ... and I want to assure you that now that he (Hyder Ali Saheb) is dead and has left all his property to us, you may continue to have it at the same rent. I shall never think of raising it or selling the house as long as you and Baba need it. If you have any worries, Bim, you have only to tell – Raja (27).

The oppressive letter shattered the entire fabric of her life. The relationship of brother-sister was reduced to the bitter relationship of landlord-tenant. Defiant as she is, Bim could not stomach the bossiness. A sense of misandry may have developed in her due to the letter. This is perhaps why we find her use Baba as a site to express her feminist backlash and ignore the diplomat Bakul. Mention may be made of the incident when Bim pours out milk out of the jug for her cats, instead of pouring out tea for Bakul. As a host, she should have shown hospitality to him but she simply de-recognises his presence. Again, Bakul's diplomatic superiority gets a jostle as he tries to poke his nose into the insurance deal between Bim and Mr. Sharma. Bim hits at his male ego just by declaring her unilateral decision that she would dispose of the business.

At present Bim thinks that she has been very much used by her relatives, yet she has a soft-corner for them. This shows that her self is divided. Though divided, she does not suffer from insecurity. In this respect a difference between her and the Misra sisters – Jaya and Sarala, who slog the whole day to fend for the family and yet are insecure, in need of protection from their alcoholic brother or insane father – is perceptible. Bim confesses :

She was exhausted by Tara, by Baba, by all of them. Loving them and not loving them. Accepting them and not accepting them. Understanding them and not understanding them (166).

The conflict that arises in her mind makes her worn out, yet she does not seek any protection from anybody. Only silently under the cover of darkness at night she wonders, 'how would she swim through the ocean and come out again?' (167). Just at that moment a book entitled *Life of Aurangzeb* shows her way. The discourse of the emperor's death moulds her subjectivity in a new direction. The discourse is as follows :

... Many were around me when I was born, but not I am going alone. I know not why I am or wherefore I came into the world ... Life is transient and the lost moment never comes back ... When I have lost hope in myself, how can I hope in others? Come what will, I have launched my bark upon the waters ... Every torment I have inflicted, every sin I have committed, every wrong I have done, I carry the consequences with me. Strange that I came with *nothing* into the world, and now go away with this stupendous caravan of sin!" (167).

The knowledge that Bim derives from this discourse enables her to jettison the thoughtless accumulation from the bark of her life. She now discovers that Raja's poems are nothing but derivations and he is a plagiarist. She tears his letter and forgives him. She forgives Tara too, keeping aside the wounded sentiment that her relatives have exhausted her. She now makes an attempt to tie with all members of the family in a bond of love. She feels elated by the embrace of Tara's daughters next morning. Through her act of advising them not to marry early, she tries to influence them, just as she did her students. But as she is addressed by her nieces as their 'Bim-Masi' (170), she immediately recollects the abject condition of Mira Masi and silently refuses to accept the role. In a confessional mood she says to herself that she is neither 'a sister, nor an aunt', but 'a solitary old woman' (173). In this context it is worthwhile to quote Peter Berger who defines the shift from traditional to modern identity as 'one from a world of honour to one of dignity : in a world of honour the individual discovers his true identity in his roles, and to turn away from the roles is to turn away from himself, but in a world of dignity the individual can only discover his identity by emancipating himself from his socially imposed roles' (quoted in Patricia Waugh, 1992 : 190). Adapting Peter Berger's observation we may say that Bim is in search of her true identity through her refusal of the socially imposed role of Masi. Asserting herself as an 'old woman', she takes a position of resistance to all roles prescribed for woman in patriarchal societies. However, she tries to overcome her aloneness by giving consent to the

continuity gets cemented by Iqbal's song sung by Mulk's Guru that leads her to understand that life gets meaning when it is related to its other, when disciple is related to Guru, man to God, individual member to other members of the family. What is interesting to note here is that her sense of maintaining a cohesive tie with the other members of the family distinguishes her from the westernized woman who, as Parthe Chatterjee argues, 'was fond of useless luxury and cared little for the well-being of the home' (quoted in Leena Gandhi, 1998: 97). Again, she is unlike the 'new woman' which was constructed by the discourse of nationalism by combining 'spiritual Maitreyi, the learned Gargi, the suffering Sita, the faithful Savitiri and the heroic Laskmibai' (Uma Chakrovorty in Sangari and Vaid (eds.) 1993:79). The independence of her mind may be linked to what Foucault called 'the art of voluntary inservitude' (James Schmidt and Thomas E. Watenberg in Michael Kelly, (ed.) 1994:292). This is because unlike the 'new woman who was subjected to new patriarchy', (Parthe Chatterjee in Sangari and Vaid (eds.), 1993:244), she has courageously created herself for emancipation from the oppressive patriarchal ideologies. Here it is pertinent to refer to Kristen Holst Petersen's observation in regard to postcolonialism's failure and success. As he puts it, 'the postcolonialism fails conclusively to resolve the conflicting claims of 'feminist emancipation' and 'cultural emancipation'. It is unable to decide which is more important, which comes first, the fight for female equality or fight against cultural imperialism?' (quoted in Leena Gandhi, 1998:93). What we find in this novel is that in constructing Bimala, Anita Desai seems to emphasise that the fight for women's emancipation is contingent upon the fight against cultural imperialism. Bimala has refused to be dominated by the purity of the Hindu culture. Rather she has allowed her subjectivity to receive conducive elements from the autobiographical discourses of the western women like Florence Nightingale and Joan of Arc, from those of great muslim persons like Aurangazeb and Iqbal. Not only that, she has also received some elements from the nationalist discourse on Indian womanhood. This shows her preference for multiculturalism over pure Hindu culture.

Thus in this novel, through Bim and Tara, Anita Desai underscores the composite culture over the pure Hindu patriarchal culture towards the emancipation of Indian women.

Last but not least, the text has a gap. This gap is created by the novelist's stony silence in regard to Raja's religion. Did Hyder Ali Sahib have Raja converted into Islam before accepting him as his son-in-law? Or, did he allow Raja to observe his own Hindu religion even though he gave his daughter Benazir in marriage to him? The novelist's silence seems to indicate that where love is dominant, religion is marginal; and it is through love that the divide between Hindu and Muslim can be bridged, paving the way towards a true nationalism. Thus Anita Desai is perhaps in favour of an acquiescent India, resisting the dominance of one culture over the other.

THE VILLAGE BY THE SEA : A DISCOURSE OF FEMININITY THAT ESPOUSES MONEY-POWER

The Village by the Sea (1982) has been described as ‘a brilliant resonant story of change in older India’. But as it unfolds through the conflictual relationships of different discourses, it appears to offer no change for women. The wheel turns for men only. The narrative opens and closes with the discourse of spirituality in which the women belonging to the fishing community of the village Thul are seen to be performing morning prayers at the sea, rather than at the local temple. They appear to enjoy a sort of power and autonomy in this sort of religious practice because they are not to depend on the priests of the local temple who, as per Hindu religious norms, are expected to be paid for performing any religious act on their behalf. Their willing performances of the morning prayers for their husbands’ or fathers’ well-being or for a good start of the day show that they do not feel oppressed by the so-called spiritual domain of culture. On the contrary, Anita Desai resurrects the ‘subjugated knowledge’ of Lila, a burgeoning woman, as to why she silently refuses to be incorporated in the traditional religious role. Lila finds herself exposed to the knowledge that it is not spirituality but money that, like magic, can do everything possible. In making her refuse the spiritual role and thereby eschew the power of Indian spirituality, Anita Desai creates resistance to the discourse of the nationalist resolution of women’s question that locates women in the inner sanctum of culture.

The text is constructed through the conflictual relationships of different discourses and practices. Mention may be made of the practice of the village women performing religious prayer at the sea, rather than in the temple, the discourse of Maharashtra Government’s schemes of industrialization in the villages adjacent to Bombay, the political and environmental discourses resisting the Government’s industrial schemes, the city women’s discourse of protest against Govt’s price-hike of essential commodities, coconut-seller’s discourse on masculinity, Mr Panwalla’s admonitory discourses and so on. All these

discourses, by their claims to truths, produce Hari's subjectivity, whereas Lila's subjectivity, without being affected by these discourses, produces a discourse of femininity contra phallogocentric discourse on femininity that locates women in the spiritual domain of Indian culture.

To begin with, the narrative focuses on Lila, a major female character, who is seen to be walking down to the sea with the small basket on the flat of her hand, filled with flowers that she would offer on the sacred rock, a kind of temple on the sea. She is very soon joined by many other village women. The latter pray for the safety of the fishermen at the sea, who are either their fathers or husbands. But Lila prays with the hope that the start of the day would be good. She does not feel an urge for a prayer for her father who is now a drunken fellow and has sold his boat to pay his debts. However, all the village women including Lila 'preferred to do it themselves' (8). This implies that in performing the act independently, they like to enjoy a sort of power and autonomy in the spiritual domain of culture.

In the material domain, 'only when the men are a failure, as is Lila's father, and only when the men are absent, do women assert their independence and their will. In the presence of their husbands, the only roles they play are those of wife and mother', says Sudhakar Ratnakar Jamkhandi (R.K. Dhawan (ed.) vol.4, 1991 : 44). In addition to Jamkhandi's observation about the women's situation in the fishing community, it is also observed that where there are debt and drunkenness, there are troubles for the women. Otherwise, the men and women maintain a good relationship between them. The women are heard to call their husbands as 'ourmen' (20) lovingly. This leads us to think that the women in the community do not feel to be oppressed by their husbands. But while they feel so, they also leave their husbands. The wives of the three brothers of the Khanekars bear evidence to the fact. After being oppressed by the drunkenness of the three brothers of the Khanekars, 'their wives had left them, and gone back to their parents in other villages. Only their old mother, Hira-bai, kept house for them' (49). Again, on the other hand, neither Hari and Lila can eschew their father, even though his debts and drunkenness create problems to the family : 'No one dared tell him, least of all her mother' (11). However, this makes it

clear that in this community debt and drunkenness are the main provenances of troubles for women.

Lila and Hari are the two major characters, both have been forced to stop going to school because of their father's debt. Lila, older than Hari, advises the latter to do something to save the family from disintegration because she knows that in the presence of male breadwinner the women's only role is to do the houseworks. However, she is hopeful that Hari is growing up and would soon be able to find work and earn money.

Hari is also made hopeful by the discourse of Government's project of industrialization that 'the Government is going to build a great factory here. Many factories; Hundreds of them' (13). Yet in the heart of his hearts Hari knows that he would leave Thul one day. Thul cannot hold him for long – at least not the Thul of the coconut groves and the fishing fleet. If it really turns into a factory site, he would stay on here to lead a new kind of life. Otherwise, he and his family would surely and slowly starve, fall ill like his mother and die. Despite this, he knows that, because of the social norms, his sisters would never look forward to working on a fishing boat or in a factory. They would have to marry oneday, and he would have to see to it since his father would not. He would have to find them husbands, and buy them their wedding finery and arrange their weddings to which the whole village would have to be invited. The bridegrooms might demand a dowry. How could he ever meet them? Even if he finds a job, he would never earn enough to buy them such riches. However, it is his realization that without a job he cannot find his sisters a way-out of the dark, gloomy house and the illness and drunkenness and the hopelessness that surround them like the shadows of the night. He also knows that he can never earn enough in Thul of green coconuts. He will have to go to Bombay to find his fortune, either with Mr de Silva's help or even without it. But how would he go there?

Hari no longer thinks of his sisters and sick mother. He is now obsessed with the thinking of going to Bombay. By this time he hears an MLA to Maharastra State Legislative Assembly countering the Government's project of industrialisation : The MLA's discourse is as follows :

I have come from Alibagh to ask you to join us. We are all concerned in this matter – all of us who live here in these fourteen villages along the coast from Rewas to Alibagh. Every one of us is threatened. Our land is going to be taken away. Where we grow coconuts and good rice for our families, they want to build their factories. Our crops will be destroyed so that their factories can come up instead. All filth of their factories – for when you produce fertilizers a lot of effluents are created which have to be disposed of – these will be dumped in the sea and will kill fish for miles around. How will we live without our land, without sea? ... They will send their men to pacify you – to pacify you with lies. The men will tell you that you will get jobs. The factories will be run by engineers, by men with degrees from colleges in city. There may be a few jobs for similar people like us who have never gone to school but have spent our lives in producing food for other people ... They say they only need five hundred acres for their factories, but thousands more will be needed ... They will take at least two thousand five hundred acres from us of our best land. In return they will cut down our tall green coconut trees, destroy our paddy crops, kill the fish in the sea, and then we will be driven away because we will be no use to them. Can we let this happen to us (62-63).

This discourse produces a dilemma in Hari's mind. First, the discourse leads him to feel that he must stand beside his fellow villagers and fight for the right of the farmers and fishermen to earn their living by the traditional ways. Secondly, though he feels so, he is in dilemma because he cannot decide what he should do. There emerge two options before him. First, he can join the villagers and march to Bombay and take part in the protest against this taking over of their land and occupations. Secondly, he can take the part of the Government and the factory and try to find work there in the new, strange manner brought to them from the distant city. However, he overcomes his dilemma partly by his urge for going to Bombay and partly by his zeal of fighting for his land along with other villagers.

However, while he is in the procession on the streets of Bombay, he finds another procession of the city women pass directly in front of theirs. The scenario of these processions leads us to understand that the state power is more oppressive than any other power. Particularly the slogans of the autonomous organisation of the city women make it clear that for the city women the state power is more repressive than the phallic power, although 'they did not trust their men to manage for them' (76). The women's procession

also enables us to draw a line of difference between the city women and the village women. The city women are well organised to fight against any sort of oppression, particularly against repressive economic measure of the government, but the village women are not at all organised. Even when they fight against any oppression or repression, they fight individually. The problems with which the village women are concerned are considered as individual problems to be settled with their partners. It is perhaps due to their lack of contact with the outside world. Anyway, Hari, on the other hand, begins to gain in knowledge through his encounter with different discourses produced by the city women and the ornithologist, Sayyid Ali. From Sayyid Ali's discourse he comes to know that the rapid industrialisation in the surroundings of Bombay would destroy ecological balance.

After the dispersal of the procession, Hari begins to suffer from non-belongingness and aloneness. But his encounter with the coconutseller opens a new prospect before him. The latter, exposing Govt.'s cruelty and lackadaisicality, dispels Hari's illusion about the Govt. and thereafter he tries to activate his mind with a discourse of masculinity :

Take my advice and keep clear of the Government. Don't ask it for anything, don't depend on it for anything. They tell you the Government is your father and your mother. I tell you my father and my mother threw me out when I was six years old to go and earn my own living. I don't need them – I fend for myself – I'm a man and depend on myself. This is the best way to be, boy – free and independent. Don't say please, and don't say thank you – take what you want. Be a man, be independent (85).

This discourse of the coconutseller makes such a deep impact upon Hari that he wants to be his disciple. But on the coconutseller's refusal to accept him as his disciple, Hari leaves him. Yet the inspiration he gets from him leads him to knock at the door of the de Silvas for a job. But their absence puts him in jeopardy. However, at last Hira Lal, the watchman of Seabird, rescues him from the nowhere-to-go situation. He takes him to Jagu, the owner of Srikrishna Eating House where he gets food, shelter and work.

During his stay in Bombay, Hari passes through a lot of hardships during which the exhortative discourses of Mr Panwalla, a watchmender, always lead him to take the right

course of his life. At night, Hari shifts himself from the suffocating atmosphere of Jagu's restaurant to the park on Panwallas' advice. In the park through his relations with different sorts of people he develops a sort of positive attitude towards human beings. Panwalla encourages Hari to learn to put his hands to good use. He says to Hari : 'I'll take you on as an apprentice – in the afternoon' (128). He wants Hari to become a genuine watchmender. He keeps his words by enabling Hari to be equipped with the skill of handling every instrument to work upon intricate, complicated machinery.

Again, through his relationships with Jagu and his wife, Hari acquires a knowledge about man-woman relationship in a different situation at Zapadpatti. Out of sympathy towards the sick Hari, Jagu takes Hari to his home at Zopadpatti where Hari observes Jagu's wife shouting at Jagu for bringing one more member to be fed :

Hardly enough for us and you bring one more to be fed ... You think I'll give your new friend my children's share? (116).

What is clear to Hari is that Jagu's wife is more powerful than Jagu at home. The more Jagu tries to intimidate her the more she screams by saying :

Go, go, as if I can stop you. That's all you want – to go to your toddy shop ... What do I care if you go and poison yourself?... (117).

Hari observes that the power of her discourse forces Jagu to leave the house. He also comes to realise the misery of the heterosexual married woman in a situation where her husband expends money on toddy instead of taking least care of his children and wife :

Man can go to the toddy shop and drink and forget, but we can do nothing, so we must lie down and sleep (Ibid).

This wail of Jagu's wife reminds him of the sorrow he has already suffered because of his father's habit of drinking toddy every night. As a result, they exchange their sorrow between them and become friendly.

The news on the Radio that three fishing boats are reported to be lost at sea, that many fishermen are feared dead makes Hari terribly perturbed and homesick. For guidance he again meets Mr Panwalla at his residence. He advises him to catch his ferry home, after coconut day, but admonishes Hari that he should never have left his mother and sisters. However, Hari defends himself by saying that he had to come to Bombay because of his father who sold out their fishing boat and cow too. 'He had no work – just a small plot of land to grow vegetables in, too small. And now a good factory is going to come up in Thul and they will take away their land and it is said there will be no fishing or farming left to do' (128).

However, coming to know the reason for Hari's leaving his home, Panwalla advises Hari as follows :

You can find work anywhere ... as long as you can use your hands, you can find work for them. And you have to be willing to learn – and to change – and to grow. If they take away your land you will have to learn to work in their factory instead. If you can't stop it, you must learn to use it ... don't be afraid. ... Things change all the time, boy ... nothing remains the same. You are young. You can change and learn and grow. All people can't, but you can (1281-29).

From Hari's behavioural change, we can guess that Panwalla's exhortative discourse has made sway upon him. He spends more time in Panwalla's shop than in Srikrishna Eating House. He is no longer a frightened, confused boy who crawled into any hole where he could find shelter and protection. He can now make choices and decisions, and does not really wish to live in a rich man's house as a servant. On the coconut day, he displays his physical power as he adventurously pushes aside two boys and shouts :

It's mine ! It's mine ! (133)

Hari's masculinity gets recognition from Panwalla :

I never thought I would see you do such a thing ... you can manage now, you will manage all right ... I can see I don't have to worry about you any more (Ibid).

Hari returns home with confidence, hope and watch-mending skill. At home he plans to set up a poultry farm and start a watch-repairing shop in his village instead of waiting for a job in the factory likely to be set up in the village. The plans bring out that Hari now wants to lead an independent life through his own business instead of depending upon the owner of the factory.

But what does Lila want to do? Before we answer the question, let us see how Lila has developed herself in absence of Hari. We find that with the departure of Hari to Bombay, Lila gets a discursive space to construct a discourse of femininity through her relations with different persons in Thul. She is not ambitious as Hari is. But her instinct for survival makes her active and dynamic and adaptable. She saves the family from disintegration by willingly doing chores of the house of the de Silvas and Sayyid Ali. Like Hira-bai, she heads the family, but unlike Hirabai she does not sip toddy and believe in superstitions. However, owing to non-availability of doctor in the village, she has to depend on the quack treatment available for her mother, though she never conceals her doubt about it in any way

What shall we do? We can't do anything – we have to listen to him. There's no hospital in the village we could take her to, and no doctor who would come. We have no one but the magic man to help us (53).

This implies that she is in favour of modern medical treatment for her sick mother.

However, with the departure of Hari and the coming of the de Silvas in Thul, Lila assumes the role of a breadwinner. Not only this, she becomes the foster mother to her younger sisters and caretaker even of her good-for-nothing father, making sure he has food and cigarette money while tending to their mother.

Lila, unlike the city women, may not join in the procession in the city to raise protest against Govt.'s repressive economic measure, yet she is not without managerial capacity. With the departure of the de Silva, with the arrival of Sayyid Ali and with the admission of her mother to the Alibag hospital, Lila displays her managerial capacity. Unlike Jagu's

wife, she never protests against her father's alcoholism. But by her role of a breadwinner she perhaps puts her father into shame and thereby starts a transformation in him. Even she is able to defy the patriarchal power of her father silently without consulting him while she takes her mother to Alibagh hospital with the help of de Silva.

Anyway, Lila develops and enjoys such power staying at Thul, whereas Hari has to go to the city to masculinize himself. Lila may not have a vision of the future as Hari does, but she is no less equipped to tackle the problem of the present. Perhaps she thinks that one does not require a vision to tackle the problem of the present. Lastly, what is more important to note is the religious performance of their mother in the sea after the races on the beach are over. Standing on the dunes, Hari sees their mother along with other village women scatter flower petals and coloured powder on the rocks as tokens of prayer. The incident makes Hari elated in such a way that he also wants Lila to share the joy with him, so he says :

Lila, Look ! ... Look, Lila ... (157).

But Lila does not respond to his call, she remains silent. With this silence the narrative ceases to move. But the silence has implications. Perhaps it suggests that Lila does not find anything encouraging in the religious performance of the village women even though a sort of autonomy they enjoy in this domain. This is because in playing different roles in the domain of the family and outside she has gained in knowledge that it is not spirituality but money that makes everything possible :

The money made everything possible and Lila hoped the gentleman would stay on and on so that she could continue to earn money (111).

The discourse makes it clear why Lila silently declines to be identified with the spiritual performatory role. The discourse also makes it clear that she wants to be an independent earner and enjoy the pleasure of earning. Thus Lila's discourse of femininity without being affected by any other discourse, affects the discourse of nationalist resolution of women's question that locates Indian women in the spiritual domain of culture. If Lila's position is

considered to be the position of the novelist, it may then be said that through the construction of the discourse of femininity Anita Desai wants us to understand that the discourse of the nationalist resolution of women's question was androcentric. Through Lila she transmits a message that the change that would come in the way of industrialization in the village areas should be meant not only for men but for women also. Despite this, Anita Desai, in this context, shows that where poverty is concerned, money is more powerful than spirituality. Thus, Anita Desai, like a Marxist, gives privilege to money-power that determines every aspect of our material life.

IN CUSTODY : OPPOSING A PHALLIC CRITIC

In Custody (1984), the eighth novel of Anita Desai, has been considered by many critics as male-centred. They find that its main focus is projected upon the male characters, implying that the female characters are ciphers or nearly so. It is true that female characters like Imtiaz Begum and Sarala do not occupy as much space as Deven and Nur do in the novel. But this does not mean that they are ciphers. Actually, but for the presence of these two female characters, the construction of power relations between men and women would not have been possible in it. The power relations have emerged out of the conflictual relations of different discourses constructed by different characters. In a Foucauldian feminist perspective it is assumed that texts are determined not by one discourse, but by several different discourses which are at work in their construction. Moreover, these discourses are often in conflict with one another. On this assumption it may be argued that this novel has no centre, rather it is decentred by the conflictual relations of different discourses : discourse of nationalism vs that of journalism, Urdu vs Hindi discourse, discourse of new housewife vs discourse of traditional housewife and the discourse of female artist vs. that of the male critic. Of these conflicts, the dominant one is the conflict between the discourse of female artist and that of the male critic.

A critic like Usha Bande has traced out Deven's awareness of the existential problem of man (1988 : 166). Dr. Kunj Bala has brought out 'the see-saw play between realism and fantasy' (1989 : 92). Again, P. Bhatnagar has dwelt upon 'Deven's pursuit of art' (Bhatnagar in R.K. Dhawan (ed.) Set I vol. IV, 1991 : 53). All these readings are silent upon the woman question. However, my reading attempts at exploring a female artist's status in the domain of patriarchal art and a Hindu housewife's status in Hindu patriarchal family.

The novel has eleven chapters. While we go through them, we come across a brief description of Mirpore which provides us with an image of post-independence India, as Chandrapore in Forster's *A Passage to India* gives us a picture of colonial India in

miniature. In Mirpore dwell people of different religious communities : Hindu, Muslim and Christian. The locations of mosque and the temples show the separate habitations of the two communities; otherwise they live in peace and harmony. The dilapidated historical mosque made of marble stones needs to be repaired, but the local Muslims are not in a position to do it. So poor they are in post-independence India. On the other hand, the temples of the pre-historical times which have often been wrecked, rebuilt and replaced without distorting their essential forms display the economic condition of the local Hindus. Both these communities try to maintain communal harmony by keeping the pigs out of the mosque area and by never slaughtering any cow near a temple. It is only during Mohurram and Holi that communal tensions mount up and communal riots break out from time to time partly because of the provoking news published by the newspapers. What is evident from the incident is that the religious tolerance and communal harmony which the nationalist discourse guarantees get jolted from time to time by the anti-secular discourses in the newspapers.

In *A Passage to India*, Aziz asked the colonizers to go : 'clear out, you fellows, double quick, I say' – so that India could become a nation of brothers :

India shall be a nation. No foreigners of any sort! Hindu and Moslem and Sikh and all shall be one! Hurrah! Hurrah for India! (317)

India is now an independent nation, yet, as the novelist observes, Aziz's vision remains unfulfilled. The same communal divisions, tensions and riots persist in it. The unguarded releases in newspapers are held responsible for undermining the secular character of the nationalist discourse. But here it is noticeable that in drawing the conflict between the discourses in the newspapers and the nationalist discourse on secularism the novelist shows her critical attitude towards both the discourses. Not only that, in resurrecting the poor economic condition of the Muslims in post-independence India she shows sympathy towards them and at the same time is critical of the nationalist economic policy towards the minority community. Here her position is like that of a Third-world feminist who shows concern not only about the women's problem but also about the problem of the marginalized people in the country.

Therefore, we again find the novelist draw a conflict between the discourses on Urdu and the discourses on Hindi so that she can speak for the marginalized Urdu language in post-independence India. Here it is pertinent to note the observation of Indra Nath Chaudhuri about Indian national language policy :

While formulating the language policy of the Congress, Nehru reiterated that the common language should be Hindustani ... In the name of Hindustani which was being developed as the common language of India before 1947, it was obvious that Hindi and Urdu would have grown nearer to each other. But after independence because of Urdu which became official language of Pakistan, Hindi was adopted as National language on the basis of certain political arguments that were floated during that time in India. Nehru could not escape those arguments (1992 : 208).

What Indra Nath observes is that Hindi occupied a dominant position because of its association with the dominant Hindus and Urdu lost much of its position for being identified as the language of a Muslim country. Anita Desai is not unaware of the communalization of the national language policy and the Hindiwallas' deep hatred towards the Urdu loving people which she brings out through the subjectivity of Trivedi, Head, Department of Hindi, Lala Ramlal College :

I won't have Muslim toadies in my department, you'll ruin my boys with your Muslim ideas, your Urdu language. I'll warn the RSS... you are a traitor (145).

By 'you' Trivedi refers to the Urdu loving people like Deven Sharma, a temporary lecturer of his department.

Deven Sharma had been more a poet than a professor before marriage. But after marriage, although he has expended the maximum of his energy to his job, yet he has not lost his interest in Urdu poetry because it is his inherited quality from his father. The love for Urdu which was in dormant state gets activated as his school chum Murad appears unexpectedly with the proposals for him to interview Nur Shahjehanibadi, the greatest living Urdu poet of that time and write an article for the special number of urdu journal 'Aaawz' he would bring out on the poet. Deven, 'still a two-cigarette man' (11), can easily

be coaxed into believing that the interview would change his fortune and that his article would be a step towards the revival of the glorious past of Urdu language and literature. Then as a self-styled patron of Urdu language, he valorises Urdu by relegating Hindi to the position of 'vegetarian monster' and 'rusticity' (15). Murad's discourse – that Urdu which had been the language of the court in the days of royalty has now been languishing due to the lack of its patron—makes an impact upon Deven's subjectivity. His immediate recitation from Nur's poetry bears testimony to the fact :

Life is no more than a funeral procession winding the grave,

Its small joys the flowers of funeral wreaths (26).

Here Deven's obedience to Urdu may be construed as Anita Desai's love for Urdu language and literature.

However, Deven meets Nur, the urdu poet. But what he finds is that Nur's life is messy, distorted and disintegrated. This makes him wonder how 'out of all this hubbub, the poet drew the threads and wove his poetry or philosophy' (52). In the second meeting Deven finds Nur charged with oppositional consciousness with which he debunks the Hindiwallas' politics of language and lashes against the Congresswallas who are believed to have thwarted the development of Urdu by making it the language of the few Urdu loving students and teachers in the universities. Thereafter Nur subverts Hindi literature by an 'act of mimicry' of Hindi verses of Sri Gobind :

Sun, moon, stars, sky,

planets, clouds, comets, I,

God made them all as he made me

A star too I must be (56).

However, Nur's contiguity causes a change in Deven who no longer hesitates to invite Nur to attack Hindiwallas not only by the 'act of mimicry', but also by articulation of the past glory of Urdu through an Urdu journal. Here it is relevant to note that Deven has become not only the agent of Urdu but also subjected to Nur.

In the third meeting in Nur's house, Deven takes note of the resistance to his guru's art by a female artist. He observes that in his guru's house, his guru Nur has been pushed to the margin by the female artist, occupying the centre-stage in her birthday ceremony. Here it is interesting to note that whatever may be the gender of an artist, the artist should be recognised as an artist. But the moment Deven finds the artist a female, his phallic mind detects a coquette in her flashing smiles at her audience. As a phallic critic, he denies her artistic quality on the basis of patriarchal poetics and consider Imtiaz Begum to be a 'female mafia or a prostitute'. Thus denying Imtiaz's creativity he elevates his guru Nur to the height of a great poet.

Like Deven, Nur also betrays his phallocentricity by accusing her of having betrayed him. He confides to Deven that when she first came to his house, she was shy of showing herself and her verse to anybody else except him. But gradually 'she wanted my house, my audience, my friends' (87). Now she has robbed him of all these things. But his accusation against her that arises out of his inferiority complex may be construed as the male ego's refusal to accept the supremacy of the female artist. However, Imtiaz Begum is no compliant woman to stomach her husband's filthy terms against her, she silences him with a counter accusation :

You could not bear the sight of someone else regaling with poetry – the same poetry you used to mouth (89).

Here it is pertinent to note that in allowing Imtiaz Begum to raise her voice against the oppressive phallic power, Anita Desai shifts her position. Instead of showing her sympathy towards the marginalized poet like Nur, now she expresses her feeling of sisterhood towards a marginalized female artist.

Nevertheless, Anita Desai is not unaware of the differences between women. Sufia Begum's quarrel with Imtiaz Begum is a case in point. While Imtiaz Begum is found to be gearing up her struggle against gender discrimination, Sufia Begum is trying to spoil that struggle by quarreling with her and making an intrigue with Deven against her. Sufia's quarrel may be for sharing maximum time with her husband, Nur. But she should have

understood that in Muslim patriarchy a man can keep four wives at a time on condition that he must give equal treatment to all of them. But Nur has violated that norm by giving more attention to Imtiaz for the enjoyment of her beauty and intellectual company. Hence she should have quarrelled with Nur who is applying double-standard on them. But instead of doing that, she quarrels with Imtiaz Begum who has already geared up her struggle for equality. Here one may ask why does a woman quarrel with another woman? According to Kamla Bhasin, 'this generally happens when the women considered men the sun and themselves its satellites, without the light of their own. The women therefore constantly compete with each other to have a bigger share of the sun light because without the light there is no life' (1993 : 16). It is the women like Sufia who think so.

Again, in addition to that quarrel, Sufia Begum cuts Imtiaz Begum down to size by intriguing with Deven. While Imtiaz does not permit Deven to record Nur's voice and his poetry in their house, Sufia removes all of Deven's anxieties by providing him with a secret room for recording, though on payment. Here it is interesting to note that as slavery would not have lasted for so long without the tacit co-operation of the slaves, so patriarchal hegemony could not continue without the women's willing consent to it. What is the irony of feminism is that while Imtiaz is taking a position of resistance to phallic power, Sufia willingly surrenders to it.

Deven has already been granted a fund for the completion of the recording session. But he misuses the fund and betrays his foolishness : firstly, in purchasing a second hand tape-recorder; secondly, in depending on an inexperienced technician and thirdly, in sifting art from life. Moreover, he cannot set the programme in proper order, it is extended from one week to three weeks. Owing to the lack of co-ordination the recording session ends in a fiasco. Nur, with his noisy, loudish companions, rambles a lot about biryani and rum. At times in simple prosaic terms he narrates the story of his youth, of his education, of his travels, of his loves or quarrels. Chiku, the technician, records all the irrelevant portions of Nur's discourses and is too late to record his poetry. Actually, the recording session proves that Nur is now devoid of coherence and creativity and that Deven is ineffectual, limited and impractical. Nur is a failure as an artist; Deven as a recorder. In proving them so in

opposition to Imtiaz Begum who has already been shown as a success on the stage, the novelist seems to subvert the patriarchal binary thought that equates male always with victory and female with defeat.

After returning home, financially crippled Deven finds that he is no longer irritated by shabbiness of his wife's limp, or hunched, twisted posture, by her untidy hair or sudden expression. It seems to him that it is 'all part of his own humiliation' (193). However, he considers touching her, putting an arm around her, but his sense of male power and position over her prevents him from doing that. He stops that move with the thinking :

It would permanently undermine his position and power over her (194).

Anyway, an unopened letter on the table draws his attention. The letter is from no less a person than Imtiaz Begum, the female artist. The letter may be here treated as a feminist discourse on the female art of poetry. In it the female artist, in a confessional mood, informs Deven that nothing of the recording session was unknown to her. Her husband Nur could not but inform her of it. She has also accused him of having insulted her intelligence by considering the co-wife more wise and capable. Thereafter she has wondered whether, like the other people, he still considers her a prostitute. She has also added if he, like them, considers her so, it would be an act of insult not only to her but also to his revered poet because his revered poet was interested in her mind, talk and poetry. After the argument, she has requested Deven to judge her poetry. She has perhaps known that validity and existence of a work of art is contingent upon the judgement of the critics. Foucault also thinks so :

Commentary which is the first of circulatory mechanisms in discursive structures keeps certain discourses in existence. Those discourses which are commented upon by others are the discourses which we consider to have validity and worth. (Quoted in Sara Mills, 1997 : 67).

But it is noticeable that Imtiaz Begum has wanted Deven to judge her work not in accordance with the criteria of the patriarchal poetics, but judge it as a woman's work. As she puts it in her discourse :

It is therefore necessary that I prove my gifts and abilities to you and to other scholars and devotees of art of poetry. It is for this reason that I am enclosing my latest poems for you to read and study and judge if you are strong enough to face them and admit to their merit, or if they fill you with fear and insecurity because they threaten you with danger – danger that your superiority to women may become questionable (196).

In this part of the discourse she has called into question the superiority of male artists. Not only that, she has also exposed the phallogentricity of the critics like Deven by producing an alternative knowledge about the victimization of the female artists like Imtiaz Begum in the following part of the discourse :

While I was singing my verse, you left the mehfil, was it not because you feared I might eclipse the verse of Nur Sahib and other male poets whom you revere? Was it not intolerable to you that a woman should match their gifts and even outstrip them? Are you not guilty of assuming that because you are a male, you have a right to brains, talent, reputation and achievement while I, because I was born female, am condemned to find what satisfaction I can in being maligned, mocked, ignored and neglected? Is it not you who have made me play the role of the loose woman in gaudy garments by refusing to take my work seriously and giving just that much regard that you would extend to even a failure in arts as long as the artists was male (Ibid).

Thus in exposing the gender discrimination even in the domain of art and taking the subject position, Imtiaz Begum again requests Deven to include her work into his custody.

But commentary, according to Foucault, 'is not an entirely selfless act' (cited in Sara Mills 1997 : 68). Deven's refusal to include her work into his custody serves certain purposes. He saves himself from being called 'sissy' and maintains the positions of the male writers. Not only that, he also establishes his own power and position as a 'phallic

critic'. This being so, he shatters her work by tearing it into pieces and scatters them over the floor of his house in front of his wife Sarala, who, seeing that, comments :

You are dropping rubbish all over the floor I have just swept (197).

The torn pieces of the paper containing her poems may symbolically be conceived of as the Sibyl's leaves : "the leaves", according to Gilbert and Gubar, 'haunt us with the possibility that if we can piece together their fragments, the parts will form a whole that tells the story of the career of a single woman artist ... a woman whom patriarchal poetics dismembered" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979 : 101). Adapting Gilbert and Gubar it may be said that the phallic critic's exclusionary practice in the domain of art can be ideologically combated in two ways. There are female critics like Sarala who unconsciously dismiss the dismembered female artist's work as 'rubbish'. But the critics who are conscious of gender discrimination may try to piece together her writings to form a complete story of her career. Besides, they may remember the dismembered female artist by reconstituting a discourse of her fragmented art of poetry. Anita Desai here gives voice to the female artist like Imtiaz by resurrecting her subjugated knowledge as to how her creativity was denied by a male critic and thereby asserts that creativity is not the monopoly of man, the female artists like Imtiaz can stride in the domain of art if recognised.

Sarala's subjectivity is in process. At the end of the novel she becomes a compliant woman, though in the beginning she was not such a woman. She was stony sulky and furious. One may ask what made her stony sulky and furious. The answer is not far to seek. Sarala was not Deven's choice, she was actually chosen by Deven's mother and her aunt who found her suitable in every way : 'plain, penny-pinching and congenitally pessimistic' (67). But what they had not suspected was that 'Sarala, as a girl and as a new bride, had aspirations too' (Ibid). The aspirations were the effect of the discourses of the commercial companies and media which appropriated the discourses on new woman or new housewife in order to augment the sales of the companies' products like refrigerators, television, phone, mixers etc. 'Sarala dreamt the magazine dream of marriage : herself stepping out of a car with plastic shopping bag full of groceries and filling them into gleaming refrigerator, then rushing to the telephone placed on a lace doily upon a three-legged table and excitedly

ringing up her friends to invite them to see a picture show with her and her husband who was beaming at her from behind a flowered curtain' (68).

But by marrying into the academic profession and moving to a small town outside the capital, none of her magazine dreams was materialized. She had to take the role of a tired and shabby-looking housewife. She was naturally embittered. The novelist as a woman cannot but express sympathy towards another woman's predicament with a comment :

At least Deven has poetry; she had nothing and there was an added accusation and bitterness in his look (Ibid).

However, Deven was enraged by her tacit accusations that added to the load of his back. He felt like a 'trapped animal' (131); 'marriage, family and job had placed him in the cage' (Ibid). To get relief, 'he would hurl away dishes, bawl uncontrollably' (68). In drawing such a picture of the patriarchal family in the capitalist society, the novelist seems to have produced a truth that the man in it is always in advantageous position because even the poor and failure man like Deven has been privileged to dominate his wife by displaying the male rage of his frustrated ego in other way.

Sarala could not become the new housewife because of the uneven distribution system of capitalism. The companies' discourses made an effect on her subjectivity, but the new housewife in her became compelled to alter her position with that of tired, shabby-looking housewife because of her husband's poor income. For that she did not leave her husband, rather like a traditional Hindu housewife, she would worship gods and goddesses for the welfare of her husband and her family. Yet the consciousness of a new woman sometimes propels her to raise a certain structural problem of the patriarchal culture :

It was only men who could play at being dead while still alive, such idleness was luxury in her opinion. Now if she were to start playing such tricks, where would they all be? Who would take Manu to school and cook lunch for them (128-29).

Deven would not have known how to answer her. Sarala's problem is not her individual problem. Through Sarala the novelist refers to a structural problem of the patriarchal society. Man, after his defeat, or his work, can take rest in the inner domain of home, but the woman who has no other independent profession and has nowhere to go has to bear the burnt of domestic life. Sarala knows if she stops cooking, mothering and cleaning, the entire system would collapse. Yet she can not do so, because as a Hindu housewife she realises that she can enjoy in the least a sort of power and position in the inner space of home. For this status she returns to her own home. The novelist welcomes her return with a comment :

She was actually quite pleased to be back in her own domain, to assume all its responsibilities, her indispensable presence in it; in her parents' home she has missed the sense of her own capability and position (194).

Thus in making Sarala selectively appropriate the institution like family towards the maintenance of her status as a housewife, Anita Desai takes the Third-world feminist position and colludes with nationlist discourse that locates woman in the inner sanctum of home, though not without reservation about it.

BAUMGARTNER'S BOMBAY : CONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES OF LIMINAL TYPE

Anita Desai's ninth novel, *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988) acclaimed as masterpiece, is called an experiment in trilingual writing because in it Anita Desai has employed the language of her infancy and childhood : German, Hindi and English. In addition, the novelist herself has claimed in an interview with Andrew Robinson that her mixed parentage created for her a synthesis which is the base of work. She has seen India, as she says, 'through the eyes of my mother, as an outsider, but my feelings for India are my father's, of someone born here' (*The Saturday Statesman*, Aug 13, 1988). Actually, as she admits, the seeds of the novel had been lying at the back of her mind since the time she was in Bombay. She knew 'an Austrian Jew there who used to walk around in the back streets looking for scraps to feed his cats' (Ibid). He was not as poor as he looked. In fact, he was quite rich. In course of time he died a natural death. A friend of Desai handed Desai a bunch of letters in German left by the old man. Anita Desai found nothing unusual in the letters except the stamp number on each of them. The letters bore muted testimony of the Nazi concentration camps. The blank spaces in the letters told a story of their own. And 'because they had been so empty, they teased my mind; I had to supply the missing history to them' (Ibid). Desai has also claimed that the title of the novel came to her mind, while she went for a stroll in her favourite Lodi Gardens in Delhi. 'Like a magic word it brought everything to life again' (Ibid). Her work, as she claims, was made somewhat easier as she went down the memory lane and 'her mother's experience of India from the late 1920s onwards and her memories of pre-war Germany she'd talked a lot about, and the memories of her German friends who'd actually been in internment camps during the war.' (Ibid).

Whatever may be its provenance, the novel, after its appearance in the literary world, has successfully drawn the attentions of different critics. We, therefore, find the critics interpret it from different points of view. Taking into consideration the above data, Suresh C. Saxena has studied it as 'search for roots' (R. K. Dhawan (ed.) Vol-4, 1991 : 114). Usha Bande has explored 'the outsider situation' (Ibid : 123) in it. By 'outsider' Bande refers to those characters who fail to achieve an adjustment with the world, who are homeless and who have a sense of personal inadequacy. Dividing the outsiders into two groups—'insider-outsiders' and 'outsider-outsiders' – she labels the characters of Indian origins as 'insider-outsiders' such as Habibullah, Jagu and the pavement dweller and his family, and the five German characters as 'outsider-outsiders' who have made India their home, although for some reasons they escape the mainstream. As Usha Bande observes, the worst sufferer of these characters is Hugo Baumgartner (Ibid : 122-128) Subhas Chandra, on the other hand, has tried to show that Hugo's predicament is akin to that of Sisyphus (Ibid : 131). Again, S. Indira considers it as 'a powerful and poignant study in human loneliness' (S. Indira, 1994 : 170). An American critic, Judie Newman, in her illuminating essay entitled, *History and Letters : Baumgartner's Bombay*, has suggested ways of reading literature as a more subtle form of history. In her view, 'the plot seems to employ that history is only a meaningless series of re-enactments, a story which repeats itself'. Adapting Rushdie's dictum, she says : 'Europe repeats itself in India, as farce' (Michael Parker & Roger Starkey (eds.) 1995 : 196). Lastly, she argues that Mutti's letters reveal both the insufficiency of literature in the face of history –and its full necessity' (Ibid : 207). Strongly marked by repetition, as Judie Newman's essay points out, Michael Parker and Roger Starkey observe that '*Baumgartner's Bombay* is a novel about recurring cycles of violence and dispossession, of global war, the colonial war ... religious war. Endless war' (Ibid:16). Again, an Indian critic like Malashri Lal has given it a feminist-deconstructive reading (K. Jain (ed.) 1998 : 193-207). Mrs. Lal has tried to show that though the novel, in its obvious form, is male-centred, yet by giving us a constantly retiring, retreating almost vanishing hero, Desai dethrones the apparent male-centre and turns the readers' attention to the women characters placed at the periphery. Mrs. Lal has also argued that the novelist's feminist position in this novel is both radical and subtle—'radical because of the obliteration of the male centre, and subtle because

the void at the centre is almost replaced by the female experience of India but not quite' (Ibid : 197). All these readings of the novel are valid in their own ways.

However, the exploration of the novel has not yet been exhausted. It can also be read from a Foucauldian feminist perspective in order to resurrect the subjugated experiences of two German expatriates – Hugo Baumgartner and Lotte—in India during world war II and pre-partition phase of India's independence movement as well as post-independence period. Of these two characters, the male one is constructed as an effeminate man and the female one as an assertive woman. These two characters, in this sense, are of liminal type. In constructing these two characters, Desai seeks to challenge the stability and coherence of hegemonic gender norms and prefigure another form of gender identity, that is, unsexed body of a male and the sexed body of a female. The latter has been strategically appropriated to create resistance to the oppressive capitalist power and to enjoy power and pleasure in patriarchal capitalist society, while the former, the unsexed body of a male, to create a form of resistance to human relationship based upon self-aggrandisement and violence in patriarchal capitalist world.

The novel consists of seven chapters, narrating alternately the past and present lives of the German expatriates and their relationships with other characters in multi-dimensional capitalist society. Here it is relevant to note that Desai, from a transnational feminist position, shows deep compassion upon the expatriates, but when the question of empowerment crops up, she takes sides with the German female character, Lotte, whom she empowers to narrate not only the story of her own life but also that of Hugo's life. In narrating the tales of their lives Lotte enters into the struggle over meanings on the margins. As a narrator, she shows her capacity to unite the structure of the novel.

Baumgartner, as a Jew, is doubly exiled both in Europe and in India. This emphasises his confusing self-identify, his inability to find 'the shelter which was once there but is there no longer'. He is accepting but not accepted in India. But only in death he finds shelter in India and his search for identity gets a meaning to his meaningless life. But his identity can in no way be situated at any fixed boundary, although Mrs. Lal observes that Baumgartner has 'racist preferences' (N.K. Jain (ed.) 1998:200). In her view, 'indefinite

German origins in Lotte and the drugged German youth evoke empathy in a man who has spent years ignoring the poor Indians crowded in a rooming house, and even the poorer Indians outside his window' (Ibid : 200). It is true that Baumgartner cajoles the rude and drugged German youth in German, takes him home and mothers him. But it is not because of his racist preference towards him, but because of the fact that 'the boy was no different from a sick cat' (142). And it is also true that it is only Lotte who keeps him in touch with the German tongue—'but that was not why he went to her. He saw Lotte not because she was from Germany but because she belonged to the India of his own experience' (150). So Baumgartner's identity cannot be said to be inflected by racial element. If this be so, he would have opposed Farrokh's invectives against western culture and western people. Farrokh views 'the young western heathens as spoiling Indian culture. But Baumgartner had no intention of standing up for the white man's reputation here in Farrokh's cafe while he had his morning tea and his cats got their food' (16). The main concern of his life is to look after the cats and enjoy a pleasure through a relationship with the kittens which greet him exuberantly even if he grows shabbier. Thus towards the end Baumgartner emerges as 'a Billiwallah pagal, the Madman of the cats' (10), although unfortunately he is murdered by the German youth for money. Through the formation of this identity, Baumgartner is made to transgress the boundary between human and animal. This relatedness is not by blood but by choice which may be construed as an oppositional consciousness against the social identities based on the categories of sex, race or class.

However, as an obverse to Baumgartner, Lotte, a cabaret dancer, experiences India more richly. She strikes the floor with her heels, swing her hips and gestures with her hands and sings together with Gissy :

Lola and Lily

Are fifteen and free

Lola and Lily

O give them to me (96).

The novelist here gives clear contrasts to the India of Lotte and Baumgartner. During war years Baumgartner goes to an internment camp and because of his bleating before the officer he cannot convince the latter of the fact that he is not a Nazi, but a German Jew and

therefore a refugee. Besides, in the internment camp he behaves 'like a mournful turtle' (109). But the resourceful Lotte appropriates the agency of marriage for escaping detention. She strikes a bargain marriage with Kanti Sethia, a Bengali jeweller, and changes her nationality. Here it would not be an exaggeration to take note of Foucault's observation on sexuality which, according to him, is disobedient to power (*History of Sexuality* vol.I trans 1990 : 103). In his view, sexuality is a dense transfer point of relations of power. He does not consider sexuality as something naturally given which power tries to hold in check, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power (Ibid : 106). Foucault also posits that in every society there are two systems of sexuality : deployment of alliance and deployment of sexuality. The deployment of alliance is built around a system of rules defining the permitted and the forbidden, the illicit and the licit, whereas the deployment of sexuality operates according to mobile, polymorphous, and the contingent techniques of power. The deployment of alliance has one of its chief objectives to reproduce the interplay of relations and maintain the law that governs them; the deployment of sexuality, on the other hand, engenders a continual extension of areas and forms of control. The first links between partners and definite statutes, the second is concerned with the sensations of the body, the quality of pleasures and the nature of impressions, however tenuous or imperceptible. Lastly, the deployment of alliance is attuned to a homeostasis of the social body—important phase of which is reproduction and the deployment of sexuality has its reason for being, not in reproducing itself, but in proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating and penetrating bodies, in an increasingly detailed way and in controlling population in an increasingly comprehensive way (Ibid : 107). In the ultimate analysis, Foucault shows that the deployment of sexuality has neither obliterated the deployment of alliance nor rendered it useless. Adapting Foucault's observation on sexuality, it may be said that, through the relationship between Kanti Sethia and Lotte, Anita Desai extends sexuality from the periphery of deployment of alliance to the deployment of sexuality. Kanti Sethia has used the Hindu marriage norms in a fake manner in order to enter into the domain of deployment of sexuality for a better quality of sexual pleasure and bodily sensation. This is why after

the fake marriage he shifts Lotte from Calcutta to Bombay. Lotte, on the other hand, using the power of her sexy body, ensnares Kanti to make herself memsahib and to escape imprisonment in the British Camp. In relating her sex to that of Kanti, she gets the status of a memsahib and a fine flat and a shop for making hats. But in accordance with the norms of the deployment of alliance, Kanti should be as much careful towards her as she should be loyal to him in respect of sexuality. But Lotte disobeys the power of Kanti in his absence by offering her sexed body to Baumgartner's unsexed body. As Baumgartner falls into a troubled sleep in her bed, she comforts his old body with the warmth and sensations of her own. Though she is a woman, she takes the initiative of offering him the opiate of sexual oblivion :

Eventually he felt something press against his back. He thought with sleeping affection that it was his cats who had come to lie on his chest or beside his pillow, and purr. He put out his arm to enfold Fretzi and Mimi, Miese and Lulu. Instead of their stifling, adhesive fur, he met only Lotte's hairless smoothness and bareness. The human, womanly quality of her slack old skin, soft as flour, drew a groan of pleasure out of his empty stomach – it was good, like bread (82).

However, after Kanti's death, Lotte tries to assert herself as Kanti's wife for his property, and gets involved in court cases with Kanti's sons. But because of her neighbours' siding with his sons she has to negotiate with them. She leaves the fine flat for a lot of money :

Then they sided with his sons, then they too said I was not married, could not keep the flat. So what could I do, Hugo, but give up my beautiful flat in Napoli? They offered to settle out of court—quite a lot of money it seemed to me—so I took it. After all I had this place, it used to be my shop, my little factory (75).

But Baumgartner is seen never to assert his position. After Chimanlal's death, he wanted his share of the business and the race-horse that both he and Chimanlal purchased out of the winning money from races. But as Chimanlal's son forcefully drove him out of the shop, he was seen not to utter a single word of protest. He was seen to behave like an effeminate

man. He went back to his kittens. But Lotte asserts her position everywhere. She is again seen to assert herself beside the deadbody of Baumgartner—she does not first of all allow the police officer or Chimanlal's son and the landlord to touch his belongings. She vociferously asserts : 'Everything is his, no one can touch it' (229). Chimanlal's son who drove Baumgartner out of his business is forced to speak levelly, keeping his tone sensible : 'No, madam, sorry, it has become police property because it is a police case. This murder' (229). However, understanding the situation, Lotte leaves the scene with deep despair and feels an urge to meet Hugo in death. We hear her mutter : 'yes, yes, I go now, I go too' (230). Thus in allowing Lotte to construct the narratives of Baumgartner's and her own oppressed life, Anita Desai empowers her to enter into struggle over interpretations of life in the patriarchal capitalist society.

JOURNEY TO ITHACA : A DISCOURSE OF RESISTANCE TO MATERIAL WEST

Journey to Ithaca (1995), Anita Desai's tenth novel, consists of six parts including one Prologue and one Epilogue. The narrative shuttles back and forth in the past and the present time and the text is constructed through the conflictual relations of different discourses out of which emerge the power relations of different characters. While constructing the power relations between two western characters who are husband and wife, the novelist is seen to take a western feminist position; but when the power relations between the western woman and the oriental woman are concerned, she shifts to the Third-world feminist position which coincides with her postcoloniality in which she is prompted to collude with the discourse of Hindu religion in respect of the empowerment of the oriental woman.

Now let us see how the novel has so far been reviewed and commented upon. In the *New York Times*, Paul West has considered it as 'a daring colourful novel almost impossible to absorb in one reading'. (<http://www.amazon.com> 29-05-01). In the *New Republic*, Pearl K. Bell finds it as 'an illumination and a blessing' (Ibid). In *San Francisco Chronicle*, Mandira Sen has deemed it as 'a rich tapestry of the contemporary human condition in an alien environment ...' (Ibid). In *Washington Post Book World* Judith Weinraub observes that in the novel 'the intensity of India is seamlessly conjured up' (Ibid). Again, Mrinalini Solanki has studied it as 'a quest for integrated being' (M. Solanki in V.L.V.N. Narendra Kumar (ed.) 1997 : 90). All these reviews and comments are seen not to coincide with my feminist reading of the novel.

However, a similarity is found between Forster's *A Passage to India* and this novel. As in Forster's *A Passage to India* Mrs Moore and Adela Quested came with an intense desire to know India in the pre-independence India, so in this novel Matteo, an Italian, and his wife Sophie, a German Journalist, come with a desire to experience India in the post-independence period. For Mrs. Moore and Adela India appeared as both muddle and

mystery. But this couple begins to understand India from two different ideological positions. Matteo has a will-to-spiritual-knowledge-for-power which he developed through his relation with his English tutor, Fabian who created an urge for an odyssey to spiritual India through his teaching of Hesse's *The Journey to East* to him in his childhood :

If thou would be with that which thou dost seek! Follow where all is fled. (20)

Observing his behavioural change in India, his wife reminds him of the effect of Hesse's book on his subjectivity :

If it were not for that book, you would not have thought of coming to India or following this guru of yours to your death (87).

Agreeing to his wife's observation, Matteo confirms that 'it was the book that opened my eyes' (Ibid). Sophie also, like Matteo, read oriental literatures, but her scientific rationality remained and remains unaffected by the discourses of Orientalism. So, it may be argued that while Matteo tries to see and understand spiritual and mystical India with the heart and mind of an orient, Sophie analyses India from a western Enlightenment position and constitutes her knowledge about it in the colonial style.

By the logic of colonial discourse Sophie considers India as a land of romance and adventure, so she wants her husband to travel with her all over India so that she can fulfil her desires :

I want to go to Goa and eat shrimp, I want to go to Kashmir and live on a houseboat. And lie in the sun and shampoo my hair and eat omelettes all day (47).

But Matteo refuses to follow her on the ground that his life has a design from which the signs come to guide him. In addition, he tries to disarm her by applying his knowledge derived from *Katha Upanishad*. On the basis of this knowledge, he endeavours to make her understand that there are two paths : the path of joy and the path of pleasure : the former is the path of the wisemen and the latter, that of the fools. He cannot relegate himself to the

position of the fools in following his wife. Not only this, he reminds his wife that his coming to India is not to make romance but to understand the Indian 'mystery that is at the heart of India' (57). In his view, in Europe it is not possible to understand mystery because there 'people do not even know there is a mystery. No one thinks about it' (58). But in India :

There are people – great sages – to guide you. I need such a person (Ibid).

Thus Matteo wants to dominate his wife.

However, Sophie accompanies her husband while the latter moves from ashram to ashram, but she does not allow her western rationality to be affected by Indian mysticism and spirituality. Rather she tries to discover the negative sides of them. She discovers casteism and racial feeling in the ashram. She finds that God has no power to bring about a miracle while a child is dying over his mother's shoulder in the temple of gyanadeva. She also discovers that swamis are concerned about so many litigations and court-cases relating to the property of the ashram. She also finds out that ashram life is not free from the practice of illegal sex. The pregnancy of an unmarried woman and the ill-treatment towards her bear testimony to the fact. In most cases she thus differs with her husband; even she is not afraid to differ with other persons such as Pierre Edward and Mr Pandey on these issues. Pandey and Pierre find an elderly lady spread perfume over a crowd of men and women just by waving her hands over them. This incident appears to them to be miraculous, but Sophie contradicts them by considering it as a magical trick.

That Sophie hates to be the devotee of the ashram is revealed in her behaviour. While Matteo tries to observe each and every code and ethic of the ashram life, Sophie is reluctant to observe them. She does not participate in the morning prayer, construes 'Satsang' – which is in Indian sense a company of the truthful – as a congregation for 'body odour' (47). Moreover, she maintains her western identity with the predilection for western food like beefsteak, martini, chocolates, strawberries etc.

As Sophie begins to feel bored with her husband in the ashram, she leaves him to join in another pilgrimage through India which becomes suffused with rich and aromatic haze of marijuana :

It clung to her and became her clothing. It penetrated her and became her being (58).

However, in this pilgrimage she gets the scope for an exchange of views with some other western women about India. She still goes on constructing India in the negative terms. In opposition to Matteo's mystical India, she constructs India as a country of various diseases like typhoid, hepatitis, cholera, eczema, leprosy. She also comes to know from Shulu, Phyllis and Andrea that the lives of the western women are not safe in India. These incidents justify their conclusion. Firstly, a white woman meditated in a cave in the Himalayas in order to achieve psychic power. But as she was returning to her hotel, on the way she narrowly escaped an explosion in her taxi and the next day she was found dead on her bed in the hotel. On outopsy it was found that one portion of her heart was entirely missing. Secondly, Phyllis and Andrea were raped by the boatmen in Goa. From this Sophie concludes that in a violent male-dominated society a woman should not move alone. So she again comes back to Matteo in the ashram.

Matteo, on the other hand, has subjected himself to the norms of the ashram life. He has almost given up the western style of living and put on a faded and torn kurta, pyjama and chappals. He has already met a yogi who had not slept for twenty five years, an ill-fed, undressed saint and a yogi who could summon cloud out of the sky. But Matteo has realised his limitation in regard to the attainment of spiritual transcendence. The question has arisen in him why he cannot see and experience what the others do. For this he has been admonished by one of his Indian companions to see India with the eye of faith. After the admonishment, he has begun to meditate and concentrate alone in a rented room. But success has not come in his way. As a result, he is gripped with frustration. Frustration haunts him, even when he copulates with his wife who understands :

The love-making he did with a new contempt and a violence that was so unlike him (80).

However, his obsession with his search for spiritual transcendence affects his health in such a way that he falls ill. Sophie, instead of leaving him, tries to recuperate him by breaking his obsession through her reminder to him of Siddhartha's warning to Govinda in Hesse's *Siddhartha* :

Perhaps you seek too much ... as a result of your seeking you cannot find (88).

But Matteo's will-to-spiritual power is so deep-rooted that Siddhartha's advice to Govinda fails to dispel his obsession. Rather he begins to think that his life had so long 'been empty of meaning, but now is not' (Ibid). Because of this faith in spirituality, his quest for transcendental self is carried on. Interestingly, a sea-change takes place in his mind as he finds a book entitled *The Mother* in the railway bookstall. He becomes more restless after being fascinated by the photograph of the Mother on the cover-page of the book. Without taking care of his pregnant wife in the Mission Hospital, he proceeds by rickshaw in search of the Mother's ashram.

Mother's power and authority make an indelible impression upon his mind. From her he learns : 'work is worship', 'Divine force is everywhere' (99). However, the discourse of Mother's attainment of spiritual enlightenment through her relation to her Master leads him to think that he can achieve spiritual transcendence by relating himself to Mother. With this realisation Matteo begins to feel alive in presence of the Mother :

Everything else came alive (108).

But Matteo's blind-faith comes into conflict with Sophie's rationality. She construes Matteo's escape into Mother's ashram as a pretext to renounce his worldly duties as a husband and father. So she asks him :

Would you work like this for your father if he asked you to join his business? No, you wouldn't, you would refuse outright. So why do you do it for her? What do you get out of it? (125).

These questionings cut Matteo to the quick, yet with maddening patience he retorts :

That is the point. Father would make work so I could become self-supporting, or so that I could take over the business over him ... But the Mother doesn't make me work for anything. She teaches us to work without desiring the fruit from the work. Isn't that a higher way of life (Ibid).

But Sophie's indomitable power of reasoning cannot spare her husband until she succeeds in bringing him to her fold, so she counters :

If work doesn't bear fruit, it does not serve its purpose (Ibid).

Even when her power of reasoning fails to discipline her husband, she tries to exercise her power over him by labeling the Mother as 'hypnotist', 'magician', 'monster', 'spider who had spun this web to catch these silly flies', and the 'junk of the society'. (127). But as the application of the labeling technique towards the degradation of the Mother's spiritual position cannot bring any result, Sophie, by the right of his wife, asks helplessly:

Why is the ordinary not enough for you? Home, family, a child? Why must you run after the extra-ordinary? (141)

Even when this desperate appeal to her husband makes no effect upon him, she violently accuses him of being in love with her. In spite of this accusation, Matteo makes no sign to cut off his relation with the Mother. Rather he tries to make his wife understand what he gets from his relation with the Mother :

Listen in her presence I feel I am more alive ... Her presence heightens and illuminates the experience of living as no one else's does. Why? Because she contains – she is the container of a power that gives the world this heightened and illuminated quality. When I leave her, I feel I am falling (Ibid).

Here it may be argued that by enabling Matteo to construct a confessional discourse like this, Anita Desai seems to deconstruct the western colonial and patriarchal discourses that

empower the western man to dominate woman both in the inner and outer domains of culture. But here in the confessional discourse the western man is willingly surrendering to the spiritual power and authority of the Mother.

But the materialist Sophie is not yet ready to give up the battle. She knows that a man by nature does not like to be dominated by a woman. On this assumption, she finally hits at his masculinity by reminding him :

It is not the stone or shrine that keeps him here. But it is a woman who keeps you here. Call her what you like – the cosmic, the Absolute – but she's a woman (147).

What is implied here is that in the colonial technique by representing the Mother in her absence as an ordinary woman she wants to exercise power over the Mother as well as her husband. But the Mother's spiritual grip over her husband is so firm that she cannot make it loose, so she becomes psychologically tired and leaves for her parental home in Europe without giving a least recognition to the Mother's power.

But in her parental home, Sophie comes into clash with her mother whose over-possessive nature creates problems for her children, takes them over completely. She finds it difficult enough to have her choose what the children are to eat, what clothes they would wear etc. But when it comes to demanding that they be baptised, and baptised in the same church as that of Sophie, then she cannot but rebel :

No, I did not leave India and all its superstitions and rituals to come here and submit to the tribal rites of Europe (152).

The implication of this utterance is that Sophie's attack is as much on Indian superstitious rituals as on European tribal rites. Here it may be noted that in colonial discourses Indian cultures are always represented inferior to the western one. But in this context one can argue that in questioning the seemingly self-evident superiority of the western culture through Sophie, the novelist seems to subvert the colonial discourse that claims the occidental superiority over the oriental other. As Sophie argues :

You talk of Indians as if they were barbarians because they cremate the dead and toss them in the river. But what about you? You believe a baby should be dumped in a basin water by a priest and have some mumbo-jumbo said over its head or it won't go to heaven, eh? (Ibid).

Not only that, she also refuses to observe the christian religious norms in respect of the baptism of her children :

No one need think that by coming back to Europe I have come back to the church. I haven't. Oh, hypocrisy! (Ibid).

Here it would not be an exaggeration to note Christopher Norris's interpretation of Kantian 'Enlightenment'. He construes the Enlightenment both as a process in which men participate collectively, and as an act of courage to be accomplished personally (Christopher Norris in Gary Gutting, (ed.) 1994 : 169). In the second sense, Sophie shows her sense of Enlightenment by arguing against the christian hypocrisy and the Indian superstitions and thereby brings out the ethics of her life which are premised on the values of autonomy, freedom and self-determination.

Again, Sophie has to return to India to attend to her sick husband in the hospital where she can easily guess that it is the book of the Mother that has made a deleterious effect upon her husband. So long her battle against the Mother has been at the pathological and psychological levels, but now it comes down to the discursive level. She now engages in a discursive battle for ideological dominance over that of the Mother in order to rescue her husband from the grip of the Mother's ideology. She assures her husband :

Whatever there is to find. The book only gives you the legend. I want to go behind that, find out what she really is, how she came here, why. I want to know her. Then I can show you, too, who she really is. (159).

With this assurance she starts her odyssey for producing an alternative knowledge about the Mother on the basis of the collected data about her. The production of knowledge about one's life in terms of one's absence, as in her book *Imperial Eyes : Travel Writing and*

Transculturation (1992) Mary Louise Pratt observes, is a colonising mode of producing knowledge. On this view, Sophie's discursive strategy is akin to the colonising mode, although her project is not at all concerned with the colonial civilizing mission, rather its aim is to disentangle her husband from the halo of the Mother by constructing an alternative truth about the Mother. The politics of her project is to exclude the spiritual part of the Mother and construct her as an ordinary Third-world woman dancer.

But Sophie's mission gets stalled with the discovery of the Mother's personal diary sent to her dance master by the Mother herself. With the discovery of the personal diary from the dance master's box, Sophie's position is relegated from the producer of knowledge to the recipient of knowledge about the Mother. The Mother's diary contains the spiritual part of the Mother. From this one may guess that the novelist, perhaps by the discursive pressure of nationalist discourse, disallows the western woman to intervene in the spirituality of the Mother.

However, the Mother's personal diary is in the nature of a confessional discourse in which the Mother has confessed that she was urgently in need of a vision of the supreme. But her dance master Krishna whom she gradually exposed as false master misled her into disharmony, a commodified world of art. As a result, there was a failure on her part to attain a spiritual harmony and that failure made her ill. But again in the missionary hospital, as she has confessed, there was an attempt on the part of a member of Christian community to mislead her. Mary, with the hope of providing her with solace and peace, presented her a 'crucifix' which she discarded as 'an image of sin and suffering' (291). She was accused of being wicked for her act of throwing Christ's cross on the floor, but she felt no repentance. Rather she brought in a counter-charge against them who made an attempt at misleading her from the path of truth and beauty. What is worthwhile to note is that the novelist seems to debunk the messianic force of Christianity through Laila's, Mother's real name, acts of throwing the cross and of representing it as an image of sin and suffering.

After that incident in the hospital, as she has confessed, she made a pilgrimage to the Himalayas and at its peak she felt an ecstatic feeling while dancing a dance of the milkmaid pining for the shepherd. In her dance she heard her Master interpellate her :

Thou art shakti,
Supreme power,
Thou art Durga,
Mother of us all
Thou art Kali
The Divine force
And Parvati
Sweet Goddess of the Mountain (299).

Through those interpellations, she became Kali, Durga, Parvati and thereby a female power. We see here two things. Firstly, the novelist, by the logic of the modern discourse of liberalism, has endowed a muslim Egyptian woman with the power of autonomy in choosing her way of life, and then lastly she has empowered her as Kali, Durga, Parvati who are the incarnations of female power, in collusion with the discourse on traditional Hindu religion.

However, the battle between the western woman, Sophie, and the Mother's book has not yet come to an end. Sophie has come back to the Mother's ashram after knowing all about the Mother from different sources and she has even read the Mother's personal diary. But in the ashram she is informed that the Mother has passed away and that Matteo has left the ashram without leaving any message for anybody, even for his wife who came back from Europe. This makes her mission futile. Sophie now is not in a position to say to her husband that there is 'nothing much' (305) in Mother's life. This suggests that the western woman cannot any longer find scope for holding sway over her husband's subjectivity which has already been moulded by the Mother's discourse of spirituality. Besides this, Sophie thought that her husband would at least wait for her until she returns. But she finds that he has left without any message for her. This perhaps makes her realise that in patriarchal capitalist society the wives are required to wait upon and wait for their husbands, while the latter would show no concern for their wives. However powerful the woman may be, she is powerless in relation to her husband. This leads her to understand :

Why the Mother went on that pilgrimage, why anyone goes on a pilgrimage and she must go too (305).

What is implied here is that one of the many possible means of resisting male dominance or male indifference is to sidestep heterosexual marriage which the Mother had done by going on pilgrimage and thereby achieving a female power by virtue of which she has caused a metamorphosis in Matteo who is shown, through the eyes of his son, as a person who 'looked like the painting of Jesus in the church' (309). This no doubt refers to her spiritual power. Thus valorizing the Mother's spiritual power over the western woman's power of rationality, the novelist takes the Third-world feminist position which overlaps with her postcoloniality which underscores the superiority of Indian spirituality over the material West.

FASTING, FEASTING : ENVISIONING A BOND OF MOTHER - DAUGHTER

Fasting, Feasting (1999), the eleventh novel of Anita Desai, explores the victimization of some women in the oppressive structure of Hindu patriarchal ideology. While producing the knowledge about their victimization through the construction of different discourses, the novelist is seen to take the Third-world feminist position in order to critique the different oppressive structures of Hindu patriarchal ideologies. But her critique does not take on a negative turn because with the feminist consciousness of the victimization of the women she also constructs a discourse of mother-daughter bond in which she empowers them to exercise their agency towards the development of their own subculture to resist the patriarchal repressive structure. In this sense, the women, in this fictional domain, are powerless and empowered, passive and active.

The text is represented through Third person narration and divided into almost two equal parts : Part one, consisting of thirteen chapters, focuses on the predicament of some Hindu women in Hindu patriarchal family structure and Part two, having fourteen chapters, deals with Arun's studies and his bewildering experience in the Patton family in America. Symbolically, Mrs. Patton's joyful sharing of vegetable food with Arun in her home and Arun's presentation of an Indian shawl to her seem to give an indication of the novelist's emphasis upon multiculturalism. Besides this, Part two provides a slightly little space for inclusion of the novelist's concern about the adolescent American girls' victimization by the cultural identity norms in Late Capitalist society. Part one opens with Papa Mama's shouting for sweets, fritters and tea and with Uma engaged in doing up the parcel of shawl and tea to be carried away by justice Dutta's son with him to America for Arun. Part two ends with the packet at Arun's hand. He finds that there is no extra space in his suitcase, so he presents them to Mrs Patton. In between these two incidents the other incidents have

unfolded themselves in depth. In what follows is a discussion of these other incidents concerned with women's life.

To begin with, the novelist gives a vignette of the relationship between Uma's parents. Uma's mother, named Mama in this novel, came of an enormous merchant family in Kanpur, which, she believed, was not an orthodox one. This was because 'in her day, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts and good things to eat. If something special had been bought from the market like sweets or nuts, it was given to the boys in the family' (6). But no such gender discrimination she encountered in that family. But she did not know that without giving her proper education, at sixteen she was given in marriage to Papa (Uma's father), the son of Tax Inspector, who was provided with the best available education for a 'career'. Her mother perhaps internalised the patriarchal ideology that the goal of woman is marriage. So the story of her life was concerned with food – mostly sweets – and the family, and her father's with education, career, authority and power.

However, Papa Mama now seemed sufficient in themselves. At home, their existence was like that of the Siamese twin; but they had two different roles : Papa's scowling and Mama's scolding. The children did not question their choice, at least during their childhood because they hardly saw any difference between them.

But a difference came to crop up between them as Mama discovered her own pregnancy at a time when her two daughters were well grown-up. However frantic she was to have it terminated, she had to comply with her husband's decision that he could not now miss the chance of having a son. Through this incident the novelist seems to expose the predicament of the women like Mama in patriarchal family where they are treated solely as bodies, but not as subjects with desires, fears, special needs and so forth.

However, in patriarchy the mother of a son is granted extra status. With the birth of a son, Mama began to enjoy that extra status. She became her husband's helpmate, his consort, his wife and above all, the mother of his son. Patriarchy's preference of a son to a daughter was revealed by Papa's joy that knew no bounds with the news of the birth of a male child in the family. But he turned morose when the second daughter was born.

Patriarchy prefers a son to a daughter in order to perpetuate itself. With this awareness, the novelist, from this point onwards, sets to constitute the discourse of gender discrimination.

The feminist in Anita Desai takes note of the fact that in patriarchal family, with the advent of a male child, the daughters' positions are relegated. This is exposed through the positions of Uma and her sister Aruna which are relegated to that of an 'ayah'. They are not only neglected but also expected to give proper attention to the infant son. Through Uma, the novelist points out that they were brought up by ayah, whereas Mama now requires their special service towards her son. With this consciousness of gender discrimination, Uma ventilates her protest against her mother's unjust demand through a direct question :

That ayah had looked after her and Aruna as babies (30).

But her mother silences her voice with a threatening note that 'it was quite a different matter now' (Ibid). Uma and Aruna find no alternative to standing in for her at Arun's cot as she would accompany her husband to the club, or to the dinner parties and weddings. She matches her husband's achievement and they are 'now more equal than ever' (31). Yet it cannot evade Uma's notice that there is a dearth of something in their relationship. Consequently, Uma cannot but wonder :

Was this love? was this romance? (31)

Actually their relationship is based upon obligation, constraint, submission but not upon mutual love and romance.

Anyway, here it is pertinent to note Uma Narayan's observation on the middle class Indian mothers' relationships with their daughters. As Uma Narayan observes, 'the middle class Indian mothers give contradictory messages to their daughters, encouraging their daughters to be confident, impudent and self-assertive even as they attempt to instil conformity, decorum and silence, seemingly oblivious to these contradictions' (1997 : 8). But Uma's mother has no such contradiction. In delineating the middle class Indian mother like Uma's mother, Anita Desai has made us aware that there are still certain middle class

Indian mothers like Mama who are of traditional mentality. Now the middle class Indian mothers, as Uma Narayan observes, see education good for daughters, encourage them to do well at their studies so that the requisite qualifications would enable them to support themselves economically. But Uma's mother discourages her daughters, particularly Uma, to continue her studies. Of course, there is a cause behind it. Uma's performance is abject in school. Yet while Uma wants to continue her studies, feels attracted towards the rational, orderly and mindful atmosphere of school, and the nuns and the sisters want her to come back to school, her parents withdraw her from it and engage her in the crib so that she can assist her mother. Since her mother wants Uma to be like her, she gives her the lessons of how to fold nappies, prepare watered milk and rock the screaming infant to sleep. Uma is not oblivious to the fact that her mother was not so serious about her school work as now in respect of these lessons.

Again, like the middle class Indian mothers, Mama is critical of the effect of convent education upon her daughters. She wants her daughters to conform to the prescriptions and expectations around them. She has already internalised almost all patriarchal prescriptions and expectations around a woman. Naturally she would not approve of her daughters' behaviour otherwise toward Hindu patriarchal culture. So whenever she finds them do so, she tries to silence them by scolding. The novelist makes this point clear in the following piece :

Anamika had had a miscarriage, after a beating ... would she be sent back to her family? Everyone waited to hear. Uma said, 'I hope they will send her back'. 'Then she will be home with Lila Aunty again, and happy'. 'you are so silly, Uma', Mama snapped, ... 'How can she be happy if she is sent home? What will people say? What will they think?' While Uma gaped, trying to think of something to say that could strike down Mama's silly thoughts ... Aruna cried out for her instead, 'Who cares what they say? Who cares what they think?' 'Don't talk like that', Mama scolded them. 'I don't want to hear all these modern ideas. Is it what you learnt from the nuns at the convent? ... All this convent education - what good does it do? Better to marry you off than let you go to that place' (71).

The mother gets alarmed at her daughters' inclination to question the social convention that after marriage, the woman will stay at her in-laws' house, she cannot be brought back to her parents' house until the in-laws send her back. She perhaps considers her daughters' defiant behaviour against the social convention as a sort of cultural betrayal. So scolding them, she tries to discipline their behaviour.

Again, it is interesting to note that while Mama is critical of the effect of convent education upon her daughters and therefore wants to withdraw them from it, Papa is very much serious about his son's education. Against this sort of gender discrimination, the novelist cannot but ventilate her feminist rage through this discourse :

If one word could sum up Arun's childhood that word was education. Although this was not what loomed large in the lives of his sisters, who were, after all, being raised for marriage by Mama. And if there was one thing Papa insisted on the realm of home and family, then it was education for his son : the best, the most, the highest (115)

Here it may be argued that Papa's seriousness about his son's education is because of the fact that in patriarchal society the girls are considered to be the transitory members of the family in contrast to the boys, who are believed to be the transmitters of the family name to the future generations and are therefore more carefully and lovingly brought up and given more advantages. So while Arun is being raised for career, Uma and Aruna are raised for marriage. Even Anamika, the daughter of her uncle, who is not only pretty and good, but also an outstandingly brilliant student is raised for marriage. Anamika has won a scholarship to Oxford by doing brilliantly well in her final Exam, yet her parents, who are modern, urban and elegant in taste and outlook, think of giving her in marriage. They argue :

To Oxford, where only the most favoured and privileged sons could ever hope to go ! They would not countenance her actually going abroad to study – just when she was of an age to marry (68).

Rather they utilize her certificate as an extra qualification towards the search for a husband for her. On the other hand, Mrs Joshi who in her early-married life got illtreatment from her mother-in-law now encourages her youngest daughter to have a career. Here the novelist perhaps admits that there are a few Indian mothers like Mrs Joshi who encourage their daughters to have a career, but in most cases the mothers, like Mama, raise their daughters for marriage in perfect conformity to the claims of a patriarchal society.

In patriarchy marriage is observed to be the deepest as well as the most problematic of all human relations. From the standpoint of religion it confers a status of the union of two souls and bodies and invokes oneness. But in practice, as the feminists, particularly the radical feminists, observe, it turns into a trap, an institution of oppression and torment for women. But in this context Anita Desai tries to show through the construction of different discourses on marriage that marriage, in practice, takes on different characters in different patriarchal families. Though the novelist observes that barring a few, marriage in most cases takes on oppressive character, yet she is not in a position to encourage the heterosexual women to abrogate it totally. Rather she makes an attempt to show that there are a few heterosexual women like Aruna who can selectively appropriate it for negotiation of power and position in patriarchal capitalist society. From this it appears that Anita Desai wants the women to selectively appropriate or abrogate it whenever it is possible for them. Now it is our turn to see how the discourses on marriage have been constituted differently in different contexts.

That marriage is a trap is shown through the construction of the discourse of Anamika's marriage. Anamika has been attractive for the male gaze, yet her bridegroom remains unresponsive to her beauty, grace and distinction. After marriage, she comes to be treated as an 'interloper' to her husband and mother-in-law. In presence of her husband she would be regularly bitten by her mother-in-law, and forced to do scrubbing, cooking, massaging her mother-in-law's legs. Anamika cannot defy the social mores lest she should put her parents into social criticism, and her parents, on the other hand, cannot bring her back to their house for the same reason. As a result, Anamika has to bear all the inhuman tortures and afflictions for twenty five years after which fire finally consumes her body in

the kitchen. Anita Desai observes that this sort of wife-murder or daughter-in-law murder is construed from different individual points of view. It is considered as a case of murder, or a case of suicide or a case of an ill-fated woman. But none of these pays attention to the fact that the practice of this sort of wife-killing is still prevalent in our society as something rooted in the very structure of the society.

Again, Anita Desai constructs a different meaning of marriage in the discourse of Aruna's marriage. Here marriage is shown to be giving Aruna freedom from her parental bondage and the way to self-actualization. For being attractive in the marriage market, she, unlike her elder sister, Uma, does not find any difficulty in choosing the handsomest, the richest, the most exciting of the suitors who present themselves. Her parents feel perturbed. Prudently they wish for someone a little less handsome, a little less showy and suggest caution and patience to see who else may turn up. But Aruna marries the man of her choice. She raises her power, position and status through marriage, obliterates every trace of her provincial roots and overlays them with the bright shine of the metropolis. Her parents cannot keep up with her. However, the only thing that makes them tolerate her behaviour is the evidence that she directs it not only towards them but even at her husband, Arvind. Clearly Aruna has a vision of a perfect world in which all of them – her own family as well as Arvind's – are flawed. But Uma assumes from the symptoms of all-time agitation on her eyelids that Aruna's marriage experience is not a pleasing one. In one sense, Uma is perhaps right because Aruna, in her quest for perfection, has fallen a victim to 'fashion/beauty complex'. She has riveted her whole attention on how to walk, talk, style her hair, care for her skin, and on how to make other do so. Paying too much attention to all these feminine identity norms, her soul has imprisoned her body, though she has made her a skilled woman. And for being so, she now shares power with and exercises power over others. The exercise of power certainly gives her pleasure – the symptom of which is noticeable in her recent shopping trip with her husband in Singapore. Here it is pertinent to note what Nelson Mendala said only the other day :

Even if there is war on you must negotiate--negotiation is what politics is all about. (quoted in Diane Elam, 1994 : 81).

Aruna has actually played the politics of negotiation for power and position in a patriarchal family. In constructing Aruna, Anita Desai seems to suggest that the marriage can be selectively appropriated for negotiation of power and position in the patriarchal capitalist society.

But the unattractive woman like Uma gets victimized by the institution of marriage. For being unattractive, she has to pass through the institution of dowry in order to enter into the institution of marriage. But the irony is that she is also cheated by the institution of dowry. Firstly, she is cheated by a cloth merchant's family. As Uma's parents approach the father of the son, the latter explains that they cannot proceed until they come into some money. So a negotiation sum is made over as dowry and the engagement ceremony arranged simultaneously. It is thought that they are now engaged; they have met a few times – after all. So Mama invites 'the family over – once, twice, thrice – only to be refused each time' (81). However, when no more is heard from the merchant family, they go across to fix a date for the wedding, but the merchant, quite abruptly, informs them that his son has decided to go to Roorkee for higher education and feels he should not be hampered at this stage and has asked for the engagement to be indefinitely postponed. If this does not suit them, they are free to break it off. But as the question of dowry-back is raised, the merchant refuses to give back the dowry on the ground that the money has been spent on building the house : 'He had gone ahead with preparing a home for their daughter, but fate had willed it otherwise' (82). The general opinion is that the Goyals are able to do such things, because of the parents' being too much in a hurry.

In spite of being cheated by the Goyals, Uma's parents again work hard to dispose of Uma, because they know that in patriarchal society it is the parents' duty to give the daughters in marriage as they bloom in youth. So they start sending photographs around to everyone who advertises in the matrimonial columns of the Sunday papers, but the photographs are always returned with a negative comment. Finally, a pharmaceutical business man, allegedly a widower, communicates his willingness to marry Uma. Uma's parents apprehend that Uma is not going to receive any other offer; so they make negotiation with the man about payment of dowry which is, as the novelist ironically

comments, bonus to the man. However, after marriage the bridegroom is discovered to have a wife and four children. He has really taken to subterfuge to revive his sick business in Meerut with the dowry money. Uma is brought back with the retrieval of gold of her Jewellery that has been under her control. But the cash is forfeited. Uma is considered to be an ill-fated woman.

Dowry-cheat is generally construed by referring to the cruel disposition of particular in-laws, or by referring to the brutal nature of a particular man, or as an unfortunate accident rooted primarily in human propensities for evil. But this is not the whole story of dowry-cheat. In order to know the exact causes, a discussion of the institution of dowry is in order here.

In her book *Dislocating Cultures* (1997 : 105-111), developing a trajectory of the institution of dowry, Uma Narayan has shown how the traditional institution of dowry which was not murderous in nature has changed in recent times and taken on a murderous character. In her view, in the traditional institution of dowry, dowry had to be given in three forms : dowry as gift, dowry as compensation and dowry as premortem inheritance. The first form meant for conversion of material wealth into spiritual wealth. The second form economically would compensate the groom's family for taking on the economic burden of a wife whose contribution to the family income was negligible, or religiously would compensate a man and his family for marrying a creature to which Scriptures have assigned 'less intrinsic value'. The third form provided the daughter a share of parental property at the time of her marriage in the form of movable property consisting of gold jewellery and household items, while it would simultaneously foreclose her inheriting immovable property such as land.

But the traditional institution of dowry has undergone a number of changes as it has come to exist within an increasingly market-dominated modern economy. It has mainly become increasingly commercialised. In the traditional institution, dowry had to be decided by the woman's parents keeping in view their social status. But in the commercialised world, demands for gold jewellery, gifts and cash as dowry have escalated due to the emergence of dowry-bargaining. The daughters' traditional control over their dowry assets

have significantly eroded. If cash is given, it seldom remains in the daughters' hands. Moreover, where dowry traditionally used to be more or less 'a one-shoot deal', it seems to be changing into something more like 'dowry on the instalment plan'. Demands for goods and cash now-a-days seem to continue for several years after marriage takes place, the wife's harassment compelling her to put pressure on her parents to submit to further demands by her husband and in-laws. If a woman's parents are unwilling or unable to meet these on-going demands, the woman's utility is reduced, making it expeditious to murder.

Adapting Uma Narayan's observation about dowry-cheat, it may be said that the dowry-mishaps concerned with Uma's life have taken on a deceitful character, instead of murderous one. It might have taken on the murderous character if Uma has not been brought back to her parents' home in time. Besides this, the above trajectory helps us understand that dowry-cheat or dowry-mistreatment is not a personal problem. Uma's parents have been cheated by the Goyals not because of their being too much in a hurry, but because of the prevalence of the practice of dowry-system in society. This is what Anita Desai means to say. In constructing the discourse of Uma's dowry-cheat, Anita Desai seems to point out that the recent dowry mistreatments or cheats are significantly rooted in particular practices and institutional arrangements embedded in a material reality that includes culture and tradition as well as a variety of ongoing changes, and the powerlessness they inflict on many women.

Again, on the other hand, in inscribing three different meanings in three different discourses on marriage, Anita Desai seems to show marriage not as a sacred essence, but merely as an institution, a construct, produced in different families in different ways. In the family of Anamika's in-laws, it takes on an oppressive and annihilating character. In Uma's case, it is a humiliating one minus sexual experience. And in Aruna's case, it is appropriated as a site for negotiation of power and the way to self-actualization. In constructing three different meanings of marriage Anita Desai seems to betray her deep scepticism about it.

After being cast away from the institution of marriage, Uma has now become a spinster daughter in her parents' close-knit family. She now finds that she is under constant

surveillance of her parents, with the result that she feels repressed in mind and soul. She seeks for an unsupervised life plus a thrilling sensation. So Mira Masi's offer for a life of submission to Lord Shiva appears to be unacceptable to her. She rejects it with an argument with herself :

Lord Shiva may have been an acceptable husband to Mira Masi, but even He, at least in the form of the brass image that had been stolen from Masi, had proved Himself elusive (96).

Here it is worthwhile to note that Mira Masi, an old widow, exercises a power over her relatives through her observance of all rituals relating to widowhood. Whenever she appears in any family of her relatives, she demands a new set of cooking pots. She does not take what the cook makes. In making herself different from other members of the family, she exercises power over them. She does not feel oppressed in the role of a widow. Rather she is seen to observe the ritual, from the moment she wakes up in the morning. Pilgrimage has now become the part and parcel of her life. She has 'developed an unsettling habit of travelling all over the country, quite alone, safe in her widow's white garments' (38). She enjoys her life through her ritual bath and morning prayers and the preparation of her single vegetarian meal of the day and through incantation of Lord's name.

However, Uma does not like to be guided by Mira Masi. She is in search of something that would provide her with freedom and a sensation of life. Casually she has heard from Mrs Joshi about the pursuit of career, but has no idea as to how to go in for a career. Again, on the other hand, her vision of escape takes on an enormous form, even though she knows that her father will not allow her to accept any chance of escape because he is 'quite capable of putting on progressive westernised front when called upon to do so – in public, in society, but not within his family of course' (141). Her apprehension comes true as Dr. Dutta's offer of a job for Uma is squarely turned down by her father on the ground that the right place for woman is home. Uma who does not have the capacity to rebel against her father has to feel oppressed by the discursive pressure of the patriarchal ideology that enjoins women to stay at home.

In the meantime, Anamika's tragic death has acted as a warning-call to all women about the oppressive structure of Hindu patriarchal society. Uma's mother is perhaps warned of her husband's belittling attitude towards her intellectual capability. She took note of this as she protested against her husband's over-seriousness about sending his son abroad for higher education :

Where is the need? Mama protested. He can go to Seth Baba Ram college here – ... it is not bad here (120).

She then noted that her husband did not even bother to counter her argument; he did not expect her to understand the importance of sending Arun abroad to study, the value of a foreign degree. He merely brushed aside her protests and concentrated on his son. That humiliation perhaps now makes her realise how selfish and possessive the male world is. She feels repentant for the negligence she has so far shown towards her daughter. Out of this sense of repentance, she relates her feminine self to the self of her daughter for sharing their sorrows and sufferings, for caring for their aspirations and desires. This is why she clasps her daughter's hand to make her feel that she is not alone in this oppressive, violent male world. Uma appreciates her mother's realization, and therefore in a consoling tone she whispers :

I told cook to make Puri-alu for breakfast and have it ready (155-56).

This also makes her mother convinced of her daughter's empathy and sense of responsibility. Once convinced, the mother 'tightens her hold on Uma's hand' (156) and feels an intimate symbiotic bond with her daughter 'as though she too finds the Puri-alu comforting; it is a bond' (Ibid).

'Puri-alu' is suggestive of a bond, stressing the need of a mother-daughter bond to be evolved in the book as women's sub-culture of mutual empathy, responsibility and interdependence. Thus the novelist locating herself inside the national culture enables the Third-world women like Uma and Mama to take a position of resistance to the dominance

of the fathers like Papa who exploit the culture of separation, selfishness, and competition for a bond of father and son.

Though all-through Part two of the novel the multiculturalism is emphasised through the symbolic exchange of food and presentation between Arun and Mrs Patton, there is also a hint at the predicament of American adolescent girls who are implicitly referred to as victimized by the feminine identity norms prescribed by the patriarchal disciplinary technologies. Because of their victimization by the norms, they are seen to suffer from different sorts of neuroses such as bulimia, anorexia, depression, withdrawal, compulsive behaviour, hysteria. Melanie's suffering from anorexia bears testimony to the fact. However, her recuperation from anorexia because of her mother's care for her symbolically speaks of the need for a culture of interdependence and empathy to counter the commodified patriarchal culture in America. Thus the novel can be read as a commentary on the selfish, aggressive, competitive and separatist patriarchal culture in the Late capitalist world.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters we have seen how Anita Desai resurrects the subjugated knowledge of different Third-world as well as western women in their respective predicaments in a male-dominated society. Like a genealogist, she locates many discontinuous individual women's struggles against different forms of patriarchal power in post-independence India. Their struggles result in their taking different forms of resistance or negotiating in power relations. For self-fulfilment they either appropriate or abrogate the social institutions like marriage and family and different cultural practices with full consciousness of their selves. Desai's female protagonists cannot be therefore said to be selfless, passive and subservient or conventional and traditional, rather they are equipped with oppositional consciousness that propels them to assert their own selves. If knowledge of the self is power, each of them is endowed with this sort of power. Again, in spite of the common trait, they also show a marked difference among themselves.

However, while directing the struggles of her female protagonists at changing the power relations in patriarchal societies, Anita Desai takes different feminist positions that shift, though not in a linear way, from western to postcolonial feminism. As a corollary of this, she emerges as a postcolonial feminist novelist.

In her first novel, *Cry, The Peacock*, Desai takes a radical feminist position. In making a Hindu wife speak out against her husband and kill him, she subverts Hindu 'pativrata' or wife's fidelity ideology and thereby shows her radicality. Maya's move from speech to action is well-nigh akin to that of Dimple in Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* (1976). Dimple is trapped in a loveless marriage with Amit with whom she talked in silences. The only person she can talk to is Milt Glasser, her American friend, in whose arms she finds love in her New York apartment. Towards the end her frustration at being imprisoned in the deadening routine of her bourgeois existence erupts into chilling act of self-assertion – she knives her husband. Maya and Dimple are no doubt extreme cases of women's self-assertion. But

Anita Desai, unlike Bharati Mukherjee, cannot grant her protagonist extra-marital sex perhaps because of the discursive pressure of Indian middle class morality. Anita Desai seems to have deliberately allowed her western radicality to be modified by Indian middle class morality with the purpose of representing not only Maya, but most of her Indian female characters, as sexually chaste. Of course, she is not blind to their sexual desires which she represents with great artistry. In *Clear Light of Day*, Bim's incestuous feeling for her retarded brother is a case in point :

She felt an immense, almost irresistible yearnings to lie down beside him on the bed, stretched out limb to limb, silent and immobile together. She felt that they must be the same length, that his slightness would fit in beside her size, that his concavities would mould together with her convexities. Together they would form a whole that would be perfect and pure. She only needed to lie down and stretch out beside him to become whole and perfect.

Instead she went out (166).

In addition to Bharati Mukherjee, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Gita Mehta, Shobha De, Nomita Gokhale and Arundhati Roy who have presented their stories from a feminist point of view make no hesitation in representing their female characters with extra-marital affairs for their sexual fulfilment. Nayantara Sahgal's central characters have no hangover of guilt when they have extra-marital affairs for sexual fulfilment. Deshpande's protagonists have extra-marital attractions : Sarita for Boozie and Padmakar, Indu for Naren and Jaya for Kamat. All three of them view it objectively as any other experience and do not allow themselves to be bogged down by any feeling of guilt. An attempt at a meaningful communication which their marriage lacks, spurs them into these relationships, but very soon they see the futility of such expectation. Gita Mehta's Jaya in *Raj* finds with Arun Roy the sexual fulfilment that her husband had denied her in marriage. With Nomita Gokhale and Shobha De, we enter the world of consumer culture. Their women of affluent and aspiring middle classes with new sex morality insist upon the right to have sexual life of their own both before and after marriage. In Nomita Gokhale's *Paro* and Shobha De's novels the quest for happiness can be equated with a more or less frantic effort to make the

best of the passing moment—the unabashed pursuit of sex. Arundhati Roy too has not been affected by the discursive pressure of Indian morality. Many critics are of the view that Roy has depicted some scenes which are highly pornographic. Anyway, in maintaining the sexual purity of her Indian middle class women characters, Anita Desai seems to have taken a position of resistance to the sexual corruption of western consumer culture.

Desai however reveals her radicality in other way through Monisha, in *Voices in the City*, who moves from silence to action. Her deliberate resort to silence and frigidity and later on suicide act as a mode of violent protest against oppressive patriarchal family structure. Desai's negative radicality takes on positive form through Amla who abjures marriage in favour of an independent profession. Her radicality is again noticeable in her construction of a Hindu sensual widow-mother who is the only Indian female character whom she grants an extra-marital affair with Major Chanda as a protest against her husband's greed for her parental property. But the affair has been only hinted at, not at all overdone.

In *Bye-Bye Blackbird* her postcolonial feminism opposes that postcoloniality which emphasizes the need of an authentic essential national culture in opposition to colonial culture. Imbued with emancipatory politics, Anita Desai does not want any culture to be dominated by another culture. She perhaps believes that women's emancipation is contingent upon cultural emancipation. With this conviction she invokes hybridity through construction of the discourse of an expectant mother. But again her postcolonial feminism switches over to a radical feminism in *Where shall We Go This Summer?* where she represents a violent pregnant mother struggling for reproductive freedom, although she has ultimately to suspend her radicality. In *Fire on the Mountain* her radicality takes on a more pronounced form, although she posits that fight against different forms of patriarchal oppression can be carried on from different positions : separatist, socialist and radical. However, in raising a stout symbolic protest against rape and envisioning a holistic and life-affirming women's world through Raka, Desai reinforces her radicality. In *Clear Light of Day* she shows her radicality in two ways : first, in exposing the nationalist resolutions' failure to solve the problem of the young widows like Mira Masi and second, in making a

young woman Bimala opt out of marriage for an independent life of her choice with an independent profession. But at the end her radical feminism turns into postcolonial one as she, through Tara and Bimala, shows preference for a composite culture over pure Hindu nationalist culture in India. In *The Village By the Sea* silence at the end is deliberately maintained as a protest against the nationalist discourse that locates women in the spiritual domain of its culture with myopia of their poverty. In refusing to locate a working class unmarried village woman in the spiritual domain of national culture in favour of a Marxist discourse that makes her conscious of the magic of money-power and the need for an independent earning, Desai takes a Third-world Marxist feminist position.

But in *In Custody*, Desai takes a Third world feminist position. A Third -world feminist shows concerns not only for the predicament of the women of the Third-world countries but also for that of the people who are marginalized there. But where the gender relations are concerned, she sides with the women. In making the muslim female artist assert her position in opposition to a male Urdu poet as well as a phallic critic Deven, Desai shows her predilection for the Third-world feminism. Again in *Baumgartner's Bombay*, Desai, from a transnational feminist position, showers compassion upon the two German expatriates who are marginalized in both India and Germany. But in respect of empowerment she favours the German woman, a cabaret dancer, whom she empowers to resurrect not only the subjugated experience of her own predicament but also that of the German Jew in an alien Indian culture. In resurrecting their subjugated experiences she creates a resistance to the violent capitalist power.

But in *Journey to Ithaca*, Desai rolls back to Third-world feminism. She takes a western feminist position as she constructs the power relations between two western characters who are husband and wife. But as she foregrounds the power relations between the western woman and the oriental woman, she shifts to the Third-world feminist position which overlaps with her postcoloniality in which she colludes with the traditional discourse of Hindu religion for empowerment of the oriental muslim woman. In her last novel, *Fasting, Feasting*, Desai evinces the feeling of a postcolonial feminist writer through her emphasis on multiculturalism that she believes would reduce dominance of one culture over

the other and widen the understandings of social relationships as well as through her vision of the women's subculture that underlines a bond of mother-daughter in opposition to an aggressive patriarchal culture.

Interestingly it may be noted that though in some of her novels Desai emphasises the need for cultural exchange between the West and the East, she does in no way show her predilection for the Western Christian values in her novels. Rather in *Journey to Ithaca* she denounces Christianity through a western and an oriental woman. She may have a fascination for modern Western civilization premised on enlightenment. But this does not debar her from getting sustenance from Indian traditional culture.

Unlike Desai, Sahgal and Kamala Markandaya, on the other hand, who, as Dr. Rakhi observes, are feminine in their perspective and 'feminist in ideology' (Manmohan K. Bhatnagar (ed.) Vol.III 1999 : 102) show their predilection for the Western Christian values. Raj in Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* brings his Christian Values to bear on his criticism of Hinduism. In the novel he who on the tradition-modernity question stands for modernity helps Simrit and becomes foil to her husband. This, as Naresh Jain observes, indicates Sahgal's own predilection for the western Christian values (Naresh K. Jain, 1998:14). He also observes that this is not however an isolated phenomenon because Kamala Markandaya has an Englishman too. Dr. Kennington is the agent of change in *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954). But Anita Desai's postcoloniality perhaps propels her to disallow any of her fictional characters to apply Christian values for debunking Indian culture, particularly Hinduism. If ever she allows any character like Sophie to attack it, she allows her to attack not the essence of Hinduism, but some of its superstitious practices.

Another important point is that western feminism insists upon women adopting divorce as a potent weapon against male oppression. Three of Sahgal's novels such as *The Time of Morning* (1966) *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) and *The Day in Shadow* (1971) dwell upon the theme of divorce that provides Sahgal with an occasion to castigate Hindu tradition where a woman's life is hemmed in by a web of duties to her husband and where she is enjoined to stay faithful to him at all costs, Sahgal has presented divorce as an assertion by women of their need for personal freedom including sexual freedom. But Desai does not

lead her women to revolt against male oppression through divorce. They either return to their parents or use violent weapons like self-immolation or suicide, or fight for their rights as wife within the framework of marriage and family. In other words, Anita Desai has created a new selfhood drawing sustenance from tradition and made an attempt at arriving at a resolution of the dilemma within the family structure.

Some critics are of the opinion that in the last two decades Anita Desai's popularity has begun to dwindle with the emergence of the women novelists of controversial merit like Gita Mehta and Shobha De who have presented their versions of the newly liberated women. Shobha De has portrayed the world of sexually infatuated people and Gita Mehta the spiritually hungry characters. Of them, particularly Shobha De is said to have an enviable appeal and an undeniable charm. But Shobha De's appeal can be at best called seasonal. If her novels are considered in depth, she easily falls short of the stature of a novelist. Anita Desai, on the contrary, remains a major novelist by any standard.

A postcolonial feminist, she has resurrected knowledges of the different women in the different roles as daughter, wife, mother or spinster, and in thus resurrecting, Desai has indeed made an insurrection in the field of feminism.

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