

# **Postmodernist Concerns in the Novels of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale : A Study in Comparison**

**A Thesis**

**Submitted for the Award of  
Ph.D. Degree of  
UNIVERSITY OF KOTA**

**in English  
(Faculty of Arts)**

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**Year : 2018**

# CERTIFICATE

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I feel great pleasure in certifying that the thesis entitled '**Postmodernist Concerns in the Novels of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale : A Study in Comparison**' has been carried out successfully by **Rashmi Agrawal** under my guidance. She has completed the following requirements as per Ph.D. regulations of the University.

- (a) Course work as per the university rules.
- (b) Residential requirements of the university (200 days)
- (c) Regularly submitted annual progress report.
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# ABSTRACT

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Postmodernism, within the historical context, denotes a period post 1980s, which represents an era following modernism. Whether it is a herald of modernism, it refutes or obscures or surpasses modernism has been a question of analysis since long. But by and large, a consensus has been reached that modernism itself is inevitably postmodern, in its ever transitional contemporaneity and its relevance to the immediate present. Postmodernism, philosophically, describes the renaissance of skeptical thinking and a constant questioning of the already existing values and ideologies. The movement symbolises an epistemological critique which shatters the prevalent unquestionable belief in morality and rationality. It rejects any possibility or need of verifiability and homogeneity of principles. The explanatory schemes are vehemently argued and so is the validity of right and wrong, good and bad, ethical and unethical. A worthwhile action is defined not by logic or sanction of society but by individual parameters and needs. Change and disorder are welcome evading any association of reverence with a universal stable pattern.

Based on the fact that Postmodernism is a valuable pursuit because it engages scholars and critics in discussions of the current cultural mutations and of the fundamental question about individual's position and situation in the society, the research takes an indepth analysis of the contemporary life as depicted in the novels of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale. The two writers of international repute, write highly individualistic narratives, carrying forward the legacy of postmodernism and its implications on our approach towards life, attitude and psychology. Explaining the concept of postmodernism, the thesis, by integrating primary material into the study, is an attempt to make explicit the common themes underlying the novels of Desai and Gokhale. It also brings to the surface the distinctive features between the works of the two contemporary writers concerning their themes as well as techniques of writing. It aims to give an insightful glimpse into the relevance of the understanding of postmodernism in

realizing the various aspects of thoughts portrayed in the novels. The novels have been positioned in the postmodern premises, highlighting the absurdities of human existence, complexities of relationships, feministic concerns, alienation and fragmentation, rejection of reason and logic, psychological traumas and the assertion of the postmodern me-generation, negating and transcending all the totalizing and unifying agents. The fiction of Desai and Gokhale is a manifestation of a flexibility and diversity of approach and of style, arising out of acceptance of discontinuity, grotesqueness, inherent difference, self-motivation, role-reversals and rejection of the pre-ordained aesthetic rules of writing. Instead of prizing truth, morality, experience and society, the actions of the protagonists are determined by a self-beneficiary outlook tending towards spontaneity, reflexivity, relativity and autonomy. Women, being the focus of study of these two writers, exhibit postmodern consumer culture by objecting openly to the centrality of power neutralizing the judgement and expectations pronounced on them. Introduction of improbabilities, which disrupt the known and the accepted and a dialogism of representation are some striking features of their hybrid fiction.

Key words: Postmodernism, modernism, absurdity, representation.

## Candidate's Declaration

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I, hereby, certify that the work, which is being presented in the thesis, entitled '**Postmodernist Concerns in the Novels of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale : A Study in Comparison**' in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, carried under the supervision of **Dr. Pratima Sharma** and submitted to the University of Kota, Kota represents my ideas in my own words and where others' ideas or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources. The work presented in this thesis has not been submitted elsewhere for the award of any other degree or diploma from any institution. I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/data/fact/source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will cause for disciplinary action by the University and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

**Rashmi Agrawal**

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

This is to certify that the above statement made by **Rashmi Agrawal** (Registration No. RS/920/13) is correct to the best of my knowledge.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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I owe a deep debt of gratitude to my reverend supervisor, Dr. Pratima Sharma, for her ceaseless guidance and encouragement in the course of my research without which this research would not have been accomplished. The keen interest displayed by her in the topic and readiness to devote her time to guide the research have motivated me to complete my research successfully.

It is with pleasure that I record my thanks to my husband, Dr. Ravi Arora for his patience, love and belief in my potential. His inspiration and rejuvenation has been valuable throughout these years. I express my heartfelt thanks to my wonderful son, Nilay Arora who despite being so young has shown acceptance and understanding and has always cheered me up with his innocent compliments.

I am extremely grateful to my father-in-law Mr. R.C. Arora, mother-in-law Dr. J.D. Arora, my mother Mrs. P.K. Agarwal and my amazing sisters Dr. Richa and Ruchi Agarwal for their valuable prayers. I appreciate their forbearance, invigoration and reassurances from time to time.

I also recognize the support of the faculty and staff members of my institution, Govt. V.S.P.A. Sanskrit College, Kota who tried their best to unburden me from extra professional responsibilities and revitalize me to proceed towards the completion of the work.

I am thankful to Miss Shruti Mishra, a Young India Scholar and my close associate, for her genuine concern about the completion of my research and her scholarly ideas and help.

Finally I express my gratitude to all the people who have co-operated with me in my research work, directly or indirectly.

May the Almighty bless all of you!

**Rashmi Agrawal**

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## Chapter – 1

# THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

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Postmodern Indian English fiction has brought revolution in the whole range of Indian English literature in its choice of subjects and language of expression. With the vast fundamental changes taking place in the contemporary culture and society, postmodern fiction, with its emphasis on human freedom and emancipation, diversity, spontaneity, individuality, change and disorder, reconstructs the modernist literature. Postmodern literature is a part of socio-cultural and historical development and can be viewed as a specific way of depiction of the postmodern life and culture. The spirit of postmodernism is that of denial of belief in any naive representational scheme, in which symbols stand for something definite. Any possibility of rational consideration of the probabilities is evaded by postmodernists. It brings our focus on consumerism and lack of fixity of any kind in our lives in the present age.

The postmodernist age, constitutes a dramatic mutation and rupture from the previous modern age and is characterized by wars, social turmoil and revolution.

The term 'Postmodern' has only become current since the 1980s whereas it was the movement called 'modernism' which stirred the field of arts in the twentieth century and became crucial in the understanding of the culture of the first half of the twentieth century. Postmodernism came as an aftershock which was dedicated to experimentation and innovation. The boundaries of arts were rejected and an entirely new universe of pattern, purpose and process was laid down, claiming that the world in which we live today is different, in almost all its basic preconditions. The lamentation of the lost values of the modernists was replaced by an attitude of criticism of traditional values and ideologies, which describes the renaissance of



epistemological doubts and theories. Rather than attempting to create a structured impression, postmodernists argue the unquestionable belief in rationality and morality, considering life to be an indefinable feast. They expose conventions only to discard and realise the need to accept the absurdity of human existence and accommodate its meaninglessness in the present context. In the age of uncertainty man stands alone amongst all humanity without any substantial support and companionship of his fellow beings. Fragmentation, today, is an on-going process, be it society, family or self-all exhibit breaking of forms with the decantation of culture. Thus, postmodernists insist on reliance on self and on the pleasure of the moment. They believe that to attain completion an individual has to achieve it within oneself and only then it can be complemented with the relationship he has with the outside world. Post-1980 fiction is postmodern.

The phenomenon became more evident in America and France. Prominent examples are works of John Fowles, Alian Robke Grillet, Thoman Pynchon, John Barth, Kurt Vonnegut, Leonard Michaels, Brigid Brophy and Richard Brautigan, among other postmodernists. However Postmodern fiction in India also witnessed a luxuriant growth at the same time resulting in the creation a new literary epoch depicting contemporary society with insight and objectivity. In the hands of Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Shashi Tharoor, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Namita Gokhale and a few others. Indian English novel gained such recognition in India and abroad in the postmodern period the way it had never done before.

In the present thesis entitled "Postmodernist Concerns in the Novels of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale: A Study in Comparison", the vision of life that is based on contemporary reality of the two promising and distinguished postmodernist writers has been reviewed and studied in detail. The outlook that the novels of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale are Postmodern fictional texts which explore the temper of their times in relation to cultural dynamics has been justified in its full possibility.

What allured my attention was the reading of some of the novels of the two women writers - the way they invite us to rethink and relocate the notions of self, society, community, reason, values and history and do so without any nostalgia or regret and without any utopian aspirations. My interest in these women writers continued to grow as they present different facets of feminine experience, flout the traditional values, unfold the grotesquerie of life and uphold the right of an individual to lead life by his own choice with a superb sense of detail. The novels aptly depict the affinity between the writers Anita Desai (1937) and Namita Gokhale (1956) and their operational environment. Thus, I could not resist myself from reading the novels of the two writers and analysing them in contemporary perspective.

Moreover, comparative analysis of works has always had a wide scope in the domain of literary studies and has always appealed to research scholars. It opens the text under analysis to various understandings and interpretations. It helps to understand not only the thoughts and sensibilities of a writer but also the cultural environment in which the writer evolves and prepares the foundation of his/her art and thinking. It allows a sharp recognition of the fact that each era produces a different set of demands, desires, aspirations and expectations of which a person could and should be aware. This realization helps in the reassessment of the texts at a deeper level. A comparison also helps to assess the nature of the work - it being social, political, religious, psychological, personal or impersonal - thus forming a proper framework for discussion of the text. Another reason for comparative study that has been acclaimed throughout the world is that it opens various avenues of research. It leads to interesting inter-disciplinary studies. It allows different literatures to be placed together and diminishes the differences and distance between the genres.

While reading the two novelists, I found myself creating a parallel fictional world in my mind where the protagonists of Desai and Gokhale

bore certain resemblances to each other. And I can state without any reservations that this engendered in me the urge to deliberately undertake a comparative study of these postmodern authors whose writings can in no way be distanced from the contemporary reality.

Anita Desai, an expatriate of Indian origin, is one of the literary luminaries of contemporary literature who devotes her writings to the portrayal of the tragedy of human existence trapped in the circumstances of life. Influenced by postmodern culture, which is mass culture, her novels discredit all restrictions on human emotions, defying any rational skepticism. In her novels, Indian English Fiction has acquired a depth which it had seldom before. She evaluates the traumas and agonies of the human mind with rare competence and gravity.

Namita Gokhale shot into fame with the release of her debut novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion* which attracted much criticism from the literary world, owing to its frankness and unrestricted articulation of human desires and needs in an unexpected manner. With a unique originality and authenticity Namita pioneered a sexually frank genre of writing. Namita's novels portray an obsession with love, lust and death. They focus on personal struggles and problems of women, trying to carve out a rightful place for themselves in the society.

The proceeding study reveals significant similarities and dissimilarities in the themes and style of writing of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale by making a detailed analysis of the novels and comparing their themes and characters.

Theoretically and methodologically this work is located within postmodernistic approach of the two writers reflecting the changing concept of truth, knowledge and happiness more generally. The research highlights the inadequacies of modernistic mononcentric vision in the present era and the blurring of borders between right and wrong, rational and irrational.

How the novels of Desai and Gokhale aptly fit into the scheme of postmodern texts in all the major senses of the term has been analysed in detail.

The thesis attempts to bring out attitude of the two novelists towards complexities of relationships by discussing the experiences of the characters struggling hard either to maintain the bond or more often to break free from it, for their own survival. Relationships have been dealt with in detail by incorporating man-woman relationship as well as affinity between the same gender, particularly women, as women bonding has been considered to be highly supportive in the postmodernistic canvas and the same idea has been powerfully established by Desai and Gokhale. Marital discord is outlined and given a lot of space in the analysis as the theme has been projected by both the novelists in a disillusionary manner simultaneous with the contemporary needs and conditions. They state with sensitivity how in the present era these relationships have become ambiguous and temporal. It is really paradoxical to notice that the inter-personal relationships which should pave the way for successful social living have estranged an individual not only from his loved ones but also from himself in the contemporary structure of society.

It extrapolates the underlining theme of alienation focusing on existential crisis and search for one's identity. Alienation and suffering have been accepted in the novels as one of the greatest problems confronting modern man. They brilliantly expose the sense of alienation suffered by individuals caught in the claustrophobic existence of metropolis. The sensitive individuals are poised against the hostile or indifferent forces of the family or society leading to unmitigated suffering and loneliness. Death, dirt and destruction are all pervading. In spite of being surrounded by people how a person feels himself to be alone and this brings utter despair to him has been depicted in the novels with lucidity of form and content. They depict its deteriorating impact as it stunts one's personality and gives one's life a sense of meaninglessness. This issue of alienation has been addressed

in the thesis representing the depressions, neurosis, abnormalities and agonies of the characters. It has been pointed out how an individual tries hard to maintain his own integrity amidst the stressful environment and learns to rely on his innate resources rather than external associations.

It reflects the strong feminine sensibility which both the writers share and explores the shift in the orientation of the Indian English writers from modernistic feministic approaches to postmodern feministic approaches. It sets the scene for contemplation and argument by exploration of the liberal feminism as well as social feminism. The thesis proceeds with the discussion of female protagonists in their different facets, who are not casted in the traditional mould accepting life as it comes them but are capable of duping their adversaries in certain subtle nuanced ways. The women have been presented as courageous enough to rebel and revolt against the male dominated culture and thought. Their writings have been successful in breaking many taboos surrounding the life and vision of Indian women. The plots revolve around a test of self-reliance and trace their journey towards the awareness of the subversive forces they have to combat with - being born and made a woman. As trenchant defenders of a woman's individualism, the writers untangle the set personal and social pattern and envision an unconventional woman. They outrightly reject the rigid concepts of virtue and chastity. The common theme of women not bowing before the oppressive agents has been given an unusual treatment by them. Denying the presence of any ultimate principle the women do not hesitate at all to move opposite to the trodden path and follow their senses and likings spontaneously. What is most important for them is the search of their own identity and place in society and within their latent consciousness. Even if the end is tragic they are ultimately able to find the true meaning of their life and its essence. In assertion of their right to live on their own terms, they more or less forget and become totally indifferent to the very existence of society. The work reveals the emergence of a new Indian woman in the novels though rooted in her traditions, daring to be eccentric, overtly

expressive, take wings and fly. Though both the novelists present women who endeavour to gain their self-esteem and self-confidence, Gokhale's women are more liberated and ambitious. This is credited largely to her own experiences on personal and academic front. Her life has been full of jars and jolts as compared to that of Anita Desai who enjoyed a motivated and protected environment before and after her marriage. Gokhale's writings are a clear reflection of her strong desire to record this personal turbulence which constantly made her restless. The difference is visible in her more frank and bold portrayal of women, their inner thoughts and desires. Since there was a cultural difference between the era of Desai and Gokhale, the same dissimilarity is reflected in their fiction. The women of Gokhale are rather more independent and rebellious.

The thesis brings to the forefront the novelists' ways of plunging into the depths and of astounding the readers by unravelling the broglio in which human beings are caught from which there seems to be no escape except in self-fulfillment. More compelling than the outer weather is the inner climate, the exploration of sensibility in the novels of the two women writers shifting the focus from the visible action to the realm of female psyche. Today scholarly interest continues to grow in these writers as these postmodernist women writers call for an acceptance of the inescapable role of human emotions.

Their excellence in fiction has been recognized in the world indubitably. While Desai owes her cosmopolitan outlook to her parentage and expatriate upbringing, Gokhale's wide perspective is a product of her multispatial and multicultural experiences. Brought up in an urban milieu, the protagonists of both Desai and Gokhale are mostly centred in the cities and are products of a mixed heritage. Attention has been drawn towards the commodification of women and hypocrisy of society in a striking voice. The novels are an encounter between dimensions and ideologies.

Attention has been drawn towards the narrative style of the writers.

How the novelists record the external events and the workings of the subconscious by employing the various techniques of stream of consciousness, diary technique, soliloquy, monologue, flashback technique to reflect the interplay of thoughts, feelings and emotions of the characters has been discussed with reference to the plot. Anita Desai uses symbols and imagery more profusely as compared to Gokhale. Moreover Namita Gokhale's novels are gothic characterised by a macabre humour as contrasted to the fiction of Anita Desai which are sensitive and psychological and humour is largely ironical. It has been indicated in the thesis how the writers represent a disruption in the linear flow of narratives by avoiding any rigidity themselves, their stories remaining open to a plurality of interpretations and future possibilities.

The objective of the present research is to conduct a comparative study of selected novels of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale from a socio-cultural and psychological perspective highlighting the complexities of human relationships, concepts of worldliness, feelings of fear, displacement, alienation and marginalisation, self -assertion and conflicts of identity. The vision of the novelists and their contemporary relevance will be analysed critically. There is an attempt to point out how the self-actualization and living on their own terms concept is bringing about changes in the individual and society at large. The research aims to apply certain psychological theories to trace the behaviour of the characters of the novels and also evaluate minutely the narrative techniques adopted by the novelists.

By putting forward an original view point on the proposed topic, the study seeks to make a contribution to the sphere of Indian fiction in English.

Anita Desai is a leading novelist in the Indian literary horizon. Though she rejects the label of 'feminist', a close study of her fiction has been done by a number of critics which reveals her deep insight into the plight of Indian women from a feminist perspective. For example Dr. N. Raj Gopal's *Critical Study of the Novels of Anita Desai* and Bidulata

Choudhary's *Women and Society in the Novels of Anita Desai*. The bewilderment of the individual psyche confronted with the overbearing socio-cultural environment and the ever-beckoning modern promise of self-gratification of Desai's male and female protagonists have also been discussed by many writers in their books such as *The Novels of Anita: A Critical Study* by M.K. Bhatnagar and Mittapali Rajeshwari or Khwaja Moinul Hassan's *Anita Desai's Confrontation With The Questions of Identity in The Twentieth century*. Like Usha Pathania in her book *The Fiction of Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya* many critics have chosen to compare Desai to her contemporary female writers. Her concept of motherhood, concerns about human and environment have also been dwelt about by her admirers like Ashle Nicole Batts in his book *An Exploration of Indian Motherhood In the Fiction of Anita Desai's Novels*. Many critics have analysed her symbolism in particular and narrative art in general.

Likewise Namita Gokhale, though a more recent writer has grabbed the attention of critics. She has been voraciously interviewed on her style of writing, her thinking process and inspiration behind her novels by a number of reputed journalists like Sunil Sethi, Ritu Khanna and Mita Kapur. There are chapters/ excerpts in the books by Indian authors on her critical style, her expression of women's suffering and traumas. To exemplify Sharad Srivastava in *The New Woman in Indian English Fiction* praises Gokhale for her broad understanding of contemporary issues and Amit Rajan in *Death, Love and Lust* appreciates her incredible power of portraying the trials faced by modern man. All her writings have also been independently reviewed by renowned literati such as Khushwant Singh, Murry Bijano and some other foreign authors have presented her novels in the light of psychoanalytical researches.

However, current interest continues to grow in these two writers owing to their excellence in presenting the intrinsic human nature. The authors world is not a closed universe and the spectrum of their analysis can be widened by critically viewing them in comparison to other writers. This



can help to take a fresh look at the established works. Besides hitherto unexplored is the canvassing of the two women writers from a postmodernist perspective - a contemporary theory which can be helpful in making a coherent sense of their fiction. This research work is also an attempt to relate the novels of Namita Gokhale and Anita Desai with the various psychological theories revealing certain untouched aspects.

The present work shall make a comprehensive study of the fiction of Namita Gokhale and Anita Desai. The main part of the method is a close reading of the primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are the selected novels of Namita Gokhale and Anita Desai. Their writings will be scrutinized in the light of psychological parameters. Different characters and situations will be explored. The secondary sources include various book lengths and shorter studies related to her novels. The methodology aims at scrutinizing their literary achievements by adopting a deconstructive approach to the subject. The narrative style and methodology of construction will also be examined on the basis of an in-depth study.

The methodology advocated by *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* 8<sup>th</sup> edition will be followed for the purpose of documentations, end notes, quotations, punctuations and bibliography.

My study is directed on the basis of certain assumptions which will form the hypothesis of my research. They can be summed up as:

1. A comparative study of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale on the basis of their themes with the postmodern approach as the framework of analysis.
2. The chief protagonists of both these novelists are women. The attitude of the women characters who are essentially urban, troubled by stifling patriarchal norms, themselves untraditional and contradictory to the demands of the society and having a characteristic will and determination to act. Namita's women are

relatively more liberal than that of Desai's.

3. Both of them depict alienation as an inevitable part of the life of postmodern individuals and so existentialism, loneliness and temporal nature of the world form an inseparable part of the novels.
4. Human relations form not only an important part of our social system but also shape the entire life and psychology of an individual by influencing his everyday life experiences. The novelists have captured the panorama of relationships and their impact on the consciousness of characters, predominantly women characters.
5. How the characters take the postmodern liberty of revolting and living on their own conditions and whether they succeed or not is another major representation in the novels. The attitude of Namita's women is far more self-centered and unprecedented than that of Desai.
6. The charming flow of language and enriched use of symbols and imagery along with the various postmodern stylistic devices of writing is striking in the novels of Desai and Gokhale.

The significance of the present study lies in formulating a new feminine consciousness in keeping with the changing times by relating the works of these writers to the contemporary realities and their pragmatism. Although the novels are not feministic political propaganda but the real concern for welfare of women is deeply embedded in their plot. They project such image of women which is not for us to judge but only to understand. The research work calls for an acceptance of the fact that the rules to lead one's life cannot be laid down by the stalwarts of tradition. They ought to be left to a person's own convictions and wishes. In the novels of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale there is a reflection of opportunistic modern culture, crafty irony, mystery, romance, grotesque sex, an ability to link the past with the present or the traditional with the modern. These areas have not been

investigated so far with a postmodern perspective and comparative aspect. The present work dealing with these issues, will rouse new critical interest. The research will draw the attention of the readers to the problems of complexities in relationships, disintegration and quest for self which are even more relevant today than the time when the novels were written. Thus the research will justify the contemporary congruity of the novels.

## Chapter – 2

# SPIRIT OF THE AGE

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Indian English literature has shown amazing growth during the last seven decades. Indian English narratives hold a prominent place in world literature for their intense and esoteric sensibility. Blessed with an incredibly responsive imagination, Indian writers have written excellent prose, poems and novels in English for more than a century but it was not earlier than the thirties and forties that a suitable and systematic attempt was made to view their output as an independent literature.

Indians have been speaking, reading and writing English since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when with the growth of the empire and expansion of civil administration, the use of English as a language of government gained increasing importance. Eminent men notably Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Lord William Bentinck and Lord Macaulay propagated and accelerated English education in India. The exposure to English that colonialism necessitated led some Indian writers to discover prose and the realist novel, or blank verse and the sonnet whose references they inserted in their tropical languages and where they have since flourished. Indian writing in English was but one manifestation of the creative urge in India. It is often referred to as the literary renaissance in India owing to the contribution made by the triumvirs of Indian English literature like Rabindranath Tagore, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Salman Rushdie, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu - to name a few. The nomenclature Indian English literature was accepted as a distinct, independent and indigenous genre by most critics despite it being a part of postcolonial literature. The earliest writings of the Indians in English were in prose and were limited to polemic pamphlets motivated by extra-literary impulses like political protests or social reforms. The novel, the genre of imaginative literature which is the effusion of human knowledge,

experience, wit and humour, was conspicuously absent till the mid-nineteenth century.

Although the 1930s are generally considered as the take-off decade for the Indian novels in English, we can trace its genealogy quite far back into the previous century. Some critics assert that the form of novel has evolved from Sanskrit narratives. Though the cultural conditions of India were favourable to the development of fiction even before coming in contact with the west but the novel was considered as the best form to reflect and represent the chaotic condition of colonial India and was favoured by the active social forces: a large audience, a literate class, growing inquisitiveness of the masses, growth of print media. Industrial revolution also had a significant influence on the direction of the literary works during the eighteenth century. The writers used literature as a means of criticism of social conditions. The form of the novel was best suited to represent the emotions of common people. Since the works were dedicated to social issues, nature, technology and common people, the language used was mostly unstructured, understood by people in general. Fiction became an important instrument to represent the voice of the common people.

Different dates have been given for the first Indian novel in English, but it is by and large agreed that Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya's *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) is the first Indian novel in English. Amongst women writers of the era, Krupabai Sathianandhan was the only female who wrote more than one novel in English namely *Kamala, A Story of Hindu Wife* (1894) and *Saguna* (1895).

Indian English novels of the first generation reflect the rising nationalism. It was born out of and was nursed by the tension between contradictory system of values in a colonial society and transformed to a certain extent by the indigenous pressures. The development of the novel like any other literary form has been subjected to the issues and environment facing the nation. The period spanning 1930s and 1940s was momentous for

the Indian novel in English as it embodied the radical vision of anti-colonial nationalism. The moment when the trinity - Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao - made their appearance as novelists, the winds of change had already started blowing across the sub-continent. The three Indian masters made proper use of the novel - a form borrowed from the west-as a vehicle of social and political inquiry. Rabindranath Tagore also contributed greatly to society by presenting his disillusionment in a passionate and uncompromising manner. These novelists retold the lives of ordinary men and women in a recreated world of the novels. It was a period of great transition on social, cultural, political, economic and religious front. Apart from these changes, a considerable change was also perceived in the position of women. Motivated by Gandhiji and as a result of Raja Ram Mohan Roy's efforts, women were brought out of the purdah and they participated zealously in the freedom struggle. In order to strengthen the fight for independence and crush the oppressive hands of the Britishers, the interconnectivity between the socio-political environment of the country and the state of women was genuinely perceived and realised. The story of the oppressed woman and the need of her emancipation by breaking patriarchal norms and clutches became the central theme of the Indian English novels since 1857. It marked a departure from the theme of nationalism and unearthed the deep seated reality of human psyche. Most of these early novels, however, were by men and dealt with widow remarriage, child marriage, suppressed life of Indian wives and such other related concerns.

These novelists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were greatly inspired by social, political and economic conditions of society. The 1950s and 1960s were not a period of great innovation for Indian writing in English, although they witnessed the foundation of writing careers that have lasted over several decades and which, especially for women writers, brought international acclaim.

The dominant concern of the novelists of 1950s and 1960s was with character development and psychological depth, often combined with a sense of alienated individuals, dissatisfied with modern life. During the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a dramatic improvement in the lives of Indian women was witnessed. A state of self-awareness coincided with the beginning of a new millennium and the various movements and growing consciousness led women to break away from the enormous pressure imposed by patriarchy. The women left the vicinity of her household and the period saw the growth of numerable women writers who attempted to portray convincingly the existing condition of women. Novelists of this time delved deep into the problems faced by women in trying to seek their fulfillment and carving their own identity. Among the women novelists Cornelia Sorabji, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Pawar Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Das, and Arundhati Roy have made their mark in India and abroad. They focus on key gender issues by portrayal of women being subjected to psychological violence. After the forties Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Pawar Jhabvala have established their strength in the depiction of human relationships. Ruth Pawar Jhabvala presents the pains of being a householder. Nayantara Sehgal deals with the richer sections of Indian society, their hypocrisy and shallow values along with the values of educated Indians. Shashi Deshpande's works reflect the whole gamut of Indian cultural issues. Loss through death, relationships within families and marriages, fine insight into human character, bereavement, awareness of morality, these form major themes in her novels.

Among the female novelists of this era the list cannot be completed without Anita Desai, one of the most popular novelists of contemporary times. While Sehgal and Markandaya concern themselves primarily with the external political and social circumstances of their characters, Desai concentrates on their psychology. Indeed Desai has made her priorities clear in this respect:

Writing to me is a process of discovering the truth - that is nine-tenths of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath the one-tenth visible portion we call reality. Writing is my way of plunging to the depths and exploring this underlying truth. . . . My novels are no reflections of Indian society, politics or character. (*Contemporary Novel* 348)

Desai's works mark a new and mature phase in Indian English fiction. She started writing in the sixties and has dealt with the existential angst of the modern man trapped in an island of loneliness, alienated from society and family.

Contemporary novels are like mirrors of the age as they reflect not only the external features of the times but also its inner face, the unconscious promptings and the latent conflicts raising their heads against the oppressive environment. Amongst other contemporary novelists of huge reputation some are Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Namita Gokhale and Kiran Desai who started writing in the late twentieth century. These novelists of the 1970s and 1980s present a startling and powerful collage of the experiences of modern man. Being themselves exposed to the disillusionment of the present age these novelists present the multifaceted human dimensions with an appreciable familiarity and ease. Different phases of relationship between power and powerlessness have been depicted in their fiction.

It was at this time, i.e., post 1980s that an unprecedented all round development and revolution was witnessed in the literary history of our country simultaneous with the other nations. We can divide the Indian English Literature from the 1930s to the end of the twentieth century into two phases - Modernist and Postmodernist - the former beginning with Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) and the latter beginning with Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and Nissim Ezekiel's *Latter Day Psalms* (1982).



In the post-1980 era Indian English literature is marked by postmodernism and can be profitably analysed in theme and technique in terms of the postmodernist characteristics so assiduously laid down by its key thinkers: Friedrich Nietzsche, Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois-Lyotard and Linda Hutcheon. Postmodernism has its humble literary-critical origin in the 1950s which rose to a globe conceptualization in the 1980s. Nothing in the contemporary world now seems to be unaffected by the wind of postmodernism. It has influenced the entire area of human civilization ranging from various academic to philosophical and to political disciplines. Even the thought process and the belief system of the society have been altered by the advent of postmodernism.

When we start probing deeper into the theory of postmodernism, one of the very basic questions that comes to mind is how and where the term Postmodernism originated, who used it for the first time and in which context. Though there is no common agreement on the point by whom and when the term postmodernism was first used. But it is commonly believed that as early as 1870s, it was first used by the English painter, John Watkins Chapman to contrast his painting with the French impressionistic painting. Another significant reference of the use of the term comes in 1917 when Rudolph Pannwitz, in his work *Die krisis der europaischen Kultur*, used the term postmodern to describe the nihilism of contemporary European culture. John Watkins Chapman is generally credited to the earliest use of term Postmodern. Though, Ihab Hassan, one of the major proponents of the theory of Postmodernism, attributed the first use of the term to Frederic de Onis. Further, in the period of 1950 and 1960 various writers, social historians and cultural theorists used the term postmodern to show the revolutionary and sharp changes taking place in the ideas, beliefs, thinking, practices of contemporary society and the culture of Europe after World War II. Arnold Toynbee used the term postmodern in 1939 to refer to the disenchantment after the destructive war. He identified it as a predominantly twentieth century phenomena.

Thus tracing the origin and the employment of the term brings us to the observation that the use of the term started as early as 1870s and gained momentum in different phases, in different contexts till it reached its zenith as we see in recent days.

Postmodernism, having a stake in almost every area of intellectual enquiry, has been defined in relation to different movements of the past from various perspectives and on the basis of its varied focus and impact. Some critics adhering to its literal construction consider it as a betrayal of modernity. To them the advent of postmodernism has stopped the project of modernity as it attacks the modernistic ideals of reason, clarity, fixed truth and linear progression. However, most critics consider Postmodernism as a reconstruction of modernistic literature in its wider aspect. Both modernism and postmodernism present contemporary life as fragmented but the attitude towards the emerging trends is different. Whereas modernism laments the loss of traditions and idealises the past, postmodernism favours incoherence, discontinuity and ambiguity - these being a reality of the present situation. Postmodernism indicates a tendency towards self-reflexivity rejecting the idea of following any specific historical epoch or cultural or moral conduct.

Postmodernism differs, in parameters, from Enlightenment and Humanism too, the movements which began in the early twentieth century. These two express the beginning of an epoch when reason took over faith and it was believed that discontinuity with the past traditions and beliefs would lead to a better life. They gave importance to eternal truths, scientific reason and a stable knowable self. However Postmodernism deconstructs the basis of these theories which is a direct attack on the idea of a unitary end of history and of a subject.

Postmodernism, thus, hurls questions at the existing precincts and suspects everything that exists or has existed, even if in the recent past. It gives no place to any pre-suppositions or any pre-established rules. We may

very well call it anti-foundational. Postmodernism is the style of our age and has become a world wide movement in all arts and disciplines owing to its porous boundaries, toleration for the incommensurable, openness and multi-dimensional approach. Some of the key contributors of the theory of Postmodernism on the global map without whose knowledge postmodernism can never be understood in its complete form are Fredreich Neitzche, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois-Lyotard (philosophy), Michael Foucault (history), Jacques Lacan (psychoanalysis), Jean Baudrillard, Jurgen Habermas (political philosophy), Julius Kriestiva, the Yale Critics (literary theory). They evoked a number of cultural tendencies, values, procedures and attitudes related to postmodernism.

To discuss a few, Nietzsche a German cultural critic, in his work expresses the major characteristics of the movement as skepticism towards rationality, fundamentalism and universalism. He expresses doubt about the possibility of distinguishing truth from falsehood in *The Genealogy of Morals*. Nietzsche in this book expressed his extreme skepticism towards the Western ideology which he believed to be manifestations of the will to power :

I should like to know how many shiploads of sham idealism, heroic trappings and grand-word-rattles, how many tons of sugared sympathy-spirits (distillers: *la religion de la souffrance*), how many "noble-indignation" stilt for the aid of the spiritually flatfooted, how many *comedians* of the Christian-moral ideal would have to be exported from Europe today before its air would begin to smell fresh again . . . morality will gradually perish now: this is the great spectacle in a hundred acts reserved for the next two centuries in Europe- the most terrible, the most questionable, and perhaps also the most hopeful of all the spectacles. . . . We can no longer conceal from ourselves *what* is expressed by all that willing which has taken its direction from the aesthetic ideal:

this hatred of the human, and even more of the animal, and more still of the material, this horror of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this longing to get away from all appearances, change, becoming, death, wishing from longing itself-all this means -let us dare to grasp it- *a will to nothingness*, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presupposition of life; but it is and remains a *will*. . . . And, to repeat in conclusion what I said at the beginning: man would rather will nothingness than not will. (127-129)

Thus, nothing can be considered stable or unchanging or ideal, our thinking is framed as per our outlook which makes us perceive things as right or wrong. Nietzsche celebrated self-empowerment and self-reliance, as against the herd mentality of following others blindly. He offered a vision to the world in which common ethics are replaced by solipsistic power-seeking and self-appraisal, where nothing except one's own mind exists. He debunked the illusion of depth and of the belief in some underlying significance or hidden meaning in human life. He glorified the very collapse of reason and truth, justifying the postmodern desire for paradoxes and for nothingness i.e., lack of meaning or logic.

Jean-Francois-Lyotard, an influential French theorist and critic, in *The Postmodern Condition* raises the question what knowledge is and who has the right to decide that. Rejecting the very system of epistemology he denies the need and possibility of any sort of authentication. He advocates the use of mini and micro narratives in literature instead of grand narratives comprising of noble heroes and evil villains. Lyotard, here, presents his belief that "Narrative knowledge does not give priority to the question of its legitimization and that it certifies itself in the pragmatics of its own transmission without having recourse to argumentation and proof" (27). Comparing postmodernism with modernism he comments in strict terms:

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. The postmodern artist or writer is in a position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will* have been *done*. (81)

We can thus infer that in postmodernism any validation seems to be inadequate as well as impossible. The postmodernists believe that it is not the problem of the artist to understand whether what they imagine is conceivable by others or not. Their sole aim is to present what they want to. He makes us aware that instabilities and paradoxes are inherent in any society and social organization and so any representative narrative must be open to multiplicity of theme as well as form to a ridiculous extent.

Similarly Jean Baudrillard, a French sociologist and philosopher, known for his insight into the contemporary culture, in his work *Simulacra and Simulation* and subsequently in *Simulation* gave the concept of simulacra and simulacrum, favouring the world of virtual reality-lacking any sense of past or traditional convictions, characterised by passionate intensity and spontaneity. He proposed his belief that in the postmodern world of mass media, only imitations exist, the original largely disappears. The postmodern culture revolves around the idea of simulacra i.e., of copies, not reflecting reality but replacing it completely by simulation i.e., by images.

Postmodernism to him is not a question of emulation but of substituting signs for real persons or objects. Baudrillard's analysis of the postmodern presents the significance of the image rather than real, of surface rather than depth and of signifiers as against the signified which he refers to as 'hyperreality' in *Simulacra and Simulation*:

Hyper reality and simulation are deterrents of every principle and every objective, they turn against power the deterrent that is used so well for such a long time. Because in the end, throughout its history it was capital that first fed on the deconstruction of every referential, of every human objective, that shattered every ideal distinction between true and false, good and evil, in order to establish a radical law of equivalence and exchange, the iron law of its power. Capital was the first to play at deterrence, abstraction, disconnection, deterritorialization, etc., and if it is the one that fostered reality, the reality principle, it was also the first to liquidate it by exterminating all use value, all real equivalence of production and wealth, in the very sense we have of the unreality of the stakes and the omnipotence of manipulation. Well, today it is the same logic that is even more set against the capital. And as soon as it wishes to combat the disastrous spiral by secreting a last glimmer of reality, on which to establish a last glimmer of power, it does nothing but multiply the signs and accelerate the play of simulation. (17)

By citing examples of Disneyland and of movies in cinema halls which by the use of advanced gadgets create a hyperreal world which appears to be more real he says: "So, it is the simulation that is effective, never the real." (39) Baudrillard's theory represents the loss of the real in the postmodern world, the reason of it being the pervasive influence of media-television, films and advertising-and also the lack of communication between people, which blurs the border between real and representations.

The widely recognised Arab American literary theorist, Ihab Hassan, in *The Postmodern Turn* coined the word 'Indeterminance' to designate the major tendencies of Postmodernism as disjunction and disintegration of various power structures in social institutions as family and marriage. Hassan says:

By indeterminacy, or better still, indeterminacies, I mean a complex referent that these diverse concepts help to delineate: ambiguity, heterodoxy, pluralism, randomness, revolt, perversion, deformation. (7)

Thus he laid forward some of the major characteristics of postmodernism which were recognised by critics later also. Also in his first essay on postmodernism, "POSTmodernISM: A Paracritical Bibliography", Hassan reveals the ambiguity in the process of postmodernism by comparing it to modernism:

Postmodernism may be a response, direct or oblique, to the unimaginable that Modernism glimpsed only in its most prophetic moments. Certainly it is not the Dehumanization of Arts that concerns us now; it is rather the Denaturalization of the Planet and the End of Man. We are, I believe, Inhabitants of another Time and another Space, and we no longer know what response is adequate to our reality. In a sense we have all learned to become minimalists - of that time and space we can call our own- though the globe may have become our village. That is why it seems bootless to compare Modern with Postmodern artists, range "masters" against "epigones". The latter are close to "zero in the bone", to silence or exhaustion, and the best of them brilliantly display the resources of the void. (395)

Distinguishing the two movements of modernism and postmodernism, Hassan has hinted at the alienation, isolation and vacuum lying at the core of capital globalization. He recognizes the lack of affirmation of a particular form of art to represent the palpable agony of postmodern era, when it is getting difficult to keep life itself alive.

The concept of postmodernism, as it is understood today in its principles, owes considerably to the contribution of Linda Hutcheon, a Canadian academician, literary theorist and critic, who, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* argues that "Postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts the very concepts it challenges" (1). She further clarifies the concept of postmodernism by suggesting that:

Linked to this contesting of unified and coherent subject is a more general questioning of any totalizing or homogenizing system. Provisionality and heterogeneity contaminate any neat attempts at any unifying coherence (formal or thematic). Historical and narrative continuity and closure are contested, but again, from within. The teleology of art forms - from fiction to music - is both suggested and transformed. The centre no longer completely holds. And from the decentred perspective, the "marginal" and what I will be calling the "ex-centric" (be it in class, race, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity) take on a new significance in the light of the implied recognition that our culture is not really a homogenous monolith (that is middleclass, male, heterosexual, white, western) we might have assumed. (11-12)

From her opinion we can deduce that postmodern art asserts as well as undermines the principles such as value, order and control by considering them operative but at the same time do not see them as eternal or unchallengeable. Hutcheon makes it clear that in postmodern theory the



contradictions are positioned within the system itself.

In consonance with these thinkers, we discern that the postmodernists believe in taking an interrogative stance towards everything, even if it is well-accepted. The postmodern movement is not an indicator of any particular style but it is a procedural concept which co-relates with the radical transformations taking place in contemporary culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and individual equations. The thinkers project the view that society in postmodern culture is far from equilibrium, nurturing paradoxical concepts and it should be presented as such. Rather than suppressing the complexities and diversities they believe in their projection and proliferation. Postmodernism gives way to differences and loves to talk about them. As we are confronted with disruption and change everywhere, every interaction is projected by postmodernists as ambiguous. In keeping with this philosophy, the postmodernistic texts are dialects of struggle focusing on singularity and individuality, absurdity being their governing tendency. They outwardly reject the central sameness. Postmodernists advocate narratives that are situational and provisional, without making any claim to truth, reason, permanency, universality or stability. They prefer to play with nonsense rather than dealing with the idea of logic or unity. Postmodernism confronts the reader with a work that is challenging both in form and content. A Postmodern work disrupts even a reader's normal process of understanding by simultaneous attraction and repulsion and by indicating a mixed feeling of pain and pleasure. It is impossible to determine in advance what response a writing might evoke.

After analysing the term, we will try to examine the major characteristics of Postmodern Indian English fiction and the different map makers in India who paved the way of forming a conceptual background of postmodernism. The first thing that strikes us about Literary Postmodernism, being a many-faceted formation, and particularly about fiction, is the broadening of the thematic range. With globalization and with the

broadening of perspective, neither society nor art is insular today. Postmodernism rejects boundaries between cultures, between high and low forms of art and the genre and gender distinctions. There is a shift in emphasis from centrism to divergence. Indian English fiction now takes characters and situations both from within the country and abroad in its orbit and develops them in terms of hybridity of relationship. Rather than attempting to create a structured impression the Postmodern writers love to play with form and adopt a deconstructed approach. This leads to new forms of critical practices that free art from old systems and rules of taste and judgement, whereby the rampant ideas of critical orthodoxy and aesthetic value fall into disrepute.

Love, Sex and marriage or its failure became the leading themes of Postmodern Indian English novels post-1980. The description of love and sex is very bold and unconventional. Postmodernists question any form of rationality of life and relationship. They argue the traditional interpretations of humanity and morality. The elements of dissimilarities and discontinuity are revered by them rather than similarity and continuity. As regards relationship the postmodernists believe that the operations of power relations have been manipulated to establish male dominance and for the subordination of females in society. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* contains certain chapters depicting this outrage and Shiv K. Kumar's *A River With Three Banks* speaks about love and sex without any inhibitions. Even Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* presents how marriage as a social institution has lost its sanctity and relevance in the post-1980 era. Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* satirises match making.

Corruption in public as well as private lives of individuals too appeals to the postmodernist novelists and they employ lack of faith in religion and declining moral standard and behaviour as some of the predominant themes in their novels. There is no place for any presuppositions in the works of postmodern artists. These artists work

without rules and biases. The postmodernists directly attack the unitary end of any situation and assert their disbelief in the epics, noble heroes and heroines, moral or grand narratives that elevate our thoughts and passions. Provisionality, incoherence and fragmentation is celebrated by them, avoiding any sort of idealisation.

Apart from this, Indian English novelists of the Postmodern era have also written feminist novels with a view to preserving the rights of women. Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* seeks to bring men and women at par in our society. Postmodernists recommend respect of differences in attitudes and way of thinking and living. They favour displacement and detotalization even if it amounts to revolt against the orthodox traditions and hierarchy, especially so in case of women. Postmodern women are seen as living not by the stereotypical traditions but their instinct is their chief guiding principal. Ideals of self-sacrifice, of seeing themselves in relation to axis of society- the man- are completely or partially rejected. Avoiding any lamentation of the discontinuity is their key principle. The established power structures in various social institutions as marriage are delegitimized with the old values shattered to bits.

With no belief in a final totality or universal concept of right and wrong, with an overpowering sense of uncertainty around us, with a lack of interconnected living fibers, alienation has become a distinctive feature of Postmodern community. In the age of consumerism and capitalism man stands alone amongst all humanity without any substantial support and companionship of his fellow beings. This makes his personality and his life incomplete. Feeling frustrated he strives to overcome his solitude by trying to become aware of his own self. But many a times he is distanced from his self and has to struggle hard to achieve fulfillment. The postmodernists focus on the belief that to attain completion an individual has to first achieve it within oneself, only then can he complement it with the relationship he has with the outside world and with others. Postmodern writings thus are perceptive of the inherent absurdities of human and realise the need to take

the arduous journey to the realm of self-consciousness and assertion. Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Salman Rushdie, Arun Joshi, Kamala Markandaya, Shobha De, Gita Mehta, Nayantara Sehgal present a vision of life based on this contemporary reality and in this sense come closer to postmodern exposition. These novelists deal with the theme of love, marriage, loneliness and search for identity and many a times induct eroticism in their novels.

The writings of both Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale are undoubtedly influenced by the postmodern consumer culture that we inhabit. Their fictional world is multi-layered and complex. They witness a path breaking shift in thinking, perception, understanding and way of living of the human civilization in contrast to the modernist writers who believe in the past ethical values as their touchstone. Customs and traditions have been cast aside with the advent of new lifestyle choices by their characters. Their writings are skeptical towards all forms of universal and essential knowledge raising question of legitimization and rationalization. Consumption becomes not just a matter of useful products but that of a way of leading life and is reflected in every move made by their characters. Being cut off from any rationality or foundational context, the worlds in the novels are mysteriously charged with anxiety, hallucination and heightened intensity. The ideals of a unified self and ultimate truth of life are put into question mark. They believe in relativity of self and make a room for anything and everything without indulging into the game of value judgement. Both the women writers have adopted a playful attitude towards incessant change in life and the options available to us. Instability infests every aspect of human experience in the contemporary scenario. This very idea is presented in a promising manner by the writers under study. As they believe, not in role-playing but in role-making, they observe that a woman is free to cast herself in a manner as she wants to. There is a mapping and remapping of the individual psyche, particularly women, who oscillate between intoxication and anxiety, trying to position themselves as individual subjects against the neutralising social forces. The two worlds of public events and private experiences

impinge regularly on the psychology of the characters in their narratives who constantly wait and endeavour to live a life relevant to their own inner consciousness. Within the framework of their novels, Desai and Gokhale, with a rare professional competence envisage heterogeneity, plurality, flux, multiplicity taking up the cudgel for an individual's freedom to choose his own way of life.

The present research is an attempt to look at the two Indian women writers Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale's works in the light of Postmodernist concepts and theories and will make a comparison in order to deeply analyse the chief characteristics of their work.

Anita Desai's world in her novels, is the present age which has shrunk in spirit languishing in confusion, frustration, disintegration, disillusionment, meaninglessness and rootlessness. The English novelists before Anita Desai dealt more with the conflicts between man and society but Desai moves out of such an approach. An expatriate of Indian origin, Anita Mazumdar, her original name, was born on 24<sup>th</sup> June, 1937 in Mussourie, a hill station near Dehradun in Northern India to a Bengali father and a German mother. Her father, D.N. Mazumdar, was a Bengali businessman and her mother, Toni Nime, was of German origin. Being well-acquainted with both the cultural backgrounds one can't overlook the encounters of west and east in her works which represent altogether different philosophies. Starting to write as early as at the age of seven, Anita's literary genius was highly appreciated by her family and she was acknowledged with open arms as the writer within the family. She was determined to be a writer. Her personal life was full of love and motivation. She herself describes her upbringing as the greatest gift she could have been given as a writer.

Anita Desai's first linguistic rendezvous was with German language as her parents spoke German with each other. Her first acquaintance with English came about when she went to Queen Mary's Girls School in Delhi. She says that the reason why she chose to write in English was that the first

thing she saw written, and the first thing she ever read, was in English. She was impressed with English as the language of books.

Dr. S.P. Swain, a literary critic, in his article "Tradition and Deviation: A Study of Anita Desai's Novels" in *The Novels of Anita Desai: A Critical Study* rightly explains her skill of employing the language with a unique flair, suggestive enough to portray the sensitive psyche of characters:

English in the hands of Anita becomes so flexible and treatable that it not only yields to the steerings and churnings of her intellect and the movement of her pen but also rises to such poetic heights so as to mirror and manifest her visions and views. In dealing with the psyche of the characters, their motivations and compulsions, she moves along the labyrinthine and dimly-lit corridors of inner reality. . . . She writes neither for providing entertainment nor for the dissemination and propagation of social ideas. Her main pre-occupation is to study human existence and human predicament, her exploration being a quest for self. (110)

Most of Desai's growing years were spent in Delhi, the city thus being a pervasive presence in many of her novels. She has also lived in Calcutta, Chandigarh and Pune and this accounts for the fact that her novel are set in one or the other of these cities. She did her graduation from Miranda House College at the University of Delhi, in English literature, in 1957. After which she worked for one year at Max Muller Bhawan in Calcutta. The following year she married Ashvin Desai, a businessman. A housewife with selected family ties, Anita Desai, has four children - Rahul, Tani, Arjun and the youngest Kiran whose writings raise a toast to current genre of fictional writings.

Anita Desai is one such literary voice which is pointedly devoted to the task of unearthing and unbossoming a well-estimated account of deep-

seated reality of female psyche and its operation in the contemporary world. Grown up during World War-II, Anita witnessed the continuous anxiety which, her mother experienced about the situation and her family in Germany. Her mother could never return to her native place after the war, owing to the devastation caused by it, nor had the desire to return, though always had a European core in her. Her mother, well accultured herself to Indian ways of life thus Desai grew up in an Indian household but with a lot of outside influences too like western music, dance and literature. This perhaps lead Desai unconsciously to approximate and portray the notions of foreignness and separateness along with a sensibility of belongingness.

Thus, before her marriage, she started writing short stories regularly. Her stories appeared as favourite pieces in the children's magazines and even in college she contributed stories to magazine. As a novelist her maiden novel is *Cry, The Peacock*, published in 1963, in Britain by Peter Qwens and it was first in England that her work became noticed. Her purpose of writing is not to reflect the Indian society, politics or character but to present the characters' psychological, emotional and intellectual needs, their aspirations, cravings and desires and the conflicts and catastrophes that they inevitably bring. She probes deep into the inner recesses of the psyche of the character at a crucial point in her/his life.

Anita Desai's three novels *Clear Light of Day*, *In Custody and Fasting, Feasting* have been nominated for the Booker prize. She won the Winifred Holtby prize of Royal Society of Literature for the novel, *Fire on the Mountain* (1978) and Guardian Award for children's literature for *Village By the Sea* (1984). She also won the Sahitya Academy Award, National Academy of Letters Award, Padma Shri Award and the Tark Nath Das Award. She has been an ambassador for promotion of Indo-US relations. She has also been awarded the Neil Gunn International Fellowship in the year 2007, for her outstanding contribution to the literary world.

The relevance of my discussion about the background and works of

Anita Desai is based on the fact that the writer and his work are inseparable. Although her predecessors like Raja Rao, Khushwant Singh, Kamala Markandaya dealt with society or social form as the predominant concerns or with political turmoil, she unravels the imbroglio in which human beings are caught. On one hand, like Robert Browning, she gets deep into the psyche of her characters, on the other like Manohar Malgonkar, Arun Joshi and Nayantara Sehgal she explores the theme of East-West counter. Man-woman relationship was a popular concern of the writers of her era like Raja Rao in *The Serpent and The Rope*, Anand in *Gouri*, Kamala Markandaya in *The Nowhere Man*, Arun Joshi in *The Foreigner* and *The Strange Case of Billi Biswas*. Thus it is not in the novelty of the themes but mainly in their unique treatment, that lies the literary genius of this great writer. Her purpose behind writing is neither to entertain her readers nor to preach. In Desai treatment of violence and death is quite different. It is a psycho-emotional-hysterical projection of a sensitive psyche. Her main pre-occupation is the study of human existence and human behaviour confronted with diverse psycho-emotional situations.

As we have delved deep into Anita Desai's social and cultural milieu, her background and her notion of gauging into the unexplored recesses of an individual's mind, it would be apt to discuss in brief the summary of those novels penned by her, which I have chosen for my present study. They include:

*Cry, The Peacock (1963)*

*Voices In The City (1965)*

*Where Shall We Go This Summer (1975)*

*Fire On The Mountain (1977)*

*Clear Light Of Day (1980)*

*In Custody (1984)*

*Fasting, Feasting (1999)*



*Cry, The Peacock*, the debut novel of Anita Desai has won the attention of readers and critics worldwide. As is true of most of her novels, her major concern in this novel too is the exploration of mind and soul and not the external action. Discarding all social concerns she asserts her interest in individual and not the social issues. The novel can be said to have a prologue and an epilogue. In the prologue the author describes the acute frustration and depression of Maya, the protagonist, and in the prologue her reactions and decisions are portrayed. The thematic nexus of the novel is in Maya's neurosis arising out of various reasons such as her growth and development without maternal love. Having grown under the loving attention of her father, she desires to get similar attention from her husband, Gautama. Gautama, a busy prosperous lawyer, too much occupied with his vocation fails to meet her romantic sensuous demands. Thus the gap of communication between them leads to martial disharmony. Obsessed by her sense of insecurity she decides to do away with her husband and pushes him off the parapet and does not even feel guilty about it.

Desai's second novel, *Voices In The City* is more sensational than her first endeavour and is a remarkable story of a Bohemian brother, Nirode, together with his two sisters, Monisha and Amla, residing in the Indian city of Calcutta. Both Nirode and Monisha find life to be unfair and Amla in turn tries her best to draw some sense out her disgusting existence. There seems to be no real channel of communication between their rough lives though so closely related to each other. The novel is divided into four parts named after the three siblings and the fourth after their mother describing their grotesque experiences and unreal relationships respectively. Nirode, completely immersed in himself, enjoyed failures and liked to lead his life mute and in exile. Being a pessimistic novel, the women characters also display traits of fragmentation due to their snapped relationships. Monisha, the elder sister, suffers the pangs of an ill-matched, unhappy marriage and ends her life tragically. Amla, the youngest sibling is caught in the crosscurrents of changing social values but somehow succeeds in preserving herself and in

surviving. The novel portrays the life of middle-class intellectuals of Calcutta where independence is far too expensive.

The novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer* is another microcosm of a woman's intense struggle to escape from the mundane duties and responsibilities of a house-wife and live in a world of silence and stillness. This is a story of the central character, Sita, a woman in her forties, set against the backdrop of her frustrated marriage with Raman. Sita already has four children and is pregnant with the fifth child. The maladjustment with her husband, a successful businessman, nauseates and irritates her. Her fifth pregnancy seems to her as a nightmare due to the emotional lacuna in her life. She feels an intense identity crisis and decides to move into self-exile to revive her inner lost self. In search of an idyllic existence she moves to her native island home but the island proves to her nothing more than the debris of the past. She is betrayed by her own children, who express their desperation to return to their father and the life of the city. Sita herself lacks conviction and clarity as on one hand she wishes to break all the familial ties while on the other she cares for her children and wants to keep her fifth child too. Sita's journey of life takes on a positive note wherein she regards compromise, adjustment and sacrifice as inevitable and unavoidable. She thinks in terms of oneness and unity. The deep crisis of identity fades away into harmony.

Shortlisted for the Booker prize in 1984, the novel *In Custody* is unique in the sense that it has a male protagonist who seeks self-fulfillment, as against her other women centric fiction. Deven Sharma is an average, small-town man belonging to lower-middle class. He is a lecturer in Hindi in a private college in Mirpore, a small town near Delhi. He has a wife and a son to support, whom he considers as obstacles in his way of becoming a renowned Urdu poet. Deven overestimates his worth but lacks the initiative to move away from the dreariness of his life. In the novel Desai is at the peak of her literary genius in delineating the alienation, the vague yearnings, misery and wretchedness of an individual's physical existence that correlates

with the melancholy of his mind and heart. Deven is charmed into going to Delhi by his childhood friend Murad, who gives him a chance to interview the legendary Urdu poet, Nur. Deven hopes it to be a liberating event in his life. However the interview and an attempt to record the rare verses of Nur end in a fiasco. Deven feels humiliated initially but in this darkness and depravity, he eventually perceives beauty and splendour. He revels in the feeling of being the sole custodian of Nur's poetry. Gathering up the inner reserves of strength he boldly accepts his responsibility dispersing his timid, vulnerable self.

In the novel *Fire on the Mountain* there are two overlapping stories of two awkward pairs-Nanda Kaul and her great grand-daughter-Raka. Nanda Kaul, an elderly lady, awakened by her need to connect with her inner self, is presented in the beginning of the novel as living a secluded life in Carignano, in Kasauli. All her life she had devotedly watched over her family and society but after fulfilling her responsibilities as a mother and being widowed, the exhausted Vice Chancellor's wife, wishes to live a quiet, self-contained, carefree life. However, she is not allowed to do so and her austere solitude is disturbed by the coming of her great-granddaughter Raka, who is an extension of Nanda Kaul's image. Raka shatters her abandonment and loneliness. Both are too proud to interact with each other. But gradually because of Nanda Kaul's inherent drive to care for everyone, she becomes concerned with Raka and her safety. Raka has a rare inquisitiveness which takes her to the different areas of the mountain, even at night. Nanda worries about her and unwillingly is drawn again into the whirlpool of life. Raka avoids her willfully and likes to be left alone. This unusual behaviour of Raka and her love for destruction greatly disturb Nanda Kaul. All this bring the bareness and the unhealed psychological wounds of Nanda Kaul to the surface leading to the inevitable tragedy.

*Clear Light of Day* deals with the children of the Das family-Bim, Tara, Raja and Baba. The echo of the past reverberates with the present in the novel as it presents the relationship between the family members which

are at one once awful and tender, strained and permanent. The two sisters, Bim and Tara are contrasted to each other as Bim, the elder one, is stronger, economically independent being a college lecture and daring. She decides to remain single and take care of her brother, Baba and aunt, Mira Masi. Tara, the meeker one, leaves the house to marry Bakul at an early age and Raja, the brother, too escapes from the mundanity of the house by moving to Hyderabad and marrying the daughter of their rich neighbour, Hyder Ali. Tara returned to her childhood home after twenty years of marriage, only to feel guilty and ashamed of herself of deserting Bim and Baba. Raja, however, is pragmatic and free of any such remorse. On the contrary, he feels proud of allowing Bim and Baba to continue living in their paternal home, which according to him, after the death of their parents was his legal property. Bim, in the beginning expresses her fury towards Tara and the outside world which had no care for her lot and emotions but eventually she realizes that her way of life was her own choice. She knew that she could never stop loving her family. Forgiving everyone, she warded off the grudges inside her heart and embraced Tara. Resentment gives place to acceptance.

*Fasting, Feasting* is a tragic story of an Indian household which Desai wrote after she left her native India to teach and write in Massachusetts. It lays bare the claustrophobia of existence caught between fasting and feasting, that is, portrays the assaults of existence of individuals who are controlled by the society by the practices of eating. Devoid of any refreshing winds the women of the household are pushed towards stifling mundanity. This is the story of Uma, an ordinary girl, who fails on almost every front of her life. Uma is the eldest child in the house of MamaPapa - the parents with no particular separate identities. She is treated as clumsy, slow and unsteady. From a very young age Uma is a victim of comparison and gender discrimination. She is compared to her younger sister Aruna, often, who in contrast to Uma is smarter and prettier. The females in the family are treated unequally. Arun, the youngest son, is assigned an

important position, and Uma is made to look after him and sacrifice for him. The parents favour their son to their daughters. There is a hint at patriarchy here where women participate in creating unequal opportunities for their daughters and sons. The fine grains of human life have been presented with exquisite details.

Namita Gokhale, born in 1956, in a Kumaoni Brahmin family in Lucknow, spent her childhood days partly in Nainital in the foothills of Himalayas and partly in New Delhi. Her primary experiences in Kumaon moulded her mind and art permanently. She is deeply attached and rooted in her culture which becomes an important part of her being and spills all over her works. She was a voracious reader since childhood, inspired by her grandfather. As a daughter of a politician, politics was another strong influence upon her. She chose literature as a profession at an early age and found *Paro* to be her right voice initially. Before that she wrote many short stories and poems. Gokhale's self-cognition runs parallel with her intense involvement in her works.

Gokhale was seventeen when she met her future husband, Rajiv Gokhale, with whom she entered into a quick wedlock. Her married life was full of tensions and pressures but she did not let it impede her further education or her literary fervour. She demonstrated courage both at the personal front and at her college where she went to court for her choice of a course in Hindi literature to that of Chaucer. She even worked as a firm journalist in Bombay for some time.

As a keen observer of life, Gokhale has much to say in an utterly new spirit and tone. She has an exquisite perception of men and matters. Her fiction constitutes a major segment of contemporary writing in English capturing the complex subtleties of human relationships in a smooth texture of her simple idiom. The works of Namita Gokhale are a reflection of the souls anguished by the rootlessness and meaninglessness of life. Gokhale brings to focus the central preoccupations of the present era in her individual

style and communicates her unique vision of reality, which is in a way, representative of deeply felt and adequately expressed truths. Crystallizing the passion of the time in her work, Namita gives new directions to our thoughts and feelings. As a part of women's fiction she articulates her vision of woman as a social asset and a gift for mankind. Her work cannot be interpreted by a culturally conditioned value pattern, on the contrary the lives of women in her fiction are definable by their own individual standards. Writing in a revelatory style, Namita's real concern is with the exploration of human psyche and the grounds on which male and female psyche works. Her novels are a re-enactment of social change in India in all its complex manifestations. Namita Gokhale explores the clash between traditional codes and modern aspirations. Namita Gokhale is now regarded as a major voice in the fictional world of Indian writings in English and has received wide critical acclaim both in India and abroad.

As a novelist of first order she stands head and shoulders with Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Pawar Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De and Manju Kapoor. The authors who have influenced her are Dickens and Muriel Spark. Gokhale is also highly influenced by Anita Desai. *War and Peace* and *The Tale of Gandhiji* are among her favourite books endorsing a cosmopolitan outlook. Gokhale has published innumerable articles and papers, home and abroad. She is an active member of the literary community who has not only contributed to literature through her works but has also endeavoured to invigorate and enhance the Indian literary scene by various literary activities. She is a co-director of the Jaipur Literary Festival and has been associated with it since its beginning. She organised a festschrift in Mussoorie in 2001-02 in honour of Ruskin bond. She has published *Writer's Retreat Series II: Present Tense: Living On The Edge*, and has helped to conceptualize and co-ordinate the Africa-Asia literary conference 2006, at Neemrana. She is a co-publisher with Penguin and a regular contributor to major Indian newspapers and magazines. She is also a founder director of Translating Bharat. She is committed to

showcasing and translating the best of Indian writings and engaging the vibrant languages of the Indian sub-continent in a creative dialogue with each other and the rest of the world.

Her major contribution to the Indian English Novel consists of –

*Paro - Dreams of Passion* (1984)

*Gods, Graves and Grandmother* (1994)

*A Himalayan Love Story* (1996)

*The Book of Shadows* (1999)

*Shakuntala - The Play of Memory* (2005)

*Priya - In Indredible Indyaa* (2011)

She has also penned two books of non-fiction, *Mountain Echoes* (1994) and *The Book of Shiva* (2001), which is an erudite and impassioned examination of the Hindu God of Death and Regeneration.

Gokhale published her debut novel *Paro-Dreams of Passion* in 1984. It is a story of two female protagonists Paro and Priya. Paro is a bold woman who celebrates her sexuality and uses it to decentralize the world of men. She is fashionable in her attire and enjoys flirting with men. Paro, an educated and economically independent woman struggles incessantly to discover her inner strength and her 'self'. Paro is an ambitious woman who does not believe in adjustments and blames others for shattering her dreams. In the end, however, she realizes that all her encounters have been false, have resulted in self-denial and have had no soulful satisfaction. She commits suicide. The changing image of the Indian female characters can also be witnessed in another character, Priya, who is also the narrator of the story. The plot moves around the upper middle class society of Bombay and Delhi with a number of incidents clustered together moving back and forth in time. Life is presented as a journey larger than death, though faced by many trials and tribulations. The feminist yearnings for equality, identity and liberation manage to acquire a suitable literary expression in the novel.

The novel *Gods, Gods and Grandmother* is an engaging story of a girl caught in the web of suffering, frustration and boredom, characteristic of an Indian house-wife. The protagonist is Gudiya whose life is nothing but a protracted tale of anguish and despair surrounded by people who do not honour her inner feelings. Since childhood Gudiya is forlorned by her parents as her widowed mother elopes with a man of her choice without caring for her daughter, leaving Gudiya to the care of her ancient grandmother, Ammi. Ammi, who was a prostitute in her early years, took the disguise of a saint. However, after adopting this sacred profession, Ammi slowly drifted away from Gudiya leaving her feeling isolated and loveless. Grandmother's neglect made Gudiya feel betrayed and deeply hurt. Gudiya led a life of contradictions at the temple. Gudiya craves for a redeemer whom she fantasises day and night. Gudiya finds her dream prince in the form of Kalki, a bandwallah. In Kalki she expects to find some happiness in future and with this hope submits herself completely to him. However she turns out to be the same ignored wife drudged into monotony and indignity. Gudiya resolves to lift herself from the destitute position and strives towards happiness with determination and courage. Phoolwati is another important assertive female in the novel who inspires Gudiya to lead her life independent of Kalki. In her many layered narrative Gokhale portrays the different dimensions of relationships, suppressions and victimizations.

*A Himalayan Love Story* is Gokhale's third novel in which she charts the course of survival of ordinary people particularly women who refuse to be subdued by their suffocating surroundings. The protagonist, Parvati, is a neglected daughter of a poor widow who is subjected to constant mutilation of her emotions and desires. As a student Parvati enjoyed the company of her classmate, Mukul Nainiwal. The liking was mutual. But following the patriarchal roots it was Hiranand Joshi who decided whom Parvati ought to marry and without caring for Parvati's likings he chose Lalit on the basis of his future job prospects. To Parvati's utter misfortune, Lalit turned out to be



a homosexual who was actually hostile towards her. Parvati, for her redemption from her stifling existence, challenges the established norms of right and wrong behaviour. She did not hesitate to enter into pre or post-marital physical relationships with Salman, her co-student and Raju, her brother-in-law respectively. However these affinities prove to be temporary and did not last long. She transferred her anxieties to Mukul who gracefully accepted them as his personal responsibility and assured Parvati that he would support her and daughter, Irra. The novel however ends in a mystery with Mukul abandoning them and feeling guilty that he could do nothing for the suffering mother-daughter as his conditions did not allow him to do so.

Gokhale belongs to Kumaon and her fourth novel, *The Book of Shadows*, picturises the Kumaon climate and its beauty in its full splendour. The novel is multidimensional being partly a ghost story, partly a romance, partly erotic and partly a story of a woman's struggle for self-definition. The story transcends the mundane and stretches about the past, the present and the future including different realms and divergent states of being. Even the native house of the protagonist, Rachita Tiwari has a separate entity in the plot. Rachita falls in love with an insecure man, Anand. In a temporary state of excitement she gets physically involved with her friend's husband. Discovering this, Anand's male ego is crushed and unable to cope with this he hangs himself to death. Rachita was broken by the incident. Rachita's misery was further heightened when with a fire of ill-will, malice and vengeance, Anand's sister took recourse to the extreme action of throwing acid on Rachita's face. Struck by deep anguish, Rachita seeks refuge in her home town to soothe her suffering body and soul. The author deals with the problems of inharmonious man-woman relationship and the morbid psychic-longings of a perturbed woman. Moving from crisis to crisis, Rachita quests for discovery of self. She determines to find relief. Gradually she learns to accept her disfigured face and looks at the mirror with courage, declaring to herself that she looked just fine, in fact really nice. She promised herself to be brave and emerge victorious in the test of reality. The to and fro

movements of the self from light to darkness, from mere passion to love, from sadness to happiness is also portrayed in the novel by the ghost imagery. Ghosts of Father Benedictus, Captain Wolcott, Dona Rosa, Marcus and other previous residents haunt the house.

Shakuntala in *Shakuntala : The Play of Memory* is a resurrection of a female who yearns to take a free flight away from her caged existence. Namita talks of the everlasting struggle of a woman since childhood through the character of Shakuntala. To free herself from her parental home Shakuntala becomes eager to marry, thus she willingly and passively delivers herself to Srijan, whom her mother chose as a match for her. Their ages and temperaments are incompatible, thus shattering all of Shakuntala's aspirations. She feels herself on a sacrificial pyre. Moreover Shakuntala could not conceive and lived under constant pressure and depression of being barren. She held herself completely responsible for her infertility. Her oppression is heightened with the coming of another woman in the house- Kamalini. Refusing to succumb to the dictates of the society, she decides to leave her house in search of a new domain. The novel displays her daring nature as she regains her lost freedom in the form of a Greek lover, Nearchus. In search of alternatives she runs away with Nearchus but her happiness with him is also short lived. She soon becomes tired of him and feels guilty of eloping. Fluctuating between two states of mind, whether to return to Srijan or not, Shakuntala distances herself from Nearchus and begins her spiritual journey to find her self. She follows her natural instinct of rebellion without caring for the consequences. Boldly she breaks free from all the unwanted clutches and embarks on a journey to assert her own identity with her unborn child.

Namita has the knack of resurrecting some unforgettable characters which she embodies in her novel *Priya : In Incredible Indyya*. The novel is a continuation of voyage of Priya, Suresh, Avinendra and other characters of her maiden novel *Paro : Dreams of Passion*. Priya, the protagonist is

married to Suresh Kaushal, a minister of State for Food and Processing, Animal Husbandry, Fisheries and Canneries. Priya, who began her life as B.R's secretary, in the novel *Paro : Dreams of Passion* is happy to find herself at top of the heap now, however she has to cope hard with the upper class values and ways of living. In the novel, Paro is declared as dead twenty-five years back but her shadow lurks throughout the plot. She is an everlasting influence in the lives of all the people around her, especially Priya. Delhi is an important backdrop in the novel and becomes a crucial ground to represent the bipolar existence of the contemporary society. Priya is presented as a caring, contemplative mother of two boys Luv and Kush who are opposite to each other in their temperament and choices and try to live a life of convenience. Suresh's extra-marital relationship with Poonam Chand forms the sub plot of the novel.

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### Chapter – 3

## INTRICACIES OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

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Understanding of the human relations is critical to the understanding of the society as well as any individual as they are an indispensable part of human civilization. Life on earth is compounded of relationships. Nothing remains single or in solitude but is always in relation to its surroundings. Interpersonal relationships of human beings go a long way in forming an individual's personality as well as pave the way for successful social living. Stable and healthy relationships are essential for an individual to comprehend his own identity. The relationships that an individual forms get affected by the social conditions in which he lives. With the changing trend of living and of thought, the traditional structures of society are crumbling down. Man's external and internal relations are assuming a complexity. The complexities may be in relationships between man and woman, husband and wife, mother and children, between two women or two men. These relationships weave lives together. In the contemporary era it is almost impossible that they go on in untangled manner. Intricacies of human relationships today form an integral part of a person's life and character. Many a times these relations, specially within the family become incomprehensible leading one to question their very validity. As regards relationships, almost the same sentiment is echoed by Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale pinpointing the perplexities in the affinities between humans. They specially lay bare the deference shown by men to the emotional as well as physical fulfillment of women. Both the writers under study present the pulls of relationships and posit the postmodernist thought that everything is subjectivity relative refraining from condemning or legitimising any action of the characters. They bring to the forefront the deeper dimensions of a person's inner subconscious mind which gets deeply

affected by the external associations.

*Cry, The Peacock (CTP)* explores the theme that would remain constant in Anita Desai's fiction, which is the portrayal of the turbulent emotional world of oppressed and suppressed Indian women. The title of the novel itself symbolizes the agony of unfulfilled desires. It suggests the protagonist, Maya's, cry for love and emotional and physical compatibility with her husband, Gautama. Peacocks know their death beforehand but they make sure to enjoy life till the last day. Their hundred eyes upon their tails have seen the truth of life and death and they are in love with their life. They dance heartily when it rains in spite of being aware of the fact that their dance of joy is the dance of death. Realizing its inevitability, they are not agonised by the fear of impending death. In order to ease their pain, they grasp the snakes lying on the sands and dash them against stones. Maya finds the shrieks of peacocks blood chilling and extremely painful. Herself, being obsessed with the fear of death by the childhood prophecy of the albino astrologer, she finds the peacocks gazing at the final truth-death. She feels, when peacocks gaze at the clouds loaded with water, they cry out of pain: "Pia, pia. . . . Lover, lover. Mio. mio - I die , I die" (*CTP* 82). Relating with their feelings she says: "With them, I trembled and panted and paced the burning rocks. Agony, agony, the mortal agony of their cry for lover and for death" (*CTP* 83).

Maya's condition is similar to that of the peacocks. She, too, is in deep love with life and wishes to enjoy it to the lees. Experiencing on one hand a constant agony of death, as predicted to be in the fourth year of her marriage, she longs for fullness of relationship with Gautama. Peacocks fight before they mate. Similar is the saga of Maya's destructive love who is too demanding of Gautama's attention and whose wisdom is paralysed by the terror of approaching death.

The novel voices Desai's post-modernist commitment to heterogeneity, fragmentation and difference. Desai delves deep into the

fragmented subject problems by deconstructing the misnomer of unified subjectivity. The novel is mainly concerned with the disharmony between husband-wife. Maya is a sensitive female living in an insensitive world. She is portrayed as an anguished soul who, having married to an insensitive husband for four years suffers from loneliness and dissatisfaction, owing to his excessive detachment and icy cold impassiveness. It voices the sexual frustrations, repressions and failures in the loveless wedlock. In the novel, Desai presents marital unhappiness and the pressures faced by the heroine Maya whose emotional integrity is fast dissolving, especially because of her marriage with a person who unlike her is of an intellectual sensitivity. It presents one of the major post-modernist concerns - absence of communion in relationships:

And so we strolled up and down the lawn, talking desultorily, not really listening to each other, being intent on our own paths which, however, ran parallel and loosely enough for us to briefly brush against each other, now and then, reminding us - or perhaps only myself - of the peace that comes from companion life alone, from brother flesh. Contact, relationship, communion. . . . I let these warm, tender sensations bathe me in their lambency, soothe me till the disturbed murmurs of my agitation grew calmer, and I could step out my painful seclusion of my feelings into an evening world where the lawn had just been trimmed, the flower-beds just watered. The season for flowers was over now-had disappeared. . . (CTP 21)

Married to Gautama, Maya gets no satisfaction as she thinks her husband is emotionally indifferent, overfed and emotionally enervated. She expects emotional and physical fulfillment but gets cold intellectuality from him. Maya is shown as a common woman caught in the labyrinth of life whereas Gautama, influenced by Gita preaches her to lead a life free from involvement. Maya is highly instinctual and wants Gautama to help her

enjoy the ecstasies of life but Gautama doesn't tread on the same path of life. He is ignorant of the fine feelings so common to women. In Anita's novels marital polarisation is considered at the root cause of all dilemmas and vacuum prevalent in the life of the characters. Maya feels that it is the duty of a husband to make her life active and happy even if it concerns petty affairs as watching a show. Resultingly, she feels frustrated when she wants to go to the South to see the performance of Kathakali dancer while her husband wants her to wait till the troupe comes to Delhi.

Maya is a prisoner of the past living almost perpetually in the shadows of the world of memories which engulf her whereas Gautama lives in the present and accepts realities and facts. He makes her feel disgusted with herself by not responding to her desires despite her beauty. Her unrequited love drives her crazy and she is forced to feel terrible as she fails to become the centre of attraction and attention of her husband. To Gautama, Maya's talks are just the chattering of a monkey, and he gets annoyed that he has been disturbed in his act of deep intellectual thinking. Maya's longings for sexual pleasures gets neglected to such an extent that she is befuddled :

But then he knew nothing that concerned me. Giving me an opal ring to wear on my finger, he did not notice the translucent skin beneath, the blue flashing veins that run under and out of the bridge of the gold and jolted me into smiling with pleasure each time I saw it. Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me, to either the soft, willing body or the lonely wanting mind that awaited near the bed. (CTP 14)

Living in an utopian world, Maya is ceaselessly engrossed in the quest of a meaningful life living within the traditional bonds. She is an epicurean to the core. Maya voices the cry of a married woman to whom love is nothing more than passion and sentiment. Gautama remains rigid and cool inspired of all the efforts of Maya as she says: "In his world there were



vast areas in which he would never permit me, and he could not understand that I could even wish to enter them, foreign as they were to me. On his part understanding was scant, love was meager" (CTP 89). Maya feels that Gautama was unfair to her in wishing that his wife should learn to be grateful for merely his presence in the house.

Anita presents the Indian tradition when marriage is a matter of convenience, decided by the parents. Here also the marriage of Maya and Gautama is based on the friendship of her father and Gautama who had similar ways of thinking. Gautama is much older than Maya and treats her like a child reminding us of Ibsen's Nora in *The Doll's House*.

Anita's novels constantly reverberate between the past and the present. Maya's attitude towards life can be traced back to her childhood's over attachment to her doting father. Maya, a pampered child of Rai Sahab, is brought up in an atmosphere of luxury where she lived "as a toy prince in a toy world" (CTP 78). She yearned for a father figure in her husband which she failed to get resulting in a void in marital relationship. She sobs and complains to herself: "No one, no one else loves me as my father does" (CTP 43). Her father bestowed unremitting selfless love on her whereas Gautama and his family did not speak of love, far less of affection. Gautama unlike his father was a lifeless, tired man, worn out by his professional demands. He was reared in a family which discussed parliament, cases of bribery, corruption in government, of trials in court, harvest - topics which never interested Maya and were far removed from personal feelings. Maya felt isolated from them as an outsider and said: "I was their toy, their indulgence, not to be taken seriously, and the world I came from was less than it - it was a luxury they considered it a crime to suffer and so damned it with dismissal" (CTP 45). With time Maya grew more and more restless in her silence and felt her inner self disintegrating. Even Gautama blamed her lack of practical understanding upon her father:

He is the one responsible for this, for making you believe that all that is important in the world is to possess, possess riches, comforts, posies, dollies, loyal retainers all the luxuries of the fairy tale you sure brought up on life is a fairy tale. (*CTP* 115)

The dichotomy of her childhood experiences lead to misery, confusion and agony. Happiness which was showered on Maya in bounties by her father was made a rare privilege by her husband. His plastic existence had taught her pain and frustration. The plot of the novel moves with the modulations of memory. The scenes from Maya's childhood alternate with her present condition and her concern for the future, thus clearly reflecting the role of her past in making of Maya, the vulnerable woman. Thus, Maya is faced with two different worlds and vacillates between the two - the dream world of her childhood and the world of sordid reality of Gautama's house and family.

Maya's tragedy is triggered by the remembrance of the prophecy of the albino astrologer. Postmodernistic to the core, Desai does not bring Maya to reason or validate the prophecy but makes her act by her own perception of relative truth. Maya's world is one of delusions and hallucinations. Maya, living in an illusory world, starts considering her life and marriage not as a journey but a game and decides that: "One of us will win, the other must lose" (*CTP* 131). In her anguish, she passes the death verdict on Gautama and pushes him down from the parapet. Justifying her act she says to herself: "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? It was I, I who screamed with the peacocks, screamed at the sight of rain clouds . . ." (*CTP* 175). As the days passed she convinced herself that Gautama is the one fated to die as life or death would make no difference to him.

As a novelist Desai does not present the futility of marriage or ridicule it. Marriage is a necessary bond in man's life which has its

foundation in an understanding between man and woman. Rather she explores the psyche of the female characters through marriage. Influenced by D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Henry James and Emily Bronte who have vividly and extensively drawn the realm of female characters and presented their state in relation to men, to society and to each other. Impressed by the diversity of women characters they capture, ranging from traditional and submissive women to those who are independent of their social roles, remaining strong in their personality, Desai appreciates and revokes their aggressive independence. Their writings helped Desai to support her feminine affinity and gave her a deeper understanding of collusion at the heart of relationships. Desai presents the untold, mute, psychosomatic miseries of women, particularly married women effectively. The significant cause of the mal-adjustment of the married life of her characters is that they converse without communication - a typical postmodern phenomena. Whether Maya committed suicide or was sent to a lunatic asylum, after she realised that she had caused her husband's death, has been left to the readers' assumptions. *Cry, The Peacock* is an open ended novel leaving the readers free to form conjectures. Being a postmodernist writer, Anita makes no attempt to force either her protagonist or the readers to invoke their reasoning faculty.

The novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer (WSWGTS)* in a very lucid prose style gives a full length picture of Sita, the protagonist, a sensitive woman in her early forties. The novel begins with Sita's escape to her childhood abode - Manori island - tracing her intense identity crisis. Sita has been described as bearing a dry, worn out, still face and hair grown grey with age. Her appearance makes her seem older than she actually is. She is in a semi-conscious, paralysed state like a zombie. On one hand she seeks assurance from the island while on the other the feeling of guilt of leaving her husband, Raman and her home wore her out. She is presented as repeating the explanation, of trying to run away from her past in Bombay, to herself very often:

She had come here in order to give birth. An explanation she had repeated to herself and her husband so often. . . . Yet she had arrived, she was on the island, in order to achieve the miracle of not giving birth. Wasn't this Manori, the island of Miracles? Her father had made it an island of magic once, worked miracles of a kind. . . . She had come on a pilgrimage, to beg for the miracle of keeping her baby unborn. (WSWGTS 28)

Sita is an Indian woman married to a man of her father's choice. She had four children whom she nurtured with pride and pleasure. She is a caring mother who went through her four pregnancies with serenity and complete acceptance. Thus, when she exhibited a show of rage, fear and revolt while bearing the fifth child her husband was puzzled. Sita, for the first time in her life, expresses the difference of opinion with her husband which although was present all the time in her subconscious mind, had never been voiced by her due to her patriarchal conditioning. Raman, with uncertainty and displeasure at her wayward behaviour asks her:

"But you were always so pleased about the babies, Sita. . . . They always pleased you".

At this she hissed and said, "I'm *not* pleased. I'm frightened."

"Why? Why?" he spoke gently, "Everything will go well. I thought it grows easier and easier."

"It's not easier. It's harder-harder. It's unbearable", she wept. (WSWGTS 29)

Her refusal to give birth to the fifth child is the result of her dilemma, whether giving birth to a child, would be an act of creation or destruction. The line between the two had been dimmed for her. Being a postmodern

character, Sita chooses a path characterised by non-linearity and indeterminacy. She decides to leave her home, her two children and take refuge in the Island of Manori. Thus displaying the agony of Sita, the chief woman character who encounters traumatic experiences in her married life due to the complete lack of understanding of her feelings by her husband. Sita's problem is more a psychological one than being external, resulting from unfulfilled wishes. The past has been presented as a psychic residue in the novel. The novel suggests deep insight into the intricate issues of life and marriage of Sita and Raman presenting their maladjustment as a struggle between resignation and discretion. Since the beginning of her wedlock she could scarcely recognize her bride self. She seemed to have adopted for the occasion "the way an insect might adopt certain characteristics not of its own breed for the sake of camouflage and self-defence . . . melancholy and boredom had settled upon her face since then" (*WSWGTS* 48). Thus even at the moment when she dressed like a bride, instead of rejoicing in her looks, as any other conventional Indian girl would do, Sita immediately discarded her appearance and disdained it.

Sita could not accept that life would continue thus, inside the small, enclosed area of the house where she felt like an outsider since the beginning. She always kept waiting for some transformation which never came. Coming from the Manori island where one was scarcely aware of what one ate, where no one gave a moment's thought to food, and meals were had hurriedly, Sita was suffocated by the vegetable 'complacency' (*WSWGTS* 45) of her husband's family and never tried or never could grow used to them. The women of the household had the habit of accepting everything as it came to them. All this made her feel dead and drowned. She was struck with utter boredom and found her life-life moving like monotonous everyday tides. She derides the "subhuman placidity, calmness and sluggishness" (*WSWGTS* 43) and the routine manner of her husband's family:

The whole house seemed to be a kitchen - kitchen smells filled each corner of it, everyone talked of the meal to come; if

meals were not being eaten, then they were being cooked, or cleaned up after, or planned . . . and beyond that they did not stir themselves. They wished to be left in peace to eat, to digest. They're nothing, they're nothing. (*WSWGTS* 44)

Marriage in Raman's family was for Sita a social duty towards the community, and there was little idea of individual interest. The social background provided by the authoritarian family afforded no scope for the recognition of any personal factors, individual interests and aspirations in the relation between husband and wife. Sita tries her best to become a responsible wife and a mother. But her husband's insensitive nature brings a deep change in Sita. Her emotions are looked at with a distance by her husband and children. In order to seek a means of escape she takes to smoking and abusing her children for trifles. Smoking is a symbol of her revolt to the traditional mores as it was something which had never been done in their household by any woman and even men indulged in it only in secret. There is a conflict between two polarised temperaments. Raman is wise and lucid while Sita is unreasonable. Her unattended, affectionless life in the home leads her to think about herself and her place in the scheme of the family. She was filled with frenzy, grim, fears which resulted in recurrent violent outbursts against every unpleasant incident. Her husband is unable to understand her hostility and passion and her 'sudden rushes of emotion' (*WSWGTS* 48). Sita is hypersensitive, an introvert personality and a pessimist. Raman is the man so passive, so grey that he caused the pulsation of grief inside her everyday till she could bear no more. While Sita is concerned with maintaining her bond with Raman throughout her life, deeply engrossed with the care of their children, their upbringing and education, the mundane domestic life and the surrounding atmosphere stifle and nauseate her. She is fed up with her husband, a typical businessman, a creature of the society, representing the traditional value system, an extrovert by nature and more or less apathetic towards Sita. She feels alienated from her husband in spite of living under the same roof for twenty

years for there was lack of communication between the couple. They hardly spent time with each other and they always remain like an ill assorted couple lacking altogether in harmony all their lives. What Raman's behaviour had done to her in the two decades of their marriage was to pile on her fury only to explode dreadfully in the present leaving their lives fragmented. Sita is presented as a post-modernist woman who takes the firm decision to escape from her unhappy married life with the vision to realise her lost self at Manori. The problems she encounters are the creation of representational failure. It is due to her failure to surrender, accept the norms and values of society and resign to her fate that she ultimately resolved to go to Manori island as a kind of self-exile, in her search for silence and identity away from home. She thinks at Manori she would be able to live under a magic spell:

She saw that island illusion as a refuge, a protection. It would hold her baby safely unborn by magic (for she is in her advance stage of pregnancy). Then there would be the sea- it would wash the frenzy out of her, drown it. Perhaps the tides would lull the children, too, into smoother, softer beings. The grove of trees would shade them and protect them. (*WSWGTS* 58)

She felt an aversion for the urbanized life in Bombay and left for Manori much to the dismay of her husband Raman, who sees the absurdity of the plan - 'a pregnant woman leaving for an unreal place-such indiscretion, inspiration and force' (*WSWGTS* 49). She, thus deviates from the institutional values, dogmas and identification as opposed to a typical wife or mother. She is portrayed as a creature of spontaneity - a typical postmodern trait. She does not live by worn out ideals of dissolving one's identity just for the name-sake institution of marriage. She represents the feelings which are locked in the recesses of a female's heart. Sita, like Anita's other heroines, is unconventional and her emotional reactions convey her problems, uncertainties and complexities of her married life.

However on this island, strange experiences and strange sensations befell her and she finds the flat, toneless island is no more hospitable. Her illusion of a miracle-to-happen, is shattered. She was disgusted to see that even her children were not happy to be alone with her- away from the man she so sincerely abhorred. Menaka and Karan, her children were full of despair at the exile she had led them into. They wished to be back to school or friends. She finds that her life is a farce and only her immediate experience is real. She realises that life is continual process of sacrifice, adjustment and compromise. She wants to avoid the question as what is true and what is false. She realises that on this island she had emerged: "as a moth. . . . From its cocoon not into the sunlight, but into a grey nonlight that does not warm the damp wings or give them strength for flight" (*WSWGTS* 69).

This sudden expansion of her world illuminated her. She was reminded of the foetus stranded inside her, struggling for life. She realised that her husband had a greater capacity for accommodation than most had-so long as it made for comfort, for security and safety from any change or scandal. He was sensible but not sensitive. He had nothing more to give her: "Everything was clear to him - that life must be continued, and all its business" (*WSWGTS* 127). She suddenly felt as if he was brave to follow the monotony, the routine of life - rearing the children, getting them admitted to school or college, taking care of the factory, earning a salary. Whereas, she herself was a coward to run away from her responsibilities. All this marks a vision of revelation in her and strikes a sympathetic chord within her towards her husband and her situation. All the differences between them melt. The reign of chaos is over, there is unity.

As her mind whirls round and round, Sita is in full agreement with the natural rhythm of life. She had a calm certainty of complete understanding. The storm inside her ended. She felt relieved and re-integrated, ready to accept her family once again and for the birth of her



child in the womb, giving her journey a positive note. Anita thus, imparts the ending a different tone giving Sita an apocalyptic vision. Earlier she was unable to come out of her egotistical self but now she could see things in a circular form making the moment's experience something permanent.

In marriage two individuals often with different backgrounds come together. Postmodernists rightly claim that the thinking, attitudes, mindsets and behaviour patterns of any two individuals even if they are closely related cannot be expected to be similar or exactly matching. Husband and wife have to make efforts to adjust to one another's tastes and temperaments by making compromises between themselves rather than breaking with each other in the event of differences and dissimilarities. This understanding develops gradually. Desai, through her novels rejects the power structure which the modernist writers lament where marriage, though important both for men and woman in India, effects a less essential adaptation in the life of the male. In most cases, the male continues to live in his original house and it does not influence his role as a son or a brother. His privileges towards life remain the same. No doubt he assumes new responsibilities, but being the head of the family, this aspect also favours him. On the other hand, life of the woman is totally transformed. She, even against her wish, has to build relationship with the close relatives of her husband's family. She has to fulfill specific responsibilities and duties. The typical pattern of husband-wife relationship is male dominant and female dependent. Women like Sita are usually just tied to bearing and rearing children. Anita presents a demystified approach to these power relations in society. She breaks this cultural mind-set which perpetuates sexual inequality. Remaining within the framework of the family, she challenges this binary opposition of man/woman in the value system. She makes her characters understand their own demands and the cost to meet them. All the characters fight the current and struggle against it.

In *Voices In The City (VIC)* Desai presents the dark recesses of the consciousness of the protagonist - Monisha. Monisha, just like Maya is

childless and a victim of an ill-matched marriage. Monisha and Jiban signify the debilitating effect of a marriage of convenience. Jiban represents the gender constructed role of masculinity. Monisha was married to him just because he belonged to a respectable, middle-class congress family which presented a safe, secure and sound prospect. Thus it was assumed that he would play an ideal role of a bread-winner. Her father thought that “Monisha ought not to be encouraged in her morbid inclinations and that it would be a good thing for her to be settled into such a stolid, unimaginative family as that, just sufficiently educated to accept her with tolerance” (VIC 196).

Monisha is a gentle, intelligent, sensitive person who even brings her library to her husband’s home because of her literary interests. Monisha is expected to lead a servile existence within the tight and stiff confines of a traditional Hindu family. She is happy neither with her husband nor with his family members who make no attempt to understand her. Monisha felt lonely and trapped in Calcutta and in her husband's house with thick iron bars. She yearned for meaningful communication but failed miserably- “One must have someone who reciprocates, who responds. One must have that-reciprocation I think” (VIC 194), said Monisha to her sister Amla.

Jiban was utterly predictable and life-less. Even her sister Amla wondered why their father had chosen this boring ‘non-entity’ (VIC 195) to marry her sister. His was a family completely unsuited to Monisha’s tastes and inclinations, Amla found all this ‘criminally unfair” (VIC 196) Jiban underestimated women and felt that he was the one who ran the household. All that the women had to do were simple household chores. He took no heed to Monisha’s ambitions and potentialities. He was dull and prolix. Jiban tells Monisha about his family “Be a little friendly to them. That is all they ask of you - a little friendliness” (VIC 118). He was a blind moralist and understood the power of being a male and of enforcing his supremacy. Jiban worked in a dull Ministry and would go on talking only about his work even if it disinterested others. Thus even when he was present at home Monisha felt his absence and said: “Jiban is never with us all” (VIC 111).

Monisha constantly lived under stress in Jiban's joint family where no one paid any attention to her. She was tired of it, the crowd. She felt as if she has been locked in a closed container away from the world outside. In the closed cubicle of her loneliness she felt she could neither hear nor understand anyone. She was away from anyone's touch or love or hate or warmth. She herself hates her life which has been reduced to "My duties of serving fresh chapatis to the uncles as they eat, of listening to my mother-in-law as she tells me the remarkably many ways of cooking fish, of being Jiban's wife" (VIC 111). Her life had been a total waste. She fails to relate herself to the image of a stereotypical wife and daughter-in-law. Her heart was parched by her loveless life.

She pits herself against the trodden path of a typical house-wife and a daughter-in-law. She was misunderstood by everyone because of her representational failure - her denial to nod in-agreement to the monotony of the vicious family circle. Anita articulates Monisha's frustrations and failures whose life is devoid of any independence and privacy. Their relationship though strained is dry to the extent of being non combative for Monisha knew the futility of making any complaints to anybody - even the minutest thread of emotional connection between them is broken. Monisha, after marriage changes from a sensitive, mild, quiet, sensible girl into a barren, distant, neurotic woman. Her heart bleeds with pain and her self esteem is shattered by the incidence when she takes some money to pay the hospital bills for Nirode, her brother as she thought she had equal right over her husband's money. But she had to suffer humiliation from the mean family of Jiban who shamefully accuse her of theft as she had taking the money without seeking his permission. Her mother-in-law shouts: "the servants will be dismissed, all of them. I will not have a thief in my house. . . . After all you were the only person who was in the room all the day" (VIC 137).

Monisha's life has been presented as an unsolved mystery. Anita

provides a free will to her characters to make their choices without making the least effort to justify their acts. Unable to attain emotional and passionate response from a world of sordid routine she tries to survive in solitude and come out with a changed individuality. Monisha tries to bear the dichotomy between her and Jiban for long, but unable to do so commits suicide by self-immolation. It is left to the readers to comprehend it as a compromise or distress or deceit, thus justifying the postmodern character of the novel being open ended. Monisha's character reveals how closely Anita has tried to understand the predicament of women, specially in India. Being a postmodernist writer, Anita reveals in the novel the major postmodernist concern as lack of communication thwarting marriage. Desai disrupts the totalising gestures that continuously threaten to consume us.

The other marriages referred to in the novel are also not happy and satisfactory. The marriage between the parents Mr. and Mrs. Ray is also characterised by maladjustment. Theirs is a marriage of practical bargain, where the husband is obsessed with his family name and title, and the wife with tea-estates and a house. Their marriage was more of a financial settlement based on monetary concerns rather than an affiliation for each other. Amla, the daughter, says to Dharma about her father, "He hadn't quite bargained for mother, just for her houses and tea-estates" (VIC 205). The father devoid of any vigour or vitality did nothing except sleeping, drinking and idling. Their relationship was that of estrangement. They had no common interests or taste. The mother liked sophistication, music, nature - all the fine things of life. As Amla said, "My father always gets on her nerves by simply never doing anything. I always see him lying back indolently, like an overfed house cat, against mother's embroidered Tibetan cushions toying with a cheroot or a glass of whisky or both" (VIC 206). Mr. and Mrs. Ray had contempt and resentment against each other. They hated one another. The husband had utter dislike for nature and music. He had no interest in the musical soirees arranged by her. While the music affected all the guests, the children and husband remained immune to it and Mr. Ray just

fell asleep with his head drooping and mouth open and wet. He was so devoid of any sensitivity that even the sweet shehnai seemed to him like a noisy pipe, a piece of plumbing. Full of malice for his competitor which he thought his wife to be, his docile nature is presented by Amla as : “When he came to Kalimpong and saw her wandering about her garden, touching her flowers, he never followed her, he used to lie back against the cushions, idle and contented-contented I think in his malice" (*VIC* 207). He looks at his wife and her habits with contempt and taunts her every now and then. He even humiliates her in front of the children. Thus he is at the same time - a sufferer as well as the cause of her suffering. They lived in a constant hellish environment, pursuing each other and destroying their lives. Through the faulty adjustment in their marriage Desai displays how this characteristic spirit of the postmodern age has loosened the bond between husband and wife.

Even Dharma, the painter, bears his marriage as an erasure of happiness. He expresses his idea of marriage to Amla, Monisha's sister, with whom Dharma has a passing extra marital affair: “Our relationship is not all so straight-forward and pat, married relationships never are. There is the matter of loyalty, habit, complicity - things I couldn't talk to you about till you married and knew for yourself” (*VIC* 225). He and Gita Devi, his wife, are like strangers, struggling for an emotional release from each other's harrowing presence. Their emotional dryness result in Dharma's cruelty to his daughter of casting her away as she married her cousin. Dharma is however a conformist and outwardly committed to his wife and society. He remains fettered to his wife who prays all the day, isolating herself from her husband.

Another man-woman relationship presented in the novel, which does not materialise into a nuptial bond is that of Amla and Dharma. It also symbolises aridity of feeling and frustration eventually. Amla encounters Dharma a couple of days after she arrives in Calcutta. For Amla, this maiden meeting become a miraculous force. Within no time she discovers herself in

the image of a love-lorn maiden. Lack of a meaningful emotional communion with her mother or with Nirode, her brother and Monisha, render Amla psychologically lacerated and weak and she finds a refuge, a relief in Dharma's presence. Being with Dharma she manages to forget the complexities of life for some time. Amla is a professional - a commercial artist- whose life embodies non-fulfilment. Whenever she attempts an alignment with someone, it is only partially successful because the streak of 'terrible destructiveness' (VIC 43) so typical in the Ray family, does not let Amla strike a harmonious relationship within or outside her family. She had willingly let herself be lured to Dharma's uncanniness, his eeriness. In the beginning Amla fantasizes their relationship and feels exalted. Whenever she goes to Dharma's house she becomes an altered Amla, a flowering Amla, translucent with joy and overflowing with a sense of love and reward. She felt herself alive and rejuvenated. But gradually she realises that Gita is the base of all Dharma's actions, that he would not be able to bless her with love. His callousness disgusts her. Owing to his degrading behaviour towards his daughter he loses respect in Amla's eyes. What she desired was a tangible and permanent relationship which she could not receive from Dharma. Thus out of sheer desperation she leaves him and like a rudderless boat drifting once again on the turbulent waters of life struggling to keep afloat.

Even Nirode, the male protagonist, shows his distrust for the institution of marriage. He suspects his mother of having an affair with Major Chadha, so he hates her. Inability to correlate and communicate, a rootless intellectual with an intense desire for self-extermination, makes him a sufferer. The pretensions and show of his friend Jit and Sarla are repulsive to him, leading him to condemn the very institution of marriage. He says: "Marriage, bodies touch and torture . . . he shuddered and, walking swiftly, was almost afraid of the dark of Calcutta. . . . All that was Jit's and Sarla's, he decided, and indeed, all that was to do with marriage, was destructive, negative, decadent" (VIC 35). Jit and Sarla, in reality, have no love for each

other. Neither Sarla wishes to keep any communication with her in-laws nor does Jit say a word to Sarla about her many admirers. There is a deep emotional hiatus between the couple.

Even Aunt Lila, a close relative of the children, who frequently visits them thus influencing their way of thinking, voices her hatred in the novel for men and marriage. She hates her fat, self-centred, dead husband, and is also perturbed by the failure of marriage of her daughter Rita. With contempt towards the opposite sex she says:

Women place themselves in bondage to men, whether in marriage or out. All the joy and ambition is channeled that way, while they go parched themselves. (VIC 221)

Thus, marriage without a healthy, meaningful communion is illustrated as a farce in the novel. Anita Desai eschews traditional practices and gives reign to her individual postmodern vision. Her characters find it difficult to compromise with the milieu. Her postmodern protagonists are at loggerheads with the structured socio-psychic reality. Desai mirrors the mythic reality of our fragmented life through the complex interaction of the self and the society. Her novels are not a vehicle for parading social, religious and moral ideas but are full of sounds, smells and the screams of life. Emotionally and physically perturbed, her characters are propelled from crisis to crises. They are presented as seekers - relentlessly driven with a feverish lust to love and be loved which brings about their fall or redemption.

The strain of maladjusted marriage continues in *In Custody (IC)*, a widely acclaimed, more mature novel of Anita Desai. Although the novel takes up different issues like language controversy, plight of vanishing Urdu Poetry, lecturer's life and above all male psychology, but there is also the backdrop of the frustrated relationship of Deven and his wife Sarla, and of Nur, the idealised and renowned Urdu poet, with his two wives.

In the novel the relationship between the protagonist Deven and his wife Sarla is fraught with indifference and frustration. Deven is an impoverished college lecturer who is married to a sullen and dull lady, thus enhancing the meanness and hopelessness of his daily life. The novel begins with the presentation of feeling of disgust regarding the interfering nature of women by Deven, who mocks at women in the company of his old friend Murad. He says, "My wife has told me not to buy a packet (of cigarettes) at a time. She says if I have to go to buy just one at a time, I will smoke less.' He tried to laugh, as at a pleasant joke. 'Women are always trying to make you smoke less, drink less" (*IC* 8).

Deven has been married to Sarla, a woman who does not share his literary aspirations. His marriage to Sarla was against his choice. Sarla was chosen by his mother and aunts, as is a common practice in India. They observed Sarla for many years, who lived in the same locality and found her suitable in every way "Plain, penny-pinching and congenially pessimistic" (*IC* 75). She is a simple woman of ordinary tastes and habits and expects her husband to be a loving and dutiful father and mate and earn well for her and their only son, Manu. She has high material hopes from life and wants to be surrounded by luxury. She aspired for :

the magazine dream of marriage: herself stepping out of a car, with plastic shopping bags full of groceries and filling them into the gleaming refrigerator, then rushing to the telephone placed on a lace doily upon a three-legged table and excitedly ringing her friends to invite them to see a picture show with her husband . . . (*IC* 75-76)

But the marriage and her husband's prospects had disappointed her. Sarla is puzzled by Deven's dreams. Deven refuses to respond to her approaches and bars her entry into his world of letters. She feels aged and hunted in the derelict house. The extreme devotion of Deven to his art and



his over involvement in extra activities and with other people, except his wife leads Sarla to a condition of psychic dissociation. Anita deals with the marital problems of this materialistic, alienated, postmodern world where individual isolation leads to conjugal chaos.

Deven, on the other hand is also a victim like her. He lives in an illusory world of being a successful artist. He seeks to add a new dimension to his existence through his literary inclinations and longs for distinction. However he lacks in initiative because of his timidity and indecisiveness. He fails to realise his own weakness of inaction but blames it on being tied to a family and his mundane job. As the title of the novel rightly suggests he has a strong feeling that he is chained to his family and is a prisoner of the compulsion of earning a livelihood in order to support his dependent family. He thinks that life for the past thirty five years has been empty and that marriage, a family and a job had placed him in a cage. He resents the fact that he is entangled to Sarla and Manu and wished for solace which seemed too dear to him. Deven feels Sarla, his wife, to be an obstacle in his becoming a poet in Urdu.

Sarla frequently accused Deven, though tactically, for his inadequacy. Deven in return either avoided those accusations or took extreme measures, he became very aggressive at home but outside he was quiet and submissive. He hurled dishes and become annoyed on simple grounds. His male ego is hurt and he is not able to share his failures with Sarla, as they are degrading for him. He has a typical sense of male superiority.

Sarla also as a typical Indian house-wife does not fight for the injustice done to her face to face. But just shouted or complained when she was at a considerably safe distance from him. Both tried to hurt each other. Anita has presented the two as sadists. Deven gets irritated by her untidy hair, shabbiness, her hunched, twisted posture. He felt Sarla's disappointments were blighting his existence and he refused to allow her to do that. Deven's frequent visits to Delhi to meet his dream poet Nur had no

meaning or sense for Sarla. Neither she understood their importance nor did he try to explain the same to his wife. Both suspected each other's intentions due to the lack of proper communication. When Sarla accused him of having an affair in Delhi and expressed her displeasure at his revisiting the capital, he felt:

that was what she might well do, he feared, to teach him not to venture out of the familiar, safe dustbin of their world into the perilous world of night-time bacchanalia revelry and melodrama. Now he would sink back on to the dustheap like a crust thrown away, and moulder. (*IC* 74)

Deven is pained to notice his pessimistic wife and feels dejected. Complicated problems of married life settle upon both like a grey monster. Neither he understands his wife and her motives nor she does. Both feel insulted and humiliated living in the same room.

However in the novel, although the couple do not have love between them, but they do not resort to breaking the marital bond which tied them. They have the realisation of their mutual duties towards each other. Since the beginning of the novel, Deven is presented as being particular about reaching home in time lest his wife would have to keep waiting for lunch and would get worried. He desires money but that too for his family. He shows his concern for them: "I have my job to think of, and my wife and son". "Would have earned a name for himself, a little fame, even gold bangles for Sarla . . ." (*IC* 175).

Even Sarla cares for Deven as a dutiful wife. When Deven returns from his expedition from Delhi, she tries to relieve him of his tiredness and takes care of him. Sarla also feels happy when Deven plays with their son.

Towards the end of the novel, Deven admits that Sarla too has been a sufferer like him. He understands her predicament and feels that even she shared his failures and woes. Both understood the secret truth about each

other just as one prisoner understands the other. However they also sensed that two victims ought to avoid each other so that their joint disappointments are not yoked and enhanced. Both search for an outside redeemer. Deven felt satisfied that at least he had his poetry to uplift him, she had nothing except her silence.

The condition of Nur Shahjehanabadi, the Urdu poet, Deven's ideal, is similar to that of Deven. Nur has two wives. The first wife of Nur stands for duty. She has been overshadowed by the second wife, Imtiaz begum, whom he probably married for an heir and is much younger to the first one. The elder has maturity in her thoughts and accepting her fate of childlessness and of being a cast-over by her husband, feels satisfied even by the slightest idea that Nur still relishes the Biryani made by her. She feels proud to convey to all that only she is the one who can cater to Nur's taste buds.

Nur, however, is infatuated by the younger wife. He has an enormous attachment for her but in turn is not able to derive any happiness or satisfaction from her. The overindulgence of Nur with his poetry and his admirers are repulsive and combative to Imtiaz Begum. She rebuked Nur for spending time with the foolish people who listened to his poetry and abused him openly in high pitch. She, on the contrary, nurtures the dream be a poetess herself. She yearns for appreciation. Hailing from a house of dancers she is a melodramatic, shrewd girl with flowery Urdu. Perhaps she married Nur only to fulfil her own ambition of being recognized as a poetess. She is presented as being vicious and enraged with Nur all the time. She wished to earn name and fame for herself. She is not satisfied with simply clinging to her husband who she feels has failed to provide her with what she wants, that is, acknowledgement as a poetess. Imtiaz Begum assumes the role of the controlling agent between the two. Anita describes her as a "jealous tigress" (*IC* 135) and as 'venomous begum' (*IC* 139). She had ferocious feelings for the great poet. Her motive seemed to be to persecute Nur. She calls the life spent with Nur as horrible and inferior and insulting him says to Deven:

“Did he marry me to make me live in a pigsty with him? Am I to live like a pig with all the rest of you”? (IC 66), She screamed “D’ you think I entered this house to keep company with a swine” (IC 67).

Imtiaz begum is not satisfied to be a stereotypical housewife of a famous poet. Nur was helpless before her. She made Nur feel foolish and even forbade him from public speaking. There was only a pathetic resignation in old man’s posture in presence of his wife. She made Nur lose his self confidence and in panic Nur says, "She is right - absolutely right - I only make a fool of myself - an old man, my day is over - and people laugh, or feel bored, they want someone new, and young, you see-?" (IC 134). She was determined not to let Nur recite or let Deven record his verses.

Nur cares for her, loves her truly but is thrown into a pathetic state by her insincerity and self love. He is unable to keep her emotional outbursts in control and surrenders to her whims completely. He is caught between an uneducated wife with her crude speech and the scandalous, vindictive, dance girl. All this, the trap from which there was no release, drained Nur of his energy and talent and at the end Nur only wishes for the primordial sleep.

As a postmodernist, Anita presents the shifting gender constructs without coding it as either good or evil, moral or immoral. Nur, unlike the typical Indian husband is not the phallus - the power centre of the family- but the victimised. Even Imtiaz Begum is a deviational character who has no inclination to conform to the norms of the society and pay unconditional respect to her acclaimed husband, rather she wishes to seek and establish her own identity and get applauded.

*Fire on the Mountain (FOM)* is another Desai’s micro-cosmic world which presents the miserable plight of Nanda Kaul, the central character, who suffers alienation and fragmentation of personality owing to an insensible and inconsiderate husband. Through her Anita has tried to reassess the known in a new context. The author here presents the cliched

life of Nanda Kaul, the wife of a Vice-Chancellor, who married her not out of love, but just as a show piece - a companion fit to be presented proudly in society. Nanda Kaul, a woman of sophistication, throughout her life remains busy gratifying with full fervour her husband and too many children. Outwardly, the Kauls were an ideal couple to the university community but from inside all was void and the whole social role and socialising was a sham :

Not that her husband loved and cherished her and kept her like a queen - he had only done enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David, the mathematics mistress whom he had not married because she was a Christian but whom he had loved all his life. (*FOM* 145)

Nanda Kaul without voicing her pent-up frustrations of a loveless life, presided over the Vice-Chancellor's house in the small university town in Punjab with such an air that she was revered and appreciated by visitors with awe. She was always busy mending clothes, sewing on strings and buttons and letting out hems, instructing servant, taking care of the children and playing a welcome host to the whole array of guests always flooding their house. Ironically, the intruders referred to her as the queen of the territory to which she had no sense of real belongingness. Anita describes her as: "Mentally she stalked through the rooms of that house-his house, never hers . . ." (*FOM* 20). She just ironically submitted to her duties with resignation and felt these bindings like a noose slip around her neck. She sought solitude from the hubbub of life which was lacking warmth and affection. Frightfully busy like a clock throughout the day, Nanda Kaul found little time for herself only while she took an afternoon nap. It was the only time when she shut herself out from the outside unwanted light and sound. No one dared rouse her during her 'hour of rest' (*FOM* 25). At that time she took an effort not to respond to anyone. After which she would resume her daily routine with a sigh: "All right, she would say, sitting up on the edge of her bed and letting down her feet to search for her slippers, then

straightening her hair - all right she'd sigh, come, come all of you, get me, I'm yours, yours again" (*FOM* 26).

She seeks solitude, not to rest her body but her pain-filled mind. She is apprehensive to be hurt again by the absence of concern on the part of the family towards her. The relationship they share is a kind of pathological relationship, characterised by deceitful games and frauds. The communication between the members of the family is limited to cater to the everyday needs. It is a game involving mutual self-deception. This game colours their whole life. Anita here explores the idea that women need more fulfillment in their lives than can be provided by the drudgery of childrearing and housekeeping. Nanda Kaul was unhappy in her domestic roles. Her life as a typical housewife seemed to her as a mockery, all the more when she realised that her husband was carrying on a silent affair with Miss David, the mathematics teacher. This filled her with vengeance towards her long life of duty and obligation. She felt cheated but her husband took no heed to her feelings. All this eroded so much of her vitality and happiness that even the mention of the game of badminton and the time spent on badminton court with her friend Ila Das made her feel disgusted. It was because it reminded her of Miss David, who used to play badminton with Mr Kaul often. This remembrance of the affair again and again was all the more torture some as it brought to her the consciousness of the wretched relationship she shared with Mr. Kaul.

Through Nanda Kaul, Anita Desai seems to present the ploddings of the prosaic routine of an Indian wife what Simone de Beauvoir, the famous French feminist, also quoted in her book *The Second Sex*:

Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day. The housewife wears herself out marking time: she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present. . . . Eating, sleeping, cleaning-

the years no longer rise up towards heaven, they lie spread out ahead, grey and identical. The battle against dust and dirt is never one. (105)

However Nanda Kaul does not reject the institution of marriage, it is only after the death of Mr. Kaul and after discharging all her duties towards her children, that she decided to leave her house of eternal suffering and take refuge in Carignano, her home on the ridge in Kasauli. It is ironical though that she does not find, her much desired peace, even there and is again enclenched in the tangles of her family duty, restraining her freedom. It is because, in her territory of privacy too she is intruded by her great granddaughter Raka, who is sent by Nanda's daughter, Asha, due to certain adjustment problems that Raka's parents were facing. By this Nanda is again caught in the vicious circle of caring for her relatives. She is unable to achieve her much desired freedom and solitude.

Her granddaughter Tara, also suffers from maladjustment in marriage. She married a diplomat who was inhuman, a man of questionable character and a drunkard. He looked at Tara as being an unfit wife and the cause of his humiliation in society. This ill-treatment reduced Tara to a state of utter disappointment and helplessness. The man had accepted all the vices of a society and tried to remove his wife out of sight. Unfortunately all this had lead to Tara's nervous breakdown. Anita Desai has hereby drawn a typical scene of an Indian household where domestic violence and brutality is quite rampant. Tara's husband constantly beats her with hammer and hurls filthy abuses at her. Asha, Tara's mother again and again tries to convince her to return to the successful, loveless diplomat and considers this as her triumph.

The fearsome outcome of domestic unrest has also been reflected by Desai in the personality of Raka, the granddaughter of Tara. She does not grow into a normal, healthy child as she had never experienced love and warmth in her house. So she repulsed from society and enjoyed ugliness and devastation. The disturbed relationship of her father and mother had ruined

her innocence and happiness.

Anita's compassion towards the plight of women who are prisoners of boring mundanity is redeemed with sensitivity in Nanda Kaul's portrayal where there is a reinstatement of the psychological anguish suffered by the characters - re-figuring or fragmenting their total life-experiences. Anita Desai, invading the realm of psychological realities, lays bare the absence of a proper balance between the traditional grooves and the unconventional role undertaken by the postmodern women. Anita looks into the reasons of marital discord but neither revolts nor rebukes.

The novel *Clear Light of Day (CLD)* is replete with examples of temperamental differences which cause emotional discords. The kernel of the story deals with life of four members - Tara, Bim, Raja and Baba. Anita here, has dealt with undesirable aspects of contemporary urban life, where some affluent parents show no concern for their children. The father and mother of the protagonists are only concerned about themselves and about each other. The father suffers from indolence and neglects both his family as well as his business. The children knew him only as a person leaving for either office or club and returning late. The mother was busy with her club affairs and was too engrossed in her game of cards. Both, husband and wife, found their familial duties irritating and took no initiative to communicate with or understand their children. Father is shown as taking constant care of her diabetic wife assuming it as his prime duty. Later, when she passes into coma and is hospitalised, instead of going to the club, the father goes to the hospital every evening. However nothing about the mother's illness is communicated to the children, they only come to know about this from the hospital smell his clothes bear. This bears proof to the absence of communication and of reciprocal bonding between the parents and children.

Tara, their second daughter, is married to Bakul, who is an official in the external affairs department in the Government of India, at an early age of eighteen. Tara married him to escape the dark, forbidden house and the



college life. Tara looks upon her life at home and at school like a confinement and found Bakul as her scapegoat. Their marriage is not based on love but on practical needs. The repressive atmosphere of the house made Tara feel the urgency of getting married and so when she saw Bakul for the first time she was highly impressed: "At that time I was just - just swept off my feet. Bakul was so much older and so impressive, wasn't he? And then he picked me, paid me attention - it seemed so wonderful and I was overwhelmed" (*CLD* 238).

Bakul in turn married her as he was a socialite and needed a presentable wife who could inflate his male ego and follow his instructions unquestionably.

Critically analysing the relationship in the present context, it is that of convenience and dependence. Tara's life is ruled by her husband. She chooses passive surrender and obedience to Bakul without reasoning. The insecurity which was Tara's lot in her parental home made her respect the dominant and authoritative figure of her husband. Whenever she voiced her own choice or disagreement she did that in a low tone. As in an incidence when Bakul asked her to get ready for a party against her wish she said, "I don't think I'll come after all", she mumbled. She always mumbled when she was afraid, as if she hoped not to be heard. She expected him to explode" (*CLD* 26). In absence of any other alternative Tara is happy to submit herself completely to a mature spouse, who is also her mentor and guide. He undoubtedly has helped her to become a sophisticated woman and loves her unconditional submission to himself. He considers her increased self-confidence and improvement in her personality as his own achievement. Bakul proudly says, "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" (*CLD* 26). Thus her helpless and defeatist attitude, after returning to her home throws him into a fury. He feels Tara had failed to live up to his expectations.

Tara is depicted as a docile and subdued figure believing in the tradition of following her husband blindly, as the finest virtue. Anita Desai, here articulates the fact that relationships which an individual forms are influenced by the conventions and traditions they imbibe since birth through faith and culture. However later Tara realises the burden of continuity of being a mute follower and feels that she had been chased by him enough: “It had 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” (*CLD 27*).

The quote by Bertrand Russell, a British philosopher and social critic, in his renowned book *Marriage and Morals* also explains his identical vision about power relations between husband and wife. He has gone to the extent of saying :

Owing to the subjection of woman there has in most civilized communities been no genuine companionship between husbands and wives, their relation has been one of condescension on the one side and duty on the other. (17)

Thus through Tara and Bakul hypocrisy of Indian social and family life is expressed. Anita's vision is to present the picture of postmodern era where any attempt to develop an authentic relationship within the framework of marriage needs re-orientation and true companionship which is often missing.

In the novel the Misra sisters, friends of the protagonists' family, Sarla and Jaya, also have an unhappy marriage and are divorced. In their case the husbands were too modern, too smart. They played golf and went to parties and danced. But Jaya and Sarla were boring and simple- they could not understand their husbands' needs- all they wanted to do was cook and knit for them. Thus, owing to vast temperamental difference between the couples, the sisters were soon sent home.

Another man-woman relationship presented in the novel, with the theme of suffering and estrangement, is that of the brother Raja and sister Bim. Bim is the eldest unmarried sister who is far from the traumas of an incompatible marriage. She willingly devotes her life to the care of her mentally retarded younger brother, Baba. Bim is very close to her younger sibling, Raja. Bim admired Raja's masculinity and to her Raja had all heroic qualities-of independent thinking and courage. As a boy, Bim took great care of Raja. She nursed him when he was sick and grew anxious by his frequent visitations to Hyder Ali's house and his returning home late. She waited up till late for Raja to come home. She felt Raja was being pursued by Hyder Ali. Raja secretly appreciated his sister's love for books and her intelligence as he knew he himself could not have tackled a study of such lengthy books which Bim read out to him , but he does not express it due to his male chauvenism and says only that: "But you don't understand, . . . You don't know any Urdu, you can't understand" (*CLD* 71). That created a gap between them- a trough or a channel- which even the books they shared did not bridge. Desai's insight into human nature illuminates the reasons for discord between the brother and sister. The relations between brother and sister have been soured and embittered on account of small issues. Their intellectual differences create a hiatus between them. Bim was bored by the books Raja brought but tried not to disappoint him by showing her boredom, although he discerns that and is hurt. Such is the outcome of the drift between the two and Raja's quest for a better life that Raja decides to leave Bim, shows unconcern and goes to Hyderabad to live with the family of Hyder Ali.

In the character of Tara and Raja, Anita has championed the role of boredom and stillness in creating a strong urge for the conquest of happiness. Raja wishes to reach out to new experiences and a new life, drawing away from his soil and darkness of their home. He views life with a typical postmodern utilitarian spirit, judging it purely by material standards. Moreover, in the novel, through the character of Bim, Anita presents the theme of role reversal and reduction of male power by the assertion of

female power- a method used by postmodernist women novelists.

As long as marriages continue to be unemotional business transactions, they will unceasingly result in traumatic experiences of married couples. Anita Desai puts forward her vision of life in which woman does not remain in background yet she is quite lackluster when put besides male in a nuptial bond.

*Fasting, Feasting (FF)* presents the subdued life of the mother of the protagonist, Uma, who has no space for herself except in the mundane affairs. The father is the hub of all activities. The father rules over her in a subtle way and decides all the important affairs of the household. He makes her his spokesperson only on those matters which he considers trivial. The mother is made to agree to father habitually and the father does not heed to the casual matters of domesticity. So that, when one speaks the other remains quiet because it is presumed that one speaks for both. The parents are presented as leading a life of twins with any convincing value lacking in either. They had nothing specific to cling to: "MamaPapa, MamaPapa, PapaMama. It was hard to believe they had ever had separate existences, that they had been separate entities and not MamaPapa in one breath" (*FF* 5). This indicates that the facade of love between them is so strong that they cease to have separate identities. Uma further says :

If Papa gave his opinion of their local member of parliament or the chances of the government in the next election, Mama said nothing because he had spoken for her too; when Mama spoke of the sales at which she planned to buy towels or of the rise in the price of silver. . . . Papa made asserting grunts because his thoughts were one with hers . . . ; if it does not affect Papa much then mother is given the liberty to decide but if it is something important then Papa is to decide and Mama is expected to stick to it. (*FF* 13)

He (Papa) had not only made her his wife, he had made her the mother of his son. What honour what status (. . .). She had matched Papa's achievement, you could say, and they now more equal than ever was that love? Uma wondered disgustedly, was that romance? (*FF* 13)

Thus, inextricably intervened in Anita's novel is the theme of underlining gender biasness. The mother is forced to lead a life that suits the father, her decisions are brushed away when it does not suit the whims of the husband. Anita here points out the privileged life that a male leads which is wholly denied to females. Overdominant man and the submissive nature of woman is held responsible for all the vicissitudes that occur in the life of females.

The pivotal character of the novel, Uma is also shown as being humiliated by all the males she comes in contact with. As in many novels of Jane Austen, Anita in *Fasting, Feasting* unfolds the fact that hunting for a suitable match is one of the chief preoccupations for a mother of a daughter. The novel demonstrates through the character of Aruna, Uma's friend and neighbour, and her mother that women need to marry men even if they are not in love with them simply in order to gain financial security. A woman who is successful in such a pursuit is considered to be fortunate, and a woman who fails in this field is considered incompetent by the society. What Jane Austen, the famous English novelist, in her novel *Pride and Prejudice* said comes true here also:

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. (1)

Marriage is considered to be the end road for girls. Only marriage is considered to be the noble way of living for women by parents. Uma is shown as a simple girl who is an utter failure as far as society is concerned. She is plain looking and never masters the art of housekeeping, thus

thwarting her prospects of finding a good husband. She cherishes the desire to lead a life that fascinates her, that is a life of education, sophistication and freedom. She wants to work at a local hospital but her proposal is whisked by her parents because her father considers below his dignity to let his daughter work anywhere. As far as marriage proposals are concerned the very first suitor shows interest in her younger sister, Aruna. This enraged Mama who then “worked hard at trying to dispose off Uma, sent her photograph around to everyone who advertised in the matrimonial columns of the Sunday papers, but it always returned . . . even though the photograph had been carefully touched up the local photographer, . . . ” (*FF* 88). Thus indicating how desperate she was to get her daughter Uma married as this was the only possible future for Uma that she could think of and perhaps the only way to get rid of her too.

Second time Uma is accepted by the groom's family and gets engaged but the boy's family keeps the dowry advanced to them and snaps off the ties. The man who finally approved of it and considered the match with Uma good enough was not so young and was already married. He was in pharmaceutical business and lived in an extended family. Due to the absence of any other proposal for Uma, the parents decided to proceed with the negotiations. Anita Desai has given voice to the social evil of dowry here. The marriages were decided on the basis of the amount of dowry offered. Uma was not even asked her opinion and was not allowed to meet her would be husband even once before marrying. She was unwillingly married to a man who looked as old to her as papa and was overweight too. What disturbed her most was his unenthusiastic attitude and sullen expressions. The bridegroom was so irritated with the marriage and the ceremony that he even shouted at the priest to cut it short. Uma was perturbed: “If he could not even tolerate the wedding ceremony, how would he tolerate their marriage”? (*FF* 92). When the celebrations were over, no one in the marriage party paid any attention to the new bride. Since the first day she realised that all her unrealistic hopes of a happy married life were to be

shattered. The very first day after marriage her husband disappeared, only to learn after a few days that she and her family had been deceived. Harish was already married, had a wife and four children and had remarried Uma just for dowry. The treatment meted out to Uma after that was that of an unfortunate, burdensome, trouble maker. Uma was considered a disgrace to the family: “an outcast from the world of marriage, the world which, all the murmuring and whispering and muttering implied, was all that mattered” (FF 99).

*Fasting, Feasting* is thus an assertion of male chauvinism in the society which impairs the existential journey of the women related to them- as a wife, daughter or sister. Anita Desai seems to suggest that there is no escape from the affairs of life. She advocates the notion that marriage is for life and attributes importance to the wedding knot. There is a unique manifestation of the dilemma of Indian urban set up and unsatisfactory relationships resulting in mental and emotional springs in the novels of Desai. The phenomenon of dissimilarity in attitudes resulting in strained relationship runs through almost all her novels.

The sanctified, important and blessed institution of marriage is no longer treated sacred. According to Desai, not the ethical laws, but it is only proper conveyance between man and woman that can make this bond accomplished. In the absence of which this relation in the postmodern era is getting almost defiled and distorted. However she does not present man and woman as straightforwardly opposing each other, fighting for their rights or laying new societal foundations. Like modernists, postmodern writers do not imply a change in the values of enlightenment but their writings are a sorting out of their own experiences and perceptions towards certain external or internal incidents and recording them, without any attempt at giving specific definitions of freedom and morality.

Anita has an independent approach to these relationships. She does not believe marriage to be a rainbow dream. She accepts that as marriage is a

union of two different minds, maladjustment is bound to be there. It is natural for two human beings, in case of absence of proper and meaningful communication, to think and react differently towards the same things. It is the woman, however who is expected by the society to lose her sensibility and sensitivity and erode herself.

Just like Anita Desai, Gokhale advocates that man and woman cannot lead a life of indifference towards each other. Great value has been placed on marriage and family in her novels too as Desai. However, Namita Gokhale targets sexuality as the basis of transition in society, leading the traditional and the so tagged modern civilization further towards postmodernism. She is unafraid of breaking stereotypes and attacks both the institutions by presenting her protagonists' attempt to be man's equal by gratifying their own sexual and emotional needs. She, like Desai, has dealt with the theme of man-woman relationship in a most objective manner, shaking off the shackles of social conventions. Her novels also chime with the theme of strained husband-wife relationship in the contemporary world with an interesting interplay of fantasy and reality. Gifted with good observation, sensitivity, a penetrating analysis and a skill to paint with words both the novelists successfully delineate the difficulty the characters face to link up the two worlds-the world within and the world without. Being postmodern writers their novels cross and re-cross the canonical boundaries between the aesthetic, the philosophic and the psychological, without making any attempt at invoking the faculty of reasoning or morality. Thus questioning the preordained truths and patterns resonating throughout society.

Relationships are an inseparable part of man's life. Aristotle remarked two thousand years ago that man's instincts for society are stronger than his instincts for politics and power. An individual is inherently and intermittently interlinked with people around him. The novel *Paro-Dreams of Passion (PDP)* strikingly reflects the causes of agony, anguish and conflict in the personal life of the characters owing to the complexities



and inherent emotional vacuum in the relationships. In *Paro*, Namita represents the constantly changing identity of her protagonists with the simultaneous changes in their relationships. The novel presents Namita's views about marriage through *Paro* in the beginning of the novel:

Marriage . . . I always knew it sounded too good to last. You know, I read somewhere that most women marry the best provider they can stomach. (*PDP* 29)

Priya, the narrator, is in love with her boss, B.R., the sewing machine magnate and forms pre-marital relationship with him without any feelings of guilt just like Amla and Dharma in *Voices In The City* of Desai. Although Priya had that feminine grace and assertiveness, she excels in a fiery zeal to outdo every woman for the man she aspired. Whenever she was with B.R. she felt like a princess, every second of it bathed in grace. Namita presents the psychology of Priya, who suffers from class-complex and so winds around B.R. like a tendril of a vine in the hope of finding someone to support her so that she can climb up the social ladder and flourish. Priya, a postmodern character, does not care to be scrupulous about forming pre-marital relationship with B.R. as long as she is happy and satisfied. On the contrary Priya feels honoured to have a relationship with B.R. as it means an upliftment from her low social status. B.R. in turn is just on the lookout for some physical satiety. Their relationship is based on mutual needs not on love. It could not transform into marriage due to the difference in their financial positions stated by society. B.R. instead marries *Paro*. The unexpected marriage shatters Priya's dreams and she is hurt. When she saw B.R. dressed as a groom to another woman she felt perplexed and cheated, however B.R.'s attitude was one of sympathy. Priya expresses her emotions: “. . . at the sight of B.R. my heart, my stomach, my legs, all turned to unset jelly. . . . Upon seeing me, his expression changed to one of warmth, of penetration, of special communication” (*PDP* 10).

B.R.'s swift move in marrying Paro led Priya to marry Suresh, a Delhi based lawyer. Suresh was a typical hindu husband who provided good economic and social status to Priya and considered her as solely his responsibility. He was quite social and entertained her regularly. Inside her head she knew that Suresh was a fairly good husband. He tried to give her all possible happiness and appreciated her beauty quite often. For some time their relationship was full of sensuousness and romance. But very soon Priya found Suresh to be insensitive. Her arranged marriage provided her security, position and comfort but failed to make her feel complete and satisfied. Whenever she thought of B.R., her heart would sigh at the difference between him and her husband. She describes her marriage nonchalantly:

My marriage was a middle-class one, much as any other. We did not have many relatives, so it was uneventful, even a little boring. My husband was a virgin and did not seem to notice that I was not. . . . Suresh unburdened his ambitions, his hopes and dreams to me. He even told me that I was beautiful; but it sounded foolish from his lips, although I was flattered. (*PDP* 19)

Priya's pre-marital relationship with B.R. causes dual-person complex in her and she leads a disoriented life. She still secretly liked B.R.. She misses B.R. whose dreams haunt her. This duality carries the germ of discontent in her psyche. The excessive love of Priya for B.R. makes her take a lop-sided view of life and gradually she moves into a world of fantasy wherein she dwells between reality and illusion. She has no real love for Suresh but continues to live with him due to societal norms. She tries to fulfill her suppressed desires by using Suresh's wealth and status. But for Priya every relationship without B.R. "seemed like an incantation against love, hope, faith" (*PDP* 13). As soon as she gets a chance she enters into post-marital sexual relationship with B.R. and feels no remorse about it. "He lavished so much tenderness upon me that I was overwhelmed with gratitude. I wouldn't have mind dying in those moments of perfect bliss . . . .

I did not ever want such joy to end. 'B.R.', Priya said, 'I don't ever want to leave you' " (PDP 34). Being with B.R., as Suresh's wife, Priya felt as if it was a second youth. However this could not last long. She felt her life deserted again when she returned to Suresh's home.

To add to her misery she suffered from a miscarriage. Priya says, "I lost my baby: Never before and never after, had I known such a pain. I am referring not to the physical pain, which was negligible, but to the desolation, the sudden emptying out of reason and beauty and hope from life" (PDP 64). Priya further says, "losing the baby had left painful, indelible scars on both of us, and we shared only our silences" (PDP 86). Outwardly life returned to normal but it caused a further drift between Priya and Suresh. Even Suresh is deeply hurt and he engrosses himself in his work to become busier, trying to forget the pain. Thus, Priya is left alone to bear her grief. Suresh's expectation from life in the form of children fails so he moves away, not only from Priya but also from himself. Namita here gives a picture of postmodern life, life which has its own kind of truth, where the chief source of pain and desolation is lack of communion. Suresh was almost in the top bracket in his profession in Delhi. He tried to return home late after the incident in order to avoid any revocation of the memory of the lost child. Priya also tried to make herself busy by taking a part time job in a book shop. They hardly talked to each other. They were like two separate beings sharing the same house. The intimacy of their married life disappears. Priya tries to hide her extra-marital relationship with B.R. from her husband but is unable to do so. The truth is revealed to Suresh by reading her diary. Suresh too indulges in physical relationship with Paro. Paro is an unwelcome intrusion to Priya in her married life and she feels disgusted. They decided to end this farce of barrenness and starkness and so Priya moves away from the wedlock to her brother's house. In her brother's house she feels haunted by loneliness and insecurity and resorts to suicide. However, maturity adorns their relationship in the end, and both decide to give it a second try and live together again. About relationship what Dr. Leland Forster Wood, a famous

marriage counselor, in the Third International Planned Parenthood Conference, said seems to be true here in case of Priya and Suresh:

Emotional maturity is a primary requisite to success in marriage. More mature people face responsibilities realistically. . . . Mature spouses are thoughtful and unselfish in their love; less mature ones are likely to be selfish and in love with themselves. Lack of consideration, selfishness, deceit and disrespect are danger signals in marriage. (qtd in Ghanshyam and Mukta 45).

Namita, like Desai, believes in the similarity of needs of men and women. Both these writers break away from the particular social structure of assumption and essentialism of formulated roles of females and even males. Here, Priya's life can be considered akin to that of Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* who also leads an emotionally and physically dissatisfied life with her husband Raman, runs away temporarily only to return back to her responsibilities acting with poise and maturity.

The relationships that Paro, another protagonist, the axis of the novel, establishes with numerable men form another core of the story. Endowed with sensuous perfection, she is gifted with subtle tactics to lure males. The status of Paro in the novel is somewhat mystical and paradoxical. Every relation of Paro in the novel is based upon her desire to get sexual satisfaction and complete victory over her partner but eventually ends in hatred, vice and sin. The daughter of a retired brigadier, Paro, is an exotic creature. When in a boarding school, she had an early affair with the art master and was consequently expelled from school. In college, at Delhi, she met B.R. who fell for her "like a ton of bricks" (*PDP* 19). These two incidents changed the very course of her life.

After her marriage to B.R. Paro maintains a well to do family. But one night she finds her husband "screwing neighbour's daughter" (*PDP* 59)

in her bedroom. This faithlessness and promiscuity of her husband struck Paro deeply. She tried to rip herself with a knife. When B.R. saw the wound he did not pay much heed and laughed at her. Deeply hurt she decides to choose the path of infidelity to take revenge from B.R., with the result that their relationship ends in divorce within a short span of marriage. Paro separates from her first husband and feels herself free. She expresses her feeling thus, "He had his whores and wanted me to take it. But I left him and his money-" (*PDP* 50). As her relationship with B.R. was devoid of any emotional warmth she felt she was a 'liberated' woman (*PDP* 141). She tries extra-martial affairs as an antidote. Shattering the establishing codes of morality, she moves from one relationship to another, from B.R. to Bucky Bhandpur, a sportsperson of much fame, then to Avinendra, the son of Minister of state for Industry and then to a politician Shambhu Nath Mishra. She has an amazing potential for progress in her relationship with men and society which is presented blantly by the novelist. Just six months after she broke up with B.R., she was with Bucky Bhandpur, test cricketer and scion of a princely family. Soon after, she left 'Bucky' as well and her next prey was Avinendra or Lenin. Lenin was young enough to be her son, and as Priya described the relationship between Paro and Lenin:

Lenin was completely dependent on her emotionally, and I wondered sometimes whether it was a mother fixation or something psychological like that. They looked a little ludicrous in juxtaposition-Paro, massive, towering . . . ; and Lenin, in his crumpled kurta-pyjama, trailing behind her as she stormed in and out of cars, houses, lobbies, like a leaf in a summer aandhi. (*PDP* 49)

Paro stuck to him like a burr just to fulfill her selfish ends. One night they had a massive fight. After the fight with Lenin, Paro laments and says, "To hear this baby, who I love like a son, calling me a whore? To hear this?' Her face crumpled, and another convulsion of tear overcame her" (*PDP* 50). She even attempted suicide and made Lenin feel remorseful for her doing.

Finding Lenin under guilt she did her best to overpower him further and acted like an absolute tyrant shamelessly and relentlessly. They even had a son named Junior. Paro, acted carelessly as a mother too, and even motherhood could not keep her from forming illicit relationship with Shambhu Nath Mishra. These incidents snatch Paro of her dignity. Lenin and Junior are horrified by her behaviour, they felt like “children at a massacre, helpless” (*PDP* 75). Her immaturity and perversity caused misery to all - herself, Junior (Aniruddha) and Lenin. Even Lenin gets tired of her, leaves her and marries Gita. However he always cared for Paro and loved and admired her latently.

Paro’s affair with Shambhu Nath is also presented by Namita as a reflection of her obsession with herself, her self-love. Paro confessed “He is so ugly, so repulsive, that he makes me feel beautiful” (*PDP* 77).

Paro even ditches her friend Priya and gets involved with her husband, Suresh. She does not care for the feelings of the people she is associated with as long as her own ambitions and desires are fulfilled. She aspires for her goals and her rights at any cost and has an eye on fame, riches, contacts and power. The pace of her life is very fast. Perhaps unable to understand herself, she is unable to understand anyone.

As for B.R. he is also unable to form any nurturing, genuine and meaningful relationship. He has physical relationship with many women but these turn out to be mere physical gratifications. B.R. was a meticulous businessman who was successfully running the company founded by his father. In spite of being a business tycoon of immense wealth and power, he was not a happy man which promoted him to run after women. “And he allowed himself to be used as a lamp post, or as a letter box for women to send messages to their husbands through. I (Priya) don’t think he ever refused a woman; it was as though he were bound, by his code of honour, to ravish every female he encountered” (*PDP* 63). He is infatuated with Priya, uses her and leaves her for Paro. Though he falls in love with Paro but is

unable to sustain their marriage due to his promiscuity with other women. Even after his divorce with Paro he did not relent or feel regretful. B.R. married Bubbles just six months after Paro left him and “already he was flaunting his mistresses through Bombay’s cloistered social circles” (*PDP* 32). Through B.R., Namita has portrayed a weak-willed and emotionally insecure man. She reflects how in the contemporary society, sexual mores and social norms are changing and people live according to their will and instant needs. B.R. said:

Men are very insecure creature . . . they need a lot of love.  
And they need beautiful women . . . unfortunately beautiful  
woman are seldom designed to provide love. (*PDP* 35)

Postmodernists are open to the play of differences and that is what is depicted in this novel, with the author lashing at the male/ female opposition which interferes with the unity of the mind. In Paro and Priya's characters, Namita seems to defend the difference against the existing order organised around a single standard. Both Priya and Paro defy the moral orthodoxy of patriarchal social system. Paro does not desire security or status from marriage as common women do but redefines the predicament of a single woman by challenging conventional values and codes. She lacks the representational harmonising principal of femininity but dominates the males she comes in contact with. She has none of the traits of the stereotyped women. Namita, by presenting Paro forming relationship with men fearlessly and without constraint, seems to fight against the airtight definitions of masculine and feminine, and aims at placing women in just perspective. Namita like Desai has a very different idea of virtue and a virtuous woman, different from the stereotypical good woman in India. The women in the novels do not suffer speechlessly but take a stand.

Namita’s *Gods Graves and Grandmother (GGG)* is a remarkable novel in the backdrop of semi-urban Delhi where the story moves between the everyday details of poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and innocence. The

central character, Gudiya is a teenage girl, whose father is unknown. She belongs to a rich Muslim family where the females earn their living by prostitution. Gudiya, the narrator is an innocent girl whose life swings between fashionable dreams to grief in real life. In the initial years of childhood Gudiya lives with her Ammi - her grandmother, and mother in a big haveli having one hundred and thirty two rooms. A turn of fate renders the family poor and destitute with tragic consequences. Soon after that her mother elopes with a beggar, leaving Gudiya alone with Ammi. Ammi is left alone to fend for herself and her granddaughter. Ammi transforms her and Gudiya's life completely by choosing to lead the life of a saint as a means of livelihood. They move into a temple where Gudiya constantly dreams of her past life full of luxuries. Though there is a lot of generation gap between the two, Gudiya has no one to hook on to except Ammi. Gudiya grows up feeling love sick. Reaching her teenage she hopes to find love and security in marriage. She has high expectations from marriage and enquires about the same of Pandit Kailash Shastry, a soothsayer by profession and a regular visitor to Ammi's temple, "I want to know only one thing. Will I marry a rich man? And when"? (*GGG* 104). Gudiya, at the controversial age of seventeen is infused with the fantasy of a dream prince by Pandit Kailash Shastry who says:

When the end of the world approaches, Kalki will come astride a pale horse and put an end to this confusion of sin and pain. Lord Vishnu, it is said by those who know, will appear in his tenth and final avatar. He will come as Kalki. . . . After this a New Age will begin, when, once again, virtue and happiness will reign on the earth. (*GGG* 134)

Gudiya starts nurturing the vision of finding her liberator in the form of Kalki. Thus, when she saw the young, handsome, orphan, bastard, bandwallah, a member of the Shiv Mohan Bond party, she assumed him to be no other than Kalki and got infatuated to him. Even Kalki himself does not reveal his real name in the novel till the end. She was fascinated by him



and Kalki was always in her thoughts. She wishes for a physical communion with him whom she found “heartbreakingly handsome” (GGG 151). Sharing intense feelings, when Kalki took her to a marriage and tried to make love to her, she easily gave in, “I knew that I was irrevocably in love” (GGG 159), said Gudiya. In the presence of Kalki she felt ecstatic. But the relationship between them was one of exploitation. Kalki was devoid of any emotional attachment with Gudiya. Since the beginning Gudiya describes their contact as: “When he entered me I let out a fierce cry of pain. He put his hand over my mouth and told me untenderly to shut up, . . .” (GGG 153). He lost interest in Gudiya soon after exploiting her sexually. Their relationship was based purely on the irony of gender-biasness as John Beynon, the well-known British academic, says in *Masculinities and Culture*:

Men’s masculinity is displayed through characters such as violence, aggressiveness, dominance and unemotionality while women’s feminity is revealed by their passiveness, submissiveness and emotionality. (185)

Kalki, as a typical male, treats Gudiya badly after the physical encounter is over. Further, being found out by Phoolwati, Gudiya's close associate and caretaker, when Kalki is forced to marry Gudiya, he feels stifled and suffocated as he had never desired to be bonded to her in marriage. It is said that love can flourish only as long as it is free and spontaneous; it tends to be killed by thought and duty. To say that it is your duty to love so-and-so is the surest way to cause you to hate him or her. When forced by Phoolwati and Sundar, Kalki looked at Gudiya with rage and hatred and his behaviour changed remarkably after their engagement. He became formal and maintained an elaborate distance from her. She longed for intimacy and tenderness but was frustrated. He no more trusted her and posed dignity. Thereafter a bond was forged between them in the form of a legal marriage. Their marriage was nothing but a sham for Kalki. Gudiya tried to arouse his interest in her by trying different ways and looks, like getting her nose pierced but could not reduce the vanity and cruelty of Kalki.

This indifference made Gudiya tired and depressed. The incidence of adorning her nose with the dazzle of a diamond to make herself pleasurable to Kalki echoes the ideas of the renowned writer and feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft, who says in *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* that women try to cultivate their beauty and their senses at the expense of their minds because their only means of establishing themselves economically and of obtaining a measure of power is by attracting a husband. To this object their persons are often legally prostituted. To quote her:

Pleasure is the business of woman's life-they have, to maintain their power, resigned the natural rights which the exercise of reason might have procured them, and have chosen rather to be short-lived queens than labour to obtain the sober pleasures that arise from equality. (145)

Gudiya, in the similar strain at first tries to please Kalki but is embarrassed. Kalki's callous behaviour, harshness and complete disregard of her feelings ultimately wear her down to the extent that she loses her confidence and her strength. Kalki's habits of gambling and drinking become a great problem for Gudiya and she finds herself unable to adjust to the situation. Phoolwati, a more practical woman advises Gudiya that after marriage she should consider her husband as an expendable being and not waste her time in fabricating the turgid bombast of artificial feelings, as he is the legitimate father of her child now. But realization of her failed marriage leaves Gudiya a broken woman with all her dreams shattered, ". . . that this was how my whole life might pass- indifference, indignities and calculated cruelties" (*GGG* 170). However, her weakness is only artificial and it produces in her a propensity to adjust and excel. The psychological conflict in Gudiya causes her to realise the contradiction between her and Kalki. She displayed more sense than Kalki and suddenly became polite and pleasant to him. Without degrading either of the two, she decided to send Kalki to Bombay to give him a chance to try his luck and free him to fulfill his ambitions. She offered calmly "I'll get you the money, Kalki. I'll sell my

Sridhan for you” (*GGG* 219). And she did that. She definitely felt pain at his departure and dreaded to be alone. But then she grew indifferent to his absence and came to terms with her solitary life. Her infatuation for Kalki finally subsided and she once again felt at ease with her life and decided to confront the unfortunate situation. “So many years of changes and surprises had made me very adaptable, and I fell into the rhythm of my new life with a flexible ease” (*GGG* 215). “On the whole, I managed to maintain a brave front. . . . I resolved to find a way out of the intolerable situation” (*GGG* 217), says Gudiya.

Namita has traced female development through its formative stages - childhood, youth and sexual initiation. She analyses the various situations or roles a teenager girl inhabits. How every force in the society deprives her of her subjectivity and flatters her into an object. Gudiya’s picaresque adventures, innocence and passion are presented with unique sensibility. Her immense love and faithfulness towards her husband, and her commitment exemplify the character of a typical Indian woman. Like Anita Desai, Namita Gokhale also believes marriage to be the sublimation of happiness but to achieve that end, people should have a clear idea of meaning and responsibilities involved towards each other and towards other members of the family.

Another husband-wife relationship in the novel is that of Phoolwati, a devotee of Gudiya’s grandmother who fell in love with Sundar Pahalwan. Phoolwati was attracted to him by his muscles and masculinity. Sundar also admired her and they became partners in various enterprises. Phoolwati was the dominant one amongst the two and was many a time rough in dealing with him and called him as a clown or taunted him as the great wrestler. Both were illiterate and juvenile in the display of their passion. Phoolwati wrote love letters to him which she dictated to Gudiya and in return he would send her musical audio cassettes. Even during bhajans, Phoolwati threw languishing looks at Sundar. She advised Sundar on economic matters and reveled in the multifarious business activities Sundar was involved in.

Gudiya says about their relationship: “I realized that they formed the perfect partnership. Sundar was a very lucky man to have her as an ally” (*GGG* 163). Sundar Pahalwan then proposed marriage to Phoolwati to which she agreed subject to certain conditions like the ownership of a house and freedom to continue her business. They shifted to their dream house. Both enjoyed spending money. Sundar was an indulgent husband and did her best to keep his beloved wife happy. Sundar was always full of praise for her wit and ingenuity. He fondly said, “no one in the whole of India can match my Phoolwati for brains” (*GGG* 191).

Phoolwati has been portrayed as an atypical postmodern woman. She is not too emotional and her love for Sundar is not blind or passionate without constraint. She knew that love is not for life and realised the difference between “a queen of hearts and a queen of diamonds” (*GGG* 231). She was a practical woman. Even when Sundar was shot by an unknown sniper she exhibited poise and calmness and did not scream or cry out or weep. She, with great dignity, and resignation accepted the situation and carried out the ritual of breaking her glass bangles. She was interrogated heavily by the police but she remained indifferent to what could have been a traumatic experience for any woman, and soon recovered and assumed her normal self again. Phoolwati's economic independence is akin to that of Bim in Anita Desai's *Clear Light Of Day*, who does not submit to anybody at the cost of her own financial liberation and self respect - a typical postmodern trait. The only difference is that Bim chooses to remain a spinster while Phoolwati marries, both equally bearing their responsibilities towards their kith and kin by will.

The complex man-woman relationship forms one of the important pivotal points of the novel, *A Himalayan Love Story (AHLS)*. Dealing with the theme of suffering and catastrophe in relationship the novel portrays Parvati, the protagonist, as a frail, poor and neglected daughter of an impoverished illiterate woman, growing up in one of the most backward areas of U.P. at the mercy of her relative, Mr. Hiranand Joshi. Parvati, a sad

and dejected child, first forms an illicit relationship with a co-student, Salman. When she first saw Salman, she was dazzled by his looks and recklessly entered into a physical encounter with him. She says, “We were playing a shadow game, and the most precious ingredient of our passion was that both of us knew that it was not permanent” (*AHLS* 29).

Parvati enjoyed the passion knowing the risk she was taking. Thus when Salman left her forever she felt relieved. However unconsciously the incident affected her life irrevocably and when later she was married she missed the fervour of Salman, which her husband lacked. Parvati is married to Lalit Joshi, the match decided by her uncle Mr. Joshi. She has to comply with his decision, without given any option to make choices. Namita has thrashed at the Indian custom where the life-partners are chosen by parents and relatives, thus increasing the chances of discord after marriage. She questions these dominant long perpetuated traditional values. Parvati is a victim of circumstances. She is a neglected wife, trapped in a complex and unrewarding marriage, finds little as her husband is homosexual. Afraid of social embarrassment and censure Lalit does not disclose the truth of his sexual preferment to anyone. Lalit’s hiding of his homosexual orientation ruins the life of both. Parvati is denied happy and satisfactory conjugal relationship by him. She, who had already enjoyed a passionate physical relationship with Salman, finds it more claustrophobic to live in a sexually starved marriage and expresses her ordeal in words, “I had tasted real passion, and I could feel nothing but scorn of this farce. My young husband looked puzzled even oppressed and kept a stubborn, watchful distance from me” (*AHLS* 33).

She tries to keep her marriage and in an attempt to bridge the gap created by lack of physical intimacy, cooks him good food. But this conventional solution fails to replace the need for carnal pleasure and as a result of this Parvati finds the company of mice and cockroaches less hostile than that of Lalit. She is unable to fit into the role of a sacrificial wife. Lalit’s lofty aim of earning his own freedom and social reputation through

marriage is also ludicrously shattered against the harsh realities of a strained marriage. His inferiority complex makes him resort to domestic violence even for such an innocent act as opening of his letter by his wife without permission.

In Parvati's case also the dystopian horror of a starved and rejected body is brought to the surface. Consequently she gets fulfillment in an incestuous relationship with her brother-in-law, Raju. Being a postmodern woman, she does not accept her fate of sexual dryness. But chooses a reconciliation in her extra-marital affair. This relationship gives her a kind of assurance and she "learnt to love Lalit" too (*AHLS* 45). This cultivated habit of loving her husband is again a reflection of the conventional mind set of Indian society. Loving Lalit on one hand and involvement with her brother-in-law on the other, create ambivalence in the life of Parvati, pushing her to the edge.

Another relationship based on need and not of love is that of Mukul and his wife. Mukul ardently loved Parvati but when his love is not reciprocated - Parvati is married to his friend - he feels lost and rejected. He leaves India and involves himself in other social works. He travels extensively and meets Adelaine, an Anglo-Burmese widow with a girl child, who seduces him. Adelaine tries to stir him sexually but Mukul is unmoved due to his obsession with Parvati. Mukul says about himself and Adelaine, "Our mating was a solemn and joyless event" (*AHLS* 136). Adelaine knew that Mukul could provide the necessary infrastructure of living for herself and her daughter and so motivates Mukul to make the inevitable compromise. She teaches Mukul "the merits of dull comfort over passion" (*AHLS* 136). Gradually Mukul accepts Parvati as a false and fleeting illusion. To Adelaine their marriage is just a social imperative and she considers Mukul as an outsider. Mukul also realised this and felt that his so-called family was happier in his absence. He says, "A wife and children are hostage to fortune" (*AHLS* 202).

His past life and its pangs return to him when he returns to Nainital. He realises that the love that sustained him for so many years was not easy to forsake and nor can the involvement with Parvati and Irra, Parvati's daughter, be condemned as a breach of matrimonial relationship. Torn between a wish to extricate the lady who had neglected him and the sense of past endearment, he fails in self-denial, and tries his best to support Parvati and Irra temporarily, before leaving to take care of his 'wife's daughter'. He says, "I consider you and Parvati my personal responsibility. I shall always be there whenever you need me. Just now . . . just now I have to go away because my wife's daughter is ill" (*AHLS* 202).

But he realises that he could not lead this surrogate life for long and admits that he could not do much for Parvati and Irra. The social taboos and customs thus leave both the protagonists forlorn without providing any kind of solace.

Namita succeeds in presenting through the novel many qualities like love, compassion, greed, belief, tradition, courage, adaptability and bondage. In the postmodern society, the pattern of male expectations and female compliance is transformed now into expectations at both ends, and therefore, the gulf between the modern man's and modern woman's expectations is too deep to be bridged. Compromise with real problems or needs is possible for some time but in the long run, these reappear and cannot be ignored completely, as their reappearance is mostly in a depraved manner. This theme is represented in Desai's novels too like *Fire On The Mountain's* Nanda Kaul who is just chosen by her husband to meet the societal demands. True love is missing and thus ultimately she fails to stick to her unconcerned family. Even Monisha of *Voices In The City* is thrown into a trance of inquisitiveness about the extent of the sacrifices she was supposed to and could possibly make for her husband's family. Namita too in this novel presents the plight of both the characters trapped in an unwanted complex situation. The narrative delineates pictures of matrimonial boredom and monotony of life's dailyness. Both Namita and Anita Desai, unlike many of

their predecessors do not make marital monotony female specific but rather integral to the structure of contemporary marriage, and hence, oppressive for both man and woman. Marital truths are depicted with their mechanicality, gloominess and spiritless routine. Out of boredom - unbearable staleness and ennui set in marriages, and romance, dreaminess and involvement are destroyed. They both voice the belief that relationships formed merely on compromise fail to evolve into anything meaningful or substantial.

Rachita Tiwari in *The Book of Shadows (BOS)* teaches English literature at Jesus and Mary college, and is in love with Anand, her finance' who is also into the same profession. The book begins with the reference to Anand's suicide, which points at his immaturity and weakness. The suicide leads Rachita to a world of regression verging on abnormality. Namita seems to believe what Mary Wolstonecraft says in the *Vindication of The Rights of Women*, that men are the cause contributing to the cramping of understanding of women leading to baneful and desolatory consequences, recking them individually as well as in relation to each other:

. . . if man did attain a degree of perfection of mind when his body arrived maturity. It might be proper, in order to make a man and his wife one, that she should rely entirely on his understanding; and the graceful ivy, clasping the oak that beauty would be equally conspicuous. But alas! husbands, as well as their helpmates, are often only overgrown children; nay thanks to their early debauchery, scarcely men in their outward form and if the blind lead the blind, one need not come from heaven to tell us the consequence. (22)

which very well speaks of the immaturity of men expressed by Namita too in this novel. Although Rachita and Anand like each other but have frequent quarrels on small pretexts and without any particular focus. Rachita once 'yielded to passion' (*BOS* 5) and had a physical relationship with her best friend's husband. Her finance' Anand, unable to bear her



infidelity commits suicide. He doesn't abuse or complain to Rachita, instead passes away silently. This shocks Rachita and the guilt leads her to loneliness:

Anand's tongue, the tongue I had known from his kisses, hung lifeless from the corner of his mouth, like in some comic caricature. It leered at me, it jeered my surprise.

Who was swaying on a rope before me? This was not my lover, the stroker of my brow. It was an unbearable excess of all that was possible and bearable. There was defeat here, and a loss of dignity. (*BOS* 5)

Rachita was unable to believe that all this was true. She was bewildered. Anand's suicide note blaming her for his death has a deep impact on Rachita's mind. Anand lashes at Rachita for her being faithless and breaching his trust. Aggravating her anguish, Anand's sister throws acid on her. She is further tortured by the unsavoury publicity generated by the newspapers after having acid flung at her. The physical and mental trauma lead her to a world of fantasy. Her mind creates an imaginary world. She starts talking and visualising different people and places in her dreams. She is afraid even of closing her eyes as she feels she would see the contorted picture of Anand's sister. She is full of anger and hatred for her. Rachita even has visions of Anand, she loses her present and shifts herself into a ghost world. "Anand was in the room as well, my once beloved Anand who had committed suicide and effectively destroyed my life" (*BOS* 228).

Universal in character, human relationships play a vital role in every story and for every character to whom the sense of dispossession and consciousness about alienation is like a sore in the heart. Namita presents this complex and disheartening situation constantly in her novels. The relationship of Captain Wolcott and Dona Rosa, the former residents in Rachita's paternal house, is another such postmodern encounter established

for the gratification of senses rather than emotions. “It was Wolcott’s looks that had led Dona Rosa to love her” (*BOS* 94). “Wolcott was himself on the run from his past. They fell in love in a welter of confused identities. Dona Rosa had a fatal combination of beauty and forgiveness: men were quick to recognize and exploit these” (*BOS* 98). Dona Rosa was extremely beautiful and had unique vitality in her. She was not gifted with discretion. Wolcott was proud of his own looks and was shallow and stupid. He was an instinctive being given to the absolute and immediate fulfillment of every mental and physical impulse. Dona’s attraction to him was due to her great power of compassion and her excessive interest in the realm of the spirits. Wolcott was an insensitive man and insulted Dona Rosa frequently calling her a ‘prosaic’ (*BOS* 98) and ordinary woman. Dona Rosa was silly and took her insult as a trifle. Commenting on her attitude Namita says, “Love, like magic, is an illusion, but at least it is that. Reality is a shoddy hoax” (*BOS* 156). Wolcott was faithless and soon shifted his attention from Dona Rosa to another guest at the house Veera as soon as he came to know of Veera’s wealth and flat in Bombay. Even Dona Rosa is described as being attracted to another man, Nicolas and getting physically involved with him. Her self-love caused her to appreciate Nicolas Kurtz’s adoration of her beauty. Namita’s novels are agonising re-enactments of the thoughtless, unending and ever-fluctuating life of the contemporary society, delineating sustained patterns of morality and ethics. As regards man-woman relationship, Namita Gokhale, in this novel opines:

Communication is rare between species. (*BOS* 91)

A man’s body is a most peculiar construct. A woman’s body contains a symmetry of purpose - the breasts, which are the conduct of the life-force, and the womb, the matrix of life. A man is an idiot on two legs . . . his life force is stored in a vulnerable exterior container. (*BOS* 90)

Namita Gokhale, through the novel, presents how relationships in this

adverse milieu are characterised by emotional annihilation, destitution and debasement. Human beings have created barriers and hurdles amongst themselves and this lack of apathy has poisoned their inner and outer lives. Namita has presented all as creatures of misery - soulless and dead-men and women all. In her novels it is not the marriage institution itself which is a subject of inquiry but the value system on which it is fore grounded. The novelist does not aim to highlight a woman's suffering due to the injustices of a male-dominated society, but portrays sufferings due to an incomplete relationship, engendered by factors and situations over which either they have no control or are caused by imposition of social codes.

Anita and Namita bear resemblance in the fact that they are not enamoured with the presentation of ideal relationship between the two sexes, but their novels present them as flaccid and are full of the horrible pretensions the association carries with it.

The institution of marriage is of unrivalled significance in the life of a young person. In the life of an Indian woman it marks a point of maturity and signifies the flowering of life. It is a union of two souls. But marriage in postmodern age has turned out to be more of an agreement and not a blissful event which causes an emotional impairment in the husband-wife bonding. Shakuntala, the protagonist of Namita's novel *Shakuntala : The Play of Memory (SPOM)* enters into martial relationship to release herself from the clutches of her mother. It is an act of freeing herself from the tortures of her mother. Shakuntala's mother chooses a life-partner in the form of Srijan, chief of fourteen villages and a widower for her daughter. Shakuntala is his third wife whom Srijan marries for an heir.

In the initial years of her marriage Shakuntala enjoyed a rare degree of freedom. She would swim in the river, climb trees and rest in grassy meadows. But Srijan is opposite to her temperamentally. Srijan is a strict man and his aim was procreation, not emotional entanglement with his wife. He is a responsible and mature man and teaches her to follow the code of

conduct. Shakuntala who wants to enjoy unbridled passion does not like constraints. When in order to please Srijan, Shakuntala once tries to imitate the priests who were chanting mantras from Samveda he reproves her for irreverence and says gravely, “A lady of the household is bound by duties quite distinct from those of a priest or monk, perhaps you are forgetting who you are” (*SPOM* 50).

The incompatibility of their ages and nature snuffs out the spirits of Shakuntala. To add to her misery she is not able to conceive. Such a woman in our Indian tradition is considered ‘barren’ (*SPOM* 49). She was made to feel guilty for this every month her ‘ritu’ (*SPOM* 49) arrived. Shakuntala experiences an escalating anxiety and becomes disturbed. She was made to feel sterile internally. As Margaret Atwood, the Canadian literary critic, in her book *The Handmaid's Tale* says:

In India women are only of two kinds – fruitful or fruitless.  
Sex is for reproduction only : We are two legged wombs,  
that’s all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices. (179)

Shakuntala's misery is worsened and she felt like a lynch victim when Srijan brings home a hand-maiden from one of his many foreign trips. The haughty Lichhavi woman called Kamalini whom he had brought, hardly looked or behaved like a maid. The presence of another woman in the house is intolerable for Shakuntala. But she could do nothing. She had nowhere else to go, no one else to depend on. When Shakuntala asks Srijan about Kamalini’s presence, Srijan does not think it necessary to give any explanations to his legal wife and silences her by saying, “Do not ask any questions, Shakuntala” (*SPOM* 58). Shakuntala concludes that, “he (Srijan) was a man, men were allowed many women, it was the way of the world” (*SPOM* 58), thereby pointing at the heinous practice of polygamy. She collapses at her husband’s indifference and insensitivity but Srijan does not care for her hurt feelings. On the contrary he instructs Shakuntala to treat the newcomer well. Day and night the question of who Kamalini was and why

had she come to her house perturbed her. Namita presents how the protagonist is lost in the maze of human relationships. Shakuntala feels hollow and afraid and even tries to befriend Kamalini but is unable to do so. She becomes desperate to have a child and goes to the priest to plead “It is a child I want”, “A child would change everything” (*SPOM* 102). She even performs all rituals, yajnas, to get a child and takes various herbs as medicines. Srijan remains unaffected by her condition. Shakuntala leads a life of compromise and hopelessness.

Looking for a respite, she gets involved in relationship with another man, Nearchus. She elopes with him to enter into a new domain. Nearchus’ appearance and experience attract her very much. Nearchus is a young and well-built person with muscular things and stocky calves and curliest hair. She says, “He looks utterly carefree, reckless and happy; his square, firm face holds a baffling merriment, and I know, instinctively, that he has travelled for long and through many world to be here” (*SPOM* 109).

Physical charms of Nearchus enchant her and she makes illicit physical relationship with him. Their fierce love-making given her immense satisfaction. With him she feels ecstatic and complete. But this illusion does not last long. She soon realises that she is somebody else’s wife and is with a stranger in a strange unknown city of Kashi. Shakuntala after that feels no affiliation with him rather develops a feeling of guilt. But return journey to her husband is not possible due to strict code of conduct of society. Gradually she becomes dissatisfied and disappointed. Her knowledge of Srijan’s child in her womb is another factor that distances her from Nearchus. Finally, she leaves him too. It is Shakuntala’s misfortune that both the men with whom she has deep communion are unconcerned about her and symbolise only bondage and drudgery.

Namita through Shakuntala’s character presents the fact how women are subdued to their anatomical destinies. They are proclaimed useless if they fail to produce a child. This aspect of strained relationship due to

childlessness has been dealt by Desai too in *Cry, The Peacock* where Maya feels an emotional void due to her inability to procreate or Monisha does in *Voices In The City*. The emotional outlet which they could have got through an innocent child is lacking in their lives, resulting in a life-long scar on their psychology. The difference in the portrayal lies in the reaction of the husbands. Whereas Maya and Monisha's husbands do not burden their wives with their expectations or blame them for any incompetence, Shakuntala's husband treats her with neglect and as worthless due to the same. All these women suffer from a troubled psychology due to this impuissance.

*Priya : In Incredible Indyya (PII)* shares many characters of Namita's debut novel, *Paro : Dreams of Passion*. The approach, however, is completely unique. *Priya : In Incredible Indyya*, the novel, is full of pragmatic postmodern approach towards marriage. The marriage most referred in the novel is that of the narrator, Priya and Suresh, the Minister of State for food processing, animal husbandry, fisheries and canneries. There is a revelation of dehumanizing trend in relationship and that of detached kind of communion. Priya is a practical woman whose marriage includes deception, lies and stratagems for the creation and perpetuation of a superficially secure atmosphere at home. Like many other girls, Priya had opted for an arranged marriage, as it was the only institution which could provide a semblance of socio-economic and emotional security to a mediocre woman within the bounds of a traditional society.

When Priya was shown the photograph of Suresh, plump and intensely serious, leaning against a luxurious car, she very clearly in her mind knew what was good for her secure future. Very practically she says, "It was his car that had decided me" (*PII* 103). Priya, while marrying Suresh just had in mind the position that she would occupy as Suresh Kaushal's wife in society. She did not romanticize the relationship and knew that love was not forever. Even after marriage she many a times suffered belittlement at the hands of Suresh who taunted her for being just a house-wife, "You are a housewife - I want to see if it interests you, Priya" (*PII* 105). Suresh

mocked at her while preparing a speech about food processing. He even refers to not taking dowry from Priya's parents as a mistake that he would not repeat with his sons. She sometimes feels out of place like a housefly in his political gatherings. But she knew the cost of being elite and affluent, of sharing the same surname and said, "Marriage and adjustment are part of the same process" (*PII* 70).

The thirty years of marriage had taught her to bear her husband and be as happy as possible. When she senses an extra-marital affair of Suresh and Poonam, a friend of theirs, she becomes insecure but does not lose hope. Although there was an emotional estrangement between them Priya realised that she did care for their wedlock, for their togetherness. She wanted to carry it on. She was not so much hurt by his infidelity as was by reading the stupid letter he had written, not for her but for someone else. Determined she was, not to let any Poonam have her husband and respecting each others' difference both tried to bring about a happy reconciliation. They knew that they had to continue doing a good job, that of survival. She says, "Suresh is my husband, he belongs to me. Poonam can't have him" (*PII* 116).

She seldom displays her real self to her husband and is watchful to convey the image of an ideal wife, ideal cook, ideal housekeeper and ideal host. Even Suresh appreciates her as a caring wife and mother. Suresh also loved her but temporarily succumbed to the attractions of another woman, Poonam thus proving his meekness and faithlessness. However both Suresh and Priya try to make compromises and adjustments.

Namita presents the postmodern perspective that life offers no promises or confirmations. It has to be lived as it comes to one, there is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects. Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting, Clear Light of Day* also echo the theme of life being inconclusive and baffling as the characters are continuously faced by the changing dimensions of relations.

Sisterhood and women's community are regarded by postmodernists as both a refuge from and a challenge to the oppressive facets of society. Women conceive of their mutual friendship and community as a weapon against a heavily subjugating andocentric value system. Their worlds are eased out by each other's presence. The communion between women is an ideological alternative to woman's subjugation and the only solution to a woman's innate urge for human dignity. It comes as a source of solidarity and confidence to women and as a means of omission of the mainstream male-determined values and masculine insensitivity. Postmodernism considers relationship between women as an important tool for rebellion against the constraints of the prevalent value system. It is one of the ways in which women can solve their problems faced in this barbaric culture as female relationships are ties between the likes, in them a woman learns to mirror herself, not a man and the traditional female role suited to him and the society. In Mary Daly, the renowned American radical feminist philosopher's words in *Beyond God The Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Literature* :

The 'bonding' phenomenon among women, expressed by the word 'sisterhood', is essential to the battle against false consciousness. Only women hearing each other can create a counter world to the prevailing sense of reality. (189)

Both Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale have presented female friendships in their literature not as mere superficial acquaintances and dependencies but as vital examples of female communion. Female encounters have been made supportive, inspiratory, motivational and sustaining, supporting the vein of postmodernism. Their novels are crucial points of authorial interjections of the possible advantages of female bonding, sometimes by a deliberate blocking of options. As generally stereotyped by mainstream character-typing, the world of the these two novelists also reveal women's mutual hostilities and suspicions of each other



and their typical microscopic vision. On one hand morally conservative and manipulative women are presented who are governed by jealousy, vindictiveness and lack of love. They bully, exploit and torture their female counterparts both for survival and for enjoyment of a gratuitous sense of pleasure and power like Paro, of *Paro: Dreams of Passion*. Some are envious of her like Priya while others admire her. While the friendship between many is presented as having the potential for emotional warmth and mutual sharing, and emerges as a model of symbiotic bonding as that of Phoowati and Gudiya in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, Tara and Bim in *Clear Light of Day*. Many a times the bonding between females is presented as a resuscitating principle against a lack of heterosexuality in their lives as in the case of Ila Das and Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain*. There is a paradoxical diversity and commonness of female experience in the novels of both writers under study. In relation to marriage there is a women bond on either side of marriage; the married woman and the unmarried or separated women or those wanting to marry and those frustrated and cynical or those who do not feel the need to marry.

The celebration of non-sexual female friendship by 1980s feminist literary critics was a form of retrenchment from the radical feminist stances of the early 1970s. Female relationships and mutual understanding of the situation can lead to the analysis of one's own pattern of life retrospectively. In Anita Desai's novels childhood experiences are depicted as having a lasting effect on the life of the characters in which sisterhood - either as an effortless bonding or as a model of rivalry has been presented in a psychoanalytical manner. The novels explore her valorisation of sisterhood relationship and also consider the possibility that some kinds of rivalry between women can ironically be both positive and energising.

*Voices in the City* is a similar representation of sisterhood where the plight of Monisha helps in the reintegration and redemption of her younger sister, Amla. Initially, not so emotionally attached to each other, Monisha, the elder sister's marriage did not affect her younger siblings in the least. Her

absence was not so much felt as her presence amongst them was also negligible. Monisha's nature had been a mystery to Amla. Amla had never made any attempt to understand Monisha much, as Amla was the favourite sister of the brother, Nirode and she reveled in the attention she was given. It was only after Amla went to Calcutta and came again in contact with whom she remembered as her "quiet and subtly uncaring elder sister" (VIC 142) that she realised a certain affinity with her as a woman. She saw how her sister was scarred and altered by her circumstances post-marriage. She saw the disillusionment with marriage had exhausted her sister, and she had subsided into a realm of colourlessness and unnatural silence like a lifeless statue. "Amla jerked into a wakefulness, overwhelmed by a new fear of this sister who had turned into a sleepwalker, ghost, some unknown and dread entity" (VIC 146). Anita here presents the irony of survival which earlier had separated Amla from Monisha in her childhood, now the same drive had given her an insight into her sister's unobstruiveness. As a child Monisha had been confusing to her but now she understood her sad spirit. She could sense her apprehension. In mapping out the relation between the two sisters, Anita points out at the lack of communication here also as in man-woman relationship. After Monisha got married she did not keep any contact with her younger sister except for the letters she sometimes wrote to the family. From the letters Amla deciphered the oppressed state of Monisha to some extent but it was just a superficial assumption until she came face to face with her mute sister at Jiban's house. She suddenly became anxious to see her sister's suffering and Amla inquisitively inquired with real concern the boy associated to Monisha in her in-law's house, "Please tell me, I had not seen my sister for a long time. Now I find her very-changed. Do you see much of her? Do you talk to her ever, Nikhil?" (VIC 160).

She was pained to see her sister turned into a rag doll, an insecure creature. Anita presents an interesting analysis how the sister relationship becomes a primary and formative element in shaping a woman's sense of identity. She seems to suggest that a woman-to-woman dyad, be it between

mother and daughter or between sisters, may constitute a threat within patriarchy.

Amla is anguished to reason what had made her father choose Jiban, her sister's husband and wonders why did Monisha with that powerful silent stubbornness of her, never rebelled? She critically assessed her sister's dilapidated state which offered her a model of a flagging life due to an ill-assorted marriage. This inspired her to separate herself from the invalid relationship with Dharma. Even Monisha encourages her sister to reconstruct her life, to seek self-reliance and a proper way to survive. She cries to Amla, "Amla, always go in the opposite direction" (VIC 159). The association with her sister, thus helped Amla to elevate herself from the reinforced stereotypes.

The kinship bond has also been underlined with a suggestive note in another novel *Clear Light of Day*. Studies of sister relationship, such as those by Elizabeth Fishel (1979), Doris Faber (1983), Toni McNaron (1964) show that they are distinguished by a complex tension between similarity and defence, closeness and separation, friendship and rivalry. Fishel, the famous journalist and author, has called it the 'sister knot' (72) in her book *Sisters: Shared Histories, Lifelong Ties*. *Clear Light of Day* explores relation between two sisters Bim and Tara. The relation is a metaphor for presentation of their status quo which becomes the vehicle of self-definition. Bim, as the other woman, becomes a key structuring element in Tara's life and Tara, in turn, becomes a source of reconciliation for Bim with her lot. The novel presents how patriarchy constructs women as rivals but the contemplative nature of the women can lead them to the inimitable realisation of their closeness and likeness. Reflecting on the association of the two sisters and its importance in the plot Kamila Shamsie, a critic and academician, said in the introduction to the novel *Clear Light of Day*:

But at the centre of it all, sometimes interlocked, sometimes drifting, sometimes whirling away from each other, are the

two sisters: Bim and Tara: The diplomat's wife who lives far away, the unmarried school-teacher who never left home. They are opposites in the way that only siblings can be opposites: their opposition manifests in different responses to the same events. (Introduction xi)

Dealing with the female bonding and resistance at the same time, the novelist portrays the sisters, Bim and Tara, who are opposed to each other in temperament since childhood. Tara, the elder sister, was the gentler and more tender of the two while Bim was decisive, firm and stronger. Tara, being meeker, wishes to escape the dullness and boredom of childhood while Bim valued her responsibilities towards the inmates of the house. As a little girl, Tara was a poor scholar and could memorize even a poem with great difficulty. She was envious of the intelligence of Bim. While school to Tara was a terror, to Bim it brought out her latent energy. While nobody chose Tara in their teams for a game, Bim was one of the leaders. The thought always troubled Tara that although she was the prettier of the two, it was Bim who appeared more attractive due to her strength of body and mind. Even Bakul, Tara's husband secretly admired Bim for this. Tara was a dreamer and aimed only to marry, "I am going to be a mother and knit for my babies" (*CLD* 172).

Bim was more practical of the two : "While Tara would be dragged helplessly into the underworld of semi-consciousness by the romances she read, Bim was often irritated and would toss them aside in dissatisfaction" (*CLD* 185).

Tara was pained by Bim's meanness. Her psychology of sibling rivalry is described as, "She felt herself shrink into that small miserable wretch of twenty years ago, both admiring and resenting her tall, striding sister who was acquainted with Byron, with Iqbal, even T.S. Eliot" (*CLD* 63). Tara was hurt and felt herself inferior. Bim, however was unaware of her sister's agonies. "Bim had always had this faculty of cutting her short,

hurting her, and not even knowing” (CLD 64).

Their characters are highly contrasting, “To look at Bim one would not think she had lived through the same childhood, the same experience as Tara” (CLD 35).

These revisitations of the past seem to threaten their present and future. Anita, while presenting the contradiction in her characters refuses to isolate women’s experiences. Memory plays an important role here. Tara feels guilty of marrying early thereby forlorn her family. She was pained to see that their life was as stale as she had left them. They had not changed a bit. Bim was full of criticism for Tara and her move to marry Bakul so early. She smashed Tara’s world with her constant cynicism. Both were dismayed. Bim was full of bitterness and anger for Tara. Bim is happy to refer to the pain she had caused Tara by cutting her hair in childhood days and making her cry, as a sort of revenge.

But what forms the crux of the novel is their self-realisation, their discovery that they cannot live in the present till they come out of this maze of intertwined memories. The recollections of past events paradoxically makes them obliterate them and come out of the labyrinth clouded by the misunderstandings. Tara asks forgiveness for her escapism from Bim “And I ran away, . . . I just turned and fled” (CLD 228). Bim, too forgave her by accepting, “what else could you have done” (CLD 228). Thus unshackling themselves from the past, they move on. *Clear Light of Day*, therefore can be said to be a family story of intimate spaces, of emotional pains and of intrusions and final releases. Anita impressively presents how sisters are bound by the binding vine of love, sometimes at a certain cost. She shows how beyond their anguish, pain and suffering, in their nameless moments of intimacy and bonding they discover the spring of life. How the glimmering moment of hope overcomes their own sense of loss and despair and they rise above all shades of misunderstanding. The novel celebrates a woman’s coming together with other woman as sharers of life rather than mere rivals.

Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* is also a novel about the operations of emotions within a family where either the claustrophobic environment of too much possessiveness in the case of Arun, the son or the intensified oppression in the case of Uma, the daughter generates a scenario that leads to transgression. As Shashi Deshpande, the acknowledged Indian novelist, suggests in her novel *Small Remedies* :

The family is a timeless and universal institution, everything begins here, everything that happens outside the family mirrors what happens within it. (179)

In this novel too the whole life of the characters is largely coloured and directed by the mental make-up of the family as a whole. Uma and Aruna are two sisters in the novel whose construction and therefore their destinies are poles apart. Uma, the elder of the two, was plain looking as against Aruna who was pretty. The theme of sisterhood has been treated differently in this novel as it offers no comfort to the protagonist, the sufferer, Uma but aggravates her marginality and deprivation. Insult and humiliation is pelted on her by the family whenever she is compared to Aruna. The family, which considered marriage as the only possible way of respectable survival evidently knew that Aruna's chances of getting a good match were brighter as she fitted into the stereotyped standards. Uma missed all the required graces and gifts that were accorded instead to her sister. "As anyone might have predicted- . . . Aruna was pretty too, and in her case it was quite evident that her future would be bright, but there was a sharp edge to her prettiness, a harsh edge given to it by a kind of steely determination, a dogged ambitiousness, that seemed to be borne of a desperation" (*FF* 67). Aruna herself sensed the difference and displayed overtly an air of superiority about herself. She frequently mocked Uma and her habits, "Uma's ears were already filled to saturation with Mama's laments, and Aruna's little yelps of laughter were additional barbs" (*FF* 88). Aruna lives in an entirely selfish and self-centred circle and Uma becomes an easy

victim among them because she, with her complete contrast and variance is a threat to their own ambitions and security. When she is discarded by the very first suitor, Uma is laughed at and scorned. They try to make her feel compunctious about herself. As Desai presents the contrast, “These were so many marriage proposals for Aruna that Uma’s unmarried state was not only an embarrassment but an obstruction”. “Here was Aruna visibly ripening on the branch, asking to be plucked. . . . Uma waited patiently to be disposed” (*FF* 87).

Aruna did not identify with Uma which foreclosed the prospects of emotional sharing between the two. Mother and daughter here evolve as exploiters in a compulsive wedge created by patriarchal interests. There is no enduring empathy and bonding between the sisters. Anita projects how some women are still resistant to the ideas of women’s community and collectivity. The ideals of patriarchy are still not uprooted completely and how the insecurity of women about their own lives propels them to postures of hostility, insensitivity and selfishness as also blind imitation of the established societal norms. Hinting at their psychological insecurities Anita points at their becoming not only preys of subtle exploitative value patterns but also handmaids of patriarchy. Thus ceasing to be friendly female associates they in turn become exploiters. Anita illustrates the view that many women deliberately adopt an anti-feminist position and collaborate with men in order to survive.

Motherhood forms another underlining concept in the novels of Desai and Gokhale. The fusion of traditional values is a conspicuous feature of novels of both these writers. In their novels they synthesize old and new values through different sets of characters and episodes. They register the essence as well as details of a lasting and emotionally balanced mother-daughter relationship on one hand and the alteration of ethics of care on the other which deeply affects them. They argue that women characters cannot be judged as simply good or bad but just endeavour to shed light on the mother-daughter involvement at times overtly, at times covertly and their

effect in the wake of the strivings of the central characters. The novels succeed in jolting one into a new perception of reality. A postmodernist emphasis has been placed on how the women characters cope with the discontinuity of traditional understanding of women bonds, how they suffer from the traumatic experience of mother-daughter miscommunications. Instead of romanticizing the relationship, both the writers many a times problematize it by warding off the illusions and misconceptions associated with the same. The novels of Desai - *Voices In the City*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, *Fasting, Feasting*, *Clear Light of Day*, *In Custody* and Gokhale's *Priya : In Incredible Indyya*, *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, present how motherhood becomes a tool of empowerment for women.

The lives of characters in the novels are presented as being greatly affected by such familial interactions. The alliance between mother and children is decisive in their struggle to overcome different hardships and the destruction of these bonds lead to a series of setbacks in their lives. As in *Voices In the City* the power game between a mother and daughter is well brought about in Amla's words who reflects about her mother's will to dominate over her children:

She is the most beautiful woman I know and very accomplished. None of us is like her, so polished and balanced and contained- like well cult jewel. I will read you her letters one day, to show you how warm-hearted she is, inspite of her self-absorption. . . . Yet at the core of it all there is this cold frosty love of power- like a concealed fluorescent bulb. . . . I'm certain it is there. (VIC 206)

Amla belonging to the same feminine community, sensed her mother's inner coldness and outward impulsiveness. Women bond is presented as an important connecting thread in the novel. It is Amla who tries to understand her mother's feeling and communicates them to Nirode, the brother. Mother is presented as all-caring and wishing to establish a



healthy communion with the children but it is the children who, threatened by the fear of intrusion in their private worlds, have erected barbed fences between them and their mother's territory. After the children left their childhood home, the mother wrote frequently to them, but she was discrete not to reveal her inner uncertainties of which children could never know. She did not want to bind or burden them with her own disenchantments of life. She was a perfect balance between reality and hallucination. She did not have much expectations from her children. She even did not expect a reply of her letters from her son, Nirode and continued writing to him. However she was relieved to get response from both the daughters - Monisha and Amla and felt her patience and prayer rewarded. Anita presents her view that how women are intrinsically interlinked and how biological connections can contribute to the creation of an enriching bond between them. Mother, in the novel is full of care and affection and although her children display a cold attitude towards her, she blames herself for this lack of communion and feels that if she had not sold the Calcutta house and had not come to live in Kalimpong- the secluded paradise- things would have been different between them. She desires their intimate company. But she is not a woman who would rot in a depressive phase. She comes out strong willed and mature. Anita delineates her plurality of experience and flexible sense of self and at the same time, conscious of her own identity. She is presented as Mother Kali- as the amalgamation of life and death, reality and illusion. Dehydrated of all relationships, communion and responsibility she reverses the emotional dependence and makes children realise that it is not she who needs them now but they, "She did not need them, for now that was this silent austerity about her . . ." (VIC 250).

Anita presents a flexible concept of relationship here which justifies the postmodern theory of relativity, of demand and fulfillment of needs.

Motherhood is presented as a complex interaction in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* and cannot be analysed by simplistic paradigms. There are no unrealistic or utopian views about the relationship but the depiction of

alteration of the equations of self which weakens them as they cannot understand each other's actions and experiences. Even if the characters care about each other, their unconventional actions may be wrongly interpreted as a lack of consideration and affection and may cause them pain. It is then crucial not to judge the characters because their controversial actions are due to the alteration of subjectivity patterns - a typical postmodern trait.

Sita, though not crazy, acts in a strange manner by taking refuge in the Manori island, with her daughter Menaka and son, Karan. She does not act in a socially accepted manner and so Menaka is disillusioned with her mother's choice. Sita does not care what other's think but when she finds that even her daughter is not an accomplice in her decision, she is shattered. She is made to feel that she had taken the wrong move. Sita says about Menaka, "Accusations shot out from her like so many pellets from a burst cartridge". ". . . how she unfailingly made the wrong moves, . . . the sight and smell of them revolted the fastidious girl (*WSWGTS* 106). Menaka longed to be in school again, to join college. She was bored on the island where there was nothing to do except sketching. The house which was meant to be a paradise for Sita seemed to the children 'like a jail surrounded by barbed wires' (*WSWGTS* 109). Menaka felt 'she had enough of her mother's disorder and nonsense' (*WSWGTS* 109) and wished to escape it wholly. She even did not want to argue or discuss anything or understand her mother's situation as she knew that arguments with her mother always ended in ambiguity, in obscurity. She felt all this to be a nonsense and rejected her mother's 'wild values and wild searches' (*WSWGTS* 110). Sita feels betrayed by her children, by her family. While Menaka tries to establish the stereotyped order, Sita challenges this order. Menaka feels her mother as an outlaw breaking the established conventions of the society, acting freely. Both share a common trait, that is, try to avoid each other's sufferings and feelings. Both attempt to avoid the possibility of being hurt. Left without the solid bonds of affection, both are unsuccessful and anguished.

Majority of mothers do not usually have the opportunity or the means to theorize about the circumstances in which parenting becomes problematic, trying or a failure. They mostly fail to examine how their social status and male partners affect mothering, especially the mothering of daughters since the same sex-identification issues seems so important in majority of parenting situations. A mother's influence is intricately important in shaping human lives. *Fasting, Feasting* presents how strained mother-daughter relationship can diminish the capacity of a child and disrupt their self-confidence. Uma is constantly rebuked by her mother and female friends. She was influenced by them and felt her daughter's meek marriage prospects had adverse effects on the socio-economic stability of her family. She thought it was the duty of a woman to ensnare a suitor and that was what labelled her as a smart and insightful woman. She hated her daughter at not being capable of doing that. There was an absence of any mutual love, respect and understanding between them which could have pacified Uma's terrible plight. The mother becomes the exploiter and when she fails to dispose off Uma, she denies Uma every basic right. Uma is entrenched in household duties and drudgery by her mother who wishes to unburden herself in turn. Unfortunately no attempt is made by the mother to understand her daughter's preferences and needs.

*Fasting, Feasting* also presents the historical trend of mother blaming, that is, blaming her for her choice to be a wife before a mother. This tendency to blame is often the case, for as Ladd-Taylor and Umansky, the famous American sociologists write, in their historical account of mothering in *'Bad' Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth Century America*:

the mother who attended too diligently to her own needs felt the sting of familial, clerical and community disapproval.

(Introduction vii)

The mother, in this novel too, when she chooses her husband instead of her daughters feels this sting. It is very easy to judge a mother but the actions should not be warranted by the name. It is the narrow limits which describe the prescribed behaviour of a normal being. Postmodernist writers like Desai believe these behaviours to be relative and constructs of society. Such mothers are often the marginalised members of the family, themselves a victim of discrimination. As in *Fasting, Feasting* the identity of the mother is itself obscured by the father and the children know them as MamaPapa, having literary and practically no space and no separate existence. The mother herself has achieved little or no autonomy and has to limit her choice at every step. She had not been given any name in the novel as if she has no identity of her own. She is living in the house of her husband without having any significant position in that household. She herself had to face the oppressive power of societal discrimination since her childhood days where girls were denied even good things to eat. If anything special was brought from the market it was given to the boys in the family. Married at the tender age of sixteen, what she learnt was a total submission to the earning member of the family, her husband. One must definitely take into account that the effects of such discrimination directly complicate the mother-daughter relationship and the mother-daughter-mother cycle. So the oppressive power of societal discrimination can have a snowball effect. Anita brings the fact to our mind that women have their personal perspectives and experiences and that there are various causes of mother-child relational conflicts.

Anita's novel suggests how the mother's own silences and secrets weigh heavily on the communication gap between them and their daughters. It has a detrimental effect on their relationship and directly hinges on their inability to understand them and unwillingness to listen to them.

Another important relationship described by Anita Desai is that of Nanda Kaul and Raka, her great-grand child in *Fire On the Mountain*. Nanda Kaul is projected as a middle-aged widow who voluntarily lives in a desolate house in Kasauli, after having fulfilled all her responsibilities towards her

family. Her happy isolation is threatened by the unexpected arrival of Raka, who was dispatched to her due to the marital discord of her parents. Nanda Kaul did not get the love of a wife but was treated as a decorative yet useful appliance needed for the efficient running of the house. Nanda saves herself from mental derailment and brings up all her children courageously not only because of her sense of duty towards others but also because motherhood imparts a meaning to her otherwise insipid existence. Motherhood for her had "been a religious calling she had believed in till she found it fake" (*FOM* 30).

Nanda's compassion for others was a habit which was again brought to the surface by the coming of Raka. The presence of Raka makes her gloss over the life which she so vehemently wants to forget. As a result of it she is able to withdraw only physically from the harsh realities of life. She realises a spirit of comradeship with Raka, who was just like her temperamentally. Despite her sufferings, as she encounters Raka, devotional feelings of a mother are rearoused in Nanda Kaul and she secretly yearns for a better life for the child. Nanda Kaul realises that she is akin to Raka and makes efforts to be friendly with the unwanted intruder. "Nanda Kaul felt a small admiration for her (Raka) rise and stir" (*FOM* 53). Raka became the cause of her renewed interest in human company. Nanda Kaul found Raka as an extension of herself because of her gender similarity and blood relationship. She understood the negative aspects of nurturance of Raka in a house of incompatible parents which had resulted in her stern disposition. She knew a child needs to be cared for. But Raka herself was unaware of her great-grandmother's concern. She loathed her company and whenever Nanda Kaul was around, she felt like a caged animal, "the child, a small fish gasping for its native air, but the old lady had her on the hook" (*FOM* 103). Nanda Kaul was reluctant to let her go and Raka wanted a release from this disagreeable intimacy. Nanda also become jealous of Ramlal whose company Raka enjoyed and yearned for. She had developed a fascination, a curiosity for this unresponsive child. She finds that the coping strategy which she had

learnt and adopted after years of oppression was inherent in Raka. She feels a fierce connection with Raka in this regard. Anita points out here how the permanent inequality, the adult/child dichotomy, that the superior person is supposed to engage with the lesser in such a way as to bring the lesser member to full parity, that is a child is to be helped to become the adult is reversed here. This task is extremely difficult in this case as Raka has ingrained the qualities of her great-grandmother since childhood. The power balance is therefore turned upside-down. Raka abhors the women-centred network, summoning her own inner strength, defying that of others. The power and survival skills that she has, changes the whole picture of their relationship.

However advanced, sophisticated and mechanized the world we live in may become, human relationships though invisible, weave lives together, permeating fragrance and making life more meaningful and worth living. They are an integral part of humanity. In this everchanging world human emotions, sensibility and feelings remain more or less the same, varying only in measurable degrees. These relations are many a times incomprehensible and entangled and condemned to male dictates in society. Namita presents daughters telling their own stories and their mothers' stories in the texts and she incorporates different versions of the same events and circumstances. Within the process of the telling of stories, mothers and daughters begin to understand each other whether there is a common ground or not. Both mothers and daughters need to tell their versions and listen to the others' versions in order to have all the information necessary to arrange their own stories in complete form. The women's stories are relative concerning the identity of the storytellers too, who are women.

Ammi in Gokhale's *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* acts as the surrogate mother to Gudiya. Ammi is a resourceful and practical woman and presents a fine example of pragmatic approach towards life to Gudiya, her granddaughter. Gudiya, as a child, received all love and attention of Ammi. But the urge for survival makes Ammi turn into a saint. Newly acquired

sainthood has some restrictions and it affects the relationship of grandmother and granddaughter. Ammi devotes lesser and lesser time to Gudiya now. She keeps a distance from Gudiya. Such treatment is painful to Gudiya as she hardly finds any solace being already abandoned by her mother. Gudiya says with deep anguish, “Grandmother’s increasing abstraction, her detachment her inexplicable remoteness had affected me much more” (*GGG* 54).

This lack of satisfying parent-child relationship and emotional starvation leads to crises in her adolescence. Furthermore when Gudiya’s menstrual cycle starts Ammi illtreats her as an outcaste and regards it as nothing but trouble. This treatment of a grandmother is very complex. A woman is unable to understand the condition of another woman. Instead of providing her support and emotional care Ammi grabbles, “this girl is good for nothing but trouble from now” (*GGG* 54). The grand-daughter-mother relationship undergoes added conflict and strain in the adolescent years because of Ammi’s role as a saint and religious preacher. This conflict manifests in the form of many of the ambiguities and confusions about the social meanings of womanhood and motherhood for adolescent Gudiya.

Dilemma is created in Gudiya’s mind by both time and place. Like every mother-daughter pair, Ammi and Gudiya face communication gap. Like a traditional mother, Ammi feels the burden of Gudiya’s youth. In India a growing girl is considered a problem. Ammi keeps a watchful eye on Gudiya as our structural codes dictate that a young girl is to be kept in strict discipline. Gudiya’s personality is scarred by her grandmother’s detachment and speculation. She says, “Ammi rarely smiled now; she never laughed; she constantly disapproved of me. She was nowhere remotely like the rational and lively woman who had brought me up” (*GGG* 68). This makes Gudiya regress into an illusory world. She starts hating her own name and also her grandmother. After Ammi’s death Gudiya’s only hope is in her future marriage prospects, where she expects to find love and respect, denied to her in her early years.

The grim reality of life and the minute confines within which Gudiya lives compel her to reassess her relationship with Phoolwati, a devotee of her grandmother. Phoolwati owned a flower shop at the gate of the Ammi's temple and plays the role of a liberator and a mother for Gudiya. She forms affectionate and cordial relationship with Gudiya and is exceptionally careful about Gudiya's well-being. Her love and devotion for Gudiya is unconditional, selfless and constant from beginning till the end, unaffected by her own state- physical or emotional. Phoolwati is a stereotypical and does not marry Shambhu for any financial support or status. She has a clear idea of her responsibilities towards every person related to her. He enjoys her relationship with Shambhu Pahalwan in a detached manner and advises the same to Gudiya. She is deeply hurt when Kalki illtreats Gudiya and suggests her to consider him as a disposable being. Phoolwati is a balanced woman and communicates this idea to Gudiya also. There is mutual liking between the two. Phoolwati is possessive about Gudiya and marries Shambhu only on the condition that he would accept Gudiya as her daughter to which he readily agreed. It was he and Phoolwati who forced Kalki to marry Gudiya, as they saw that she was more than willing to make Kalki her life partner. When the relationship of Kalki and Gudiya is fragmented and when he goes to Bombay, Gudiya finds solace in Phoolwati's motherly care. It is Phoolwati's love which provides some solution in repairing what Gudiya has lost in her impaired relationship as a woman. Phoolwati's endurance is remarkable. She does not even cry when Shambhu is shot dead and it is her strength which encourages Gudiya at every step of her life. With Phoolwati, Gudiya's life becomes a tale of sweet and sour tensions, realising that she and Phoolwati are speaking the same language. The treasured relationship helps her to escape her abusive marriage.

Thus women according to Namita Gokhale and Anita Desai, need each other more than their masculine partners in order to know themselves completely. As Monisha helps Amla in *Voices In The City*, Phoolwati does so in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* to understand the nature of life and living.



The complex mother-daughter relationship has been presented in a different dimension in *A Himalayan Love Story*. Parvati is a neglected daughter of a poor widow, who entrenched in her own struggle for existence overlooks her daughter's happiness. Parvati longs for and wishes basic happiness but fails miserably to achieve it. She is entirely at the disposal of her mother who denies her freedom. Her mother maintained silence and strenuous discipline. She chided her into doing the household tasks that she herself disliked to do like gathering firewood. She was too proud to do it herself. She stands as an obstacle in the path of progress and freedom of her own daughter. When Parvati attains an appropriate age for admission in school, her mother is against her education. She says:

It would be different if you were a boy . . . then you could earn and provide for me in my old age. But all you are going to do is getting married to some no-good and take my gold Champakali necklace off with you as dowry. It's a double curse, to first be born a woman, then get straddled with another female to provide for. (*AHLS* 6)

She considers educating a girl child as a waste of money. Parvati is ignored as a human being. She is torn to pieces by the callous and indifferent attitude of her mother. She is a victim of gender discrimination practiced by her own mother. She is denied all possibilities of growth. Even her food and diet are subject to discrimination. Her mother does not care for her taste or nutrition and stuffs her with corn every day. It is interesting to note that there is a reversal of role here of oppressor and benefactor in a patriarchal society. Mr. Hiranand, their patron, insists that Parvati be given education while Parvati's mother opposes it. When Parvati tells her mother about her dreams of building a palace, she gives her a "resounding slap" (*AHLS* 14). This treatment is very harsh and outrageous for a child to bear. Her mother's self-centredness and desire to secure her own survival results in her failure to empathize with her own daughter. She does not wish to provide any moral

or material support to her only daughter. The mother does not think of Parvati as a woman like herself rather acts to improve her own personal living conditions and elevate herself. She only takes into consideration her own personal needs.

Namita emphasises that female bonding is at risk due to the gender inequality in the society. Unable to redeem themselves women are segregated from the feelings of their daughter or sisters. Often women feel animosity and competition with other women which keeps them away from mutual bonding or solidarity. Economic dependence is also a big factor in this competition. In an essay about female bonding Toni Morrison, in his novel *Beloved* reflects:

I am alarmed by the violence that women do to each other; professional, competitive, emotional violence. I am alarmed by the willingness of women to enslave each other. (183-84)

This complexity is indicated in this novel also where ironically on one hand the mother keeps her daughter under restraints while on the other she herself does incest and enters into physical relationship with her landlord, the shopkeeper. When Parvati finds this out, her world is completely shattered and she is disillusioned to realise that people are not as they appear to be. Their bonding turns overnight into an estranged relationship due to the dual personality of the mother. Namita points that one of the cause of failure of female friendship is a focus on the self. Putting forward personal objectives, that is, caring for personal interest without paying sufficient attention to another person does not allow a sincere commitment to the other. These conflicts of interest set up real rivalries within families and have a long lasting effect on their psychology.

The love triangle or erotic triangle is another excellent vehicle to represent the complexity of human desires and relationships. Impulse towards the same object/person has a play in identification of females with

each other. It stresses at a unique power structure where two women become competitors over the same male object. The relationship between Priya and Paro in Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is both manipulative and dynamic. Their friendship is both educative and destructive. There is an inherent mutual antagonism foregrounded in the differences of class, sexual orientation and ideology. The relationship is characterised by a triangulated desire for the sex hungry and offensive B.R. in the beginning of the novel, and later for Priya's husband Suresh Kaushal. They form no strategic female bonding and comradeship against their masculine world. Paro, the seductive temptress, prejudiced by herself wishes to subjugate both males and females which constitute a threat to female bonding and causes women's estrangement. Their rivalry is an assertion of difference, a vehicle of self-satisfaction and self-definition. Priya, a middle class girl is fascinated by B.R., her boss and business tycoon, who in turn leaves her and marries Paro. Although Priya is overpowered by jealousy but she is gratified by B.R.'s choice and looked at Paro with awe and admiration. She perceived B.R., "like a hunter displaying an unusually fine skill" (*PDP* 10) in choosing Paro. She feels abandoned and says about Paro, "I decided that I hated her" (*PDP* 11). "She looked like a cat that has had all the cream" (*PDP* 17).

Even Paro sensed the undercurrent of intimacy between B.R. and Priya and latently warned her to be on her guard. Priya had contradictory feelings for Paro. She was full of malice and envy on one hand and adoration on the other. It was because Paro represented everything she herself wanted and dared not to be. Their relationship is manipulative. Paro, the male exploiter uses the middle-class upstart Priya for specific self-interests while Priya observes in the association opportunities for elevation into the coziness and smugness of upper-class living. Priya describes their relationship as "she was flattered by my curiosity and attention. She would mock me gently, with overtones of friendship. I in turn was flattered by her laughter. I think I was in love with her" (*PDP* 30). Paro irresistibly attracted Priya. She was impressed by her vitality and indifference towards men's attitudes. Her own

life is marked by the failure to grab possibilities, suppression, confinement and feminine compromise contrasted to the vibrant, carefree life of Paro. Tired of her repressed role-playing, as soon as she gets a chance to re-enter into extra-marital relationship with B.R. she does not resist it at all. It gives her a feeling of triumph over Paro and quenches her thirst for revenge against her, thus satisfying her physical and emotional need. She proudly rebukes Paro, “You stupid woman, B.R. loves me and he’s loved me for years, much before he even knew you, in fact” (*PDP* 113).

Paro and Priya are set against each other as studies in contrarities and oppositions and it is the attraction of the opposites that binds them in a friendship. Priya is calculative about life and Paro is spontaneous and impulsive. Paro’s sardonic approach is structured to restrain and regulate Priya’s sincere but fond amorous involvement with first B.R. and then Suresh. The pull of the opposites that brings them closer also reduces the possibilities of intense personal sharing because communication always leaves them at polar extremes. Priya confines her emotions and decisions to herself. She secretly admires Paro but is unable to find corroboration from her. Paro’s act of establishing extra-conjugal relationship with Suresh causes a discontinuation and harshness in their correspondence and friendship. Their friendship is patterned by disgust and resistance on one hand and feminine affinity on the other. Their distancing is due to the inability to cross the boundaries for reconnection resulting in misunderstandings. Priya’s relationship with Paro resembles the fractured identity of the colonized and his ambiguous relationship with the colonizer. The superior gaze of the colonizer creates an inferiority complex in the colonized and he struggles to mimic the idealized whiteners of the colonizer. His relationship with the colonizer is the dual relationship of love-hate that creates intense agony and fragmentation as evident in the personality of Priya. Paro’s personality leaves a never ending impression upon Priya’s mind. Priya’s every action and movement is an exact replica of Paro. Priya herself says:

Gradually she became an obsession for me. Subconsciously I

would find myself mouthing her words; phrases that were not mine would spill unsuspecting from my lips; gestures that were hers would enact themselves in involuntary mine. For examples, I too would throw back my head in a deep throaty laugh, and my eyes would narrow in a pale shadow of her piercing gaze. (*PDP* 13)

Her carefully suppressed jealousy slowly overpowers her and leads her into fantasy and obsession. Although Priya has the feminine grace and assertiveness, Paro has the keenness to surpass every woman, which creates an inferiority complex in Priya. They are not feministic, standing strategically against the advances of B.R. or Suresh or criticizing them. The ability to listen to others' idea may have been helpful and offered comfort and healing to both. But then too they remain emotionally dependent upon one another-even when they are physically separated or distanced by seeming betrayal. An untarnished woman-identification is inherent resulting in symbiotic human allegiance. Priya voicing the same admits, "I was in love with her and I hated her, I felt as though I was being throttled by a panther or something" (*PDP* 146). When Paro dies Priya's pain is unmitigable, "Paro was dead. I couldn't imagine a world without her" (*PDP* 152).

A similar triangular relationship is portrayed in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, the difference is that the centre for contest instead of being a male, is a female, the grandmother - a transformed saint, Ammi. Lila and Phoolwati, both devotees of Ammi contend for being and proving themselves closer to Ammi. Both surrendered themselves to Ammi's wisdom and had specific chores assigned to them. Lila enthralled by Ammi's majesty and holiness accepted the major burden of the temple workload. She left her son and came to live in the temple itself. She served Ammi enthusiastically which aroused Phoolwati's instant hostility. Phoolwati referred to her as Ekdanti owing to her single protruding tooth. She felt Ekdanti was jealous of her privileged relationship with Ammi. Lila however was calm and balanced and kept herself engrossed in the chores with a serenity. Lila was always at

the call of grandmother. She pressed her legs and attended to her every personal need. She was always available like a djinn to attend to her every unspoken wish. Phoolwati grew so envious and insecure that she even tried to get rid of her by calling her son to take Lila back home. She managed to send away Lila but only for a short while. Lila soon returned and the temple politics was reinstated. The sub-plot of their association has not been dealt by Namita in much detail, and their turf is partially resolved by the incidence of monkeys - so called Hanuman Ji - coming on the banana tree planted by Phoolwati. The episode brings them together and worshipping the monkey they embrace each other and continue with their jobs and lives. “. . . peace was established between grandmother’s two acolytes” (*GGG* 37).

The concept of erotic triangle has been explored in *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* also. Although female friendship heals wounds resulting from patriarchal structures and secures women’s survival it faces various challenges that threaten its accomplishments. Women have to grapple with each other when they are faced as competitors luring the same man. This may lead to the victimization of either both or one of the two women and causes extreme pain and suffering verging on madness. The women themselves become passive agents of patriarchy in this case and they are faced with different kinds of challenges due to proximity with each other. The depiction of this struggle is there in the experiences of Shakuntala and Kamalini. Shakuntala is the wedded wife of Srijan but when she is unable to give him a child, Srijan brings home this Lichchavi woman, Kamalini. Shakuntala feels cheated and dislikes her presence. Srijan forbids Shakuntala to ask any questions about Kamalini. This mystery further allievates her grief and she keeps guessing about the relationship of Srijan and Kamalini. She is disturbed by the ‘seductive undertone’ (*SPOM* 85) in her voice. She wanted to talk about it, understand it and when she inquires Kamalini says, “I cannot tell you the reason, . . . you can, if you wish, ask this questions of your husband Srijan, my most honoured master. This is my home now, . . .” (*SPOM* 86). Kamalini’s indifferent attitude and confidence of her position in

Srijan's house dismayed Shakuntala. Kamalini's conduct causes irreparable psychological wounds to Shakuntala and is destructive for her. She felt the house to be a battle ground in which animosity and competition are the rules, rather than bonding and solidarity. Rivalry exists between them and Shakuntala says, "It was oppressive in the house, for she was there" (*SPOM* 97). "I could see that she disliked, even despised me" (*SPOM* 81). Shakuntala and Kamalini both in order to safe guard their own position engage in rivalries and so cannot co-exist peacefully. This results in the premature end of their marriage and finding her future doomed beyond hope, Shakuntala leaves the house, revealing the crippling effects of female rivalry and oppression.

It has been reflected how the patriarchal ideology causes one woman to diminish the security and happiness of another to ensure one's own safety. Namita observes how we disrespect and disregard each other's personhood with the individualistic notion that the most important thing in life is self. Our inflated egos frequently hinder us in extending ourselves to others particularly in times of need, a typical postmodern feature. This aspect of female association in the form of erotic triangle is not to be found in Anita Desai's novels and distinguishes the two writers in their approach towards female bonding.

Thus both Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale appropriate the medium of novel to reveal their concern for the complexities of relationships specially concerning women. External and internal conflicts are surfaced in the novels with an appreciable intensity. Relationships have been given due importance in their fiction, be it man-woman, sisterhood, motherhood relations or relations of rivalry but personal identity within them has been given a significant space. A person's experiences are diverse, producing different emotions, moods and reactions everyday and these too keep on changing constantly. Similarly does the approach of the characters towards relationships. Their recollections of the past and childhood events also influence their responses to the outside world greatly. Thus emphasising that

it is impossible to isolate a character from his associations, Desai and Gokhale support the importance of relationships in the fact that they give meaning to one's life but also carry their vision forward by suggesting that compromises and adjustments are possible and should be done only up to a certain extent. Even motherhood relation which has been otherwise highly applauded has been problematized by these two writers. The root cause of clash being the dominating long term patriarchal suffocating norms of society and their consequences. Unfolding the reality of contemporary Indian society, Desai and Gokhale ironically portray certain practices like choosing of marriage partners by the parents without caring for the choice of the two people involved. However both suggest crossing and re-crossing of boundaries, Gokhale's women venture outside them more freely and frequently than that of Desai's. Desai's deep foray into sisterhood is lacking in Gokhale's novels whereas Gokhale's impassioned examination of the erotic triangle does not find its mention in Desai's works. Human psyche is laid threadbare and the working of human mind and emotions are unfolded in the interactions between characters with an artistic coherence.



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## Chapter – 4

# SPECTRUM OF FEMALE SENSIBILITIES

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The patriarchate has not evolved from any revolution. It is since the beginning of civilization that men have affirmed their status as sovereign subjects; and have assumed and undertaken their authority to decide a woman's place in society. They resist from giving a woman even the dignity of being a person. The subordination and oppression of a woman begin since her birth. When she is a young girl the father has all the power over her; when she marries, he transfers it to her husband. Surprisingly, even in the postmodern era, when we so frequently talk of the issues of feminist consciousness in a loud tone, in reality all the societies worldwide have oppressive and discriminatory attitude towards women. She suffers from an identity crisis and loneliness and depression seem to cloud her personality. This is responsible for ruination of her inner self. Subject to continuous torture it is not easy for a woman to revolt against the social restraints and mainstream norms. Society does not allow any deviations from the norms labelled as traditions. The fiction of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale revolve around this smothering world of real life experiences of women with an attempt to deconstruct the oppressive patriarchal binaries; asserting that it is not quintessential for women to fulfill their social obligations every time or accept the overwhelming male dominance, that may restrict their movements or control their desires and emotions. The novelists delineate the psychic traumas of the females to project the grotesque image of all that passes for normal in our world. Extremely consciousness of their separate existence and identity the women expand their focus from the family to themselves and give preference to their personal wishes. Whether the women in the novels of the two writers rebel provisionally and then accept the social norms or concentrating completely on themselves achieve personal

accomplishment and an exploration of the circumstances that lead them into the conflict is the subject of the subsequent discussion. The analysis will mirror the myriad faces of Indian women in the novels - women who are submissive, who are rebellious, who oscillate between their conventional roles and the desire to deviate, those who refuse to become representative role models, who prefer to retreat into isolation, and those who feel estranged due to absence of desired relationships - and their victimisation within the so called domestic boundaries and outside them and the how the social constructs become instrumental in disturbing the mental and psychological make-up of the women characters. The concepts evoked by the novelists which identify with postmodernism have also been laid bare. In this chapter neurosis has been given a considerable place because neurosis verging on insanity has been portrayed in the novels to articulate the effect of the hurts that the protagonists have received in an insensitive man-dominated world. The endless re-iteration of this hurt, the various disillusion, cynicism, oppression and frustrations sooner or later degenerate into a disorderly state of mind. Neurosis has been explored by Desai and Gokhale arising out of need for others' concern which is missing in most cases in the contemporary times.

Maya, the protagonist of *Cry, The Peacock*, Desai's first novel, projects the image of a new woman who is aware of herself as an individual. She is free from her traditional, social and moral constrictions and is able to perceive her life segregated from the rhythm of a stagnant survival. Every time we read the novel we find that Maya is filled with the excitement of a hunter. She comprehends only simple things of life not the big talks about penance, moksha or salvation. She believes the main reality of life to be death and devoid of any sacrificial precincts longs for her own survival above anything else. Maya's psychological aspects dominate the novel.

Anita's world is one of mental preferences and dislikes as far as handling of the characters is concerned. Anita shares the qualities which made Jane Austen special and famous. Jane Austen, writing at the eve of

industrial revolution, allows us to observe women who are three-dimensional, strong minded, independent and atypical. Anita's novels too are broadly appreciated for the subtle portrayal of the protagonist's search for self-actualization in the face of rigid codes of behaviour in a conformist and status quo-loving society. Maya initiates the existence of Anita Desai's heroines searching for values and harmony in a harsh, cold and relentless world, dominated by men where they either annihilate themselves or compromise with their destiny. Maya is a young, sensitive, childless woman married for four years to Gautama, a reputed lawyer in Delhi, who is twice her age. The novel begins with a brief account of the death of Toto, Maya's white little dog, whom she had loved passionately. The novelist attempts to establish the queer psyche of her protagonist by showing her oversensitiveness. Anita says, "Childless women do develop fanatic attachments to their pets. It is no less a relationship than that of a woman and her child, . . ." (CTP 15). The reactions of the two main characters to this event are varied. Maya's response to the death of Toto is highly emotional and hysterical while Gautama is completely cool, detached and little disturbed over the event; he forgets it by the evening but Maya cannot get over it. She cries and is on the verge of collapse till Gautama takes over it. She exasperates Gautama who cannot comprehend her agitation. Her unconscious is dominated by the prophecy of the albino magician. She has fits and recedes into an unreal world. Her psyche faces fierce inner emotional storm due to the husband. Her father's overprotective behaviour has made her extremely vulnerable with a lot of imagination. Her sensuousness is so acute that she can readily and instinctively identify herself with natural objects and animals but not with human beings, which demands the exercise of common-sense. Maya's love and concern for animals only show her feeling of heart and compassion which is a part of her greater psyche that loves everything around - the grass, the fire fly, the moon, the flowers, the stars etc. Her inability to communicate with Gautama proves sinister for her.

Maya's tragedy is that there is no one to share her feelings. Gautama

does not respond “either to the soft, willing body or the lonely, wanting mind near his bed” (*CTP* 9). Gautama, himself characterised by boredom and exhaustion finds his wife petulant, pampered, childish and immature, unable to cope with the hard facts of life. The sexual hunger gives another blow to the shattered woman. She always felt the albino eyes haunted her and she grew more restless day by day. The postmodern novelist, as critiques of metanarratives who do not believe in false idealisation of values or institutions, voices her support about the fallacious idealisation of marriage in Maya's words, “It was discouraging to reflect on how much in our marriage was based upon a nobility forced upon us from the outside, and therefore neither true nor lasting” (*CTP* 38).

Gradually she found it difficult to manage with Gautama and found her life bizarre and oppressive. She compared herself to a timid, crouching mouse afraid to venture out. Gautama felt that her misery was unreasonable and there was nothing constructive in it. She was undisciplined and indulgent. Maya's unhappiness can be traced in part to external circumstances - ‘her wayward and high strung childhood’ (*CTP* 53) and adolescence which makes it difficult for her to face the realities of adult life, the Oedipus complex for her father, and an unsatisfactory emotional and physical relationship with her husband. Maya's anguish can be credited to her belief that surrender of self means the subtraction of her autonomy. Sadness and melancholy is the fate of sensitive people as Maya. Her love for art and music is a part of her sensuousness. Her life is that of a desperate wife - incoherent and ambivalent. The dominance of fear of her own impending death lead her into a frenzy and she pushes Gautama from the parapet and she justifies herself by the assurance that Gautama believed in after-life and resurrection and it would not matter if he were physically alive or dead, thus an unexpected climax is given to the novel. Anita does not condemn her act as a romantic euphoria or a breach of matrimonial relationship, her aim is just to venture into the intricacies of her persona. Anita constructs Maya's life as a projected statement of an irrational and

tempestuous relationship and elaborates how boredom with familial life leads to disorder and resorting to unscrupulous steps with a view to acquire vital space in the given framework. Anita writes:

It is remarkable what a magnet human nature can be for disorder and failure. (CTP 42)

It is this acceptance of disorder and failure without any particular analysis or criticism that characterizes her as a postmodernist writer.

Otto Friedman Kernberg, the famous psychoanalyst, has made important psychostructural diagnosis of personality organization wherein he has focused on tripartite psychostructural framework - psychotic, borderline and neurotic - which delineates broad ranges of personality functioning based on past influences, prominent defences, integration of identity and object relations, anxiety tolerance and management. Kernberg has propounded that neurosis is a type of defence mechanism employed by the identity concerned against the psychologically hostile environment. Kernberg in *Severe Personality Disorders: Psychotherapeutic Strategies* accentuates :

I propose that neurotic personality structure, in contrast to borderline and psychotic personality structures, implies an integrated identity. Neurotic personality structures present a defensive organization entering on repression and other advanced or high-level defensive organization. (5)

He illuminates our knowledge about the cognitive, perceptual and emotional style of neurotic functioning. Such obsessive personalities abound in the novels of Desai. Lack of proper relationship matrix and a peaceful, satisfactory environment contribute to a person's insecurity and the torment of life leads to a person's neurotic condition. In order to avoid the trauma and onslaught of dissolution of personality one escapes into the intra-psychic defences.



The novel *Cry, The Peacock* is a fascinating psychological study of neurotic fears and anxieties of the dramatic character, Maya. Maya is the centre of this world. Her sanity - whether she is sane, hysterical or insane fill the whole book and gives it form, as well as life.

Various incidences of the novel have been captured with an aim to give a meaning to Maya's abnormal behaviour. Maya's neurosis arises out of various reasons ranging from her overprotected childhood to her discordant marriage and above all her own obstinate thinking and obsession with an unforgotten sorrow. Maya is obsessively preoccupied with philosophical questions like "What was true? What was lasting? What to believe in? What to reject? Danger, danger . . . the warning came whispering over a distance to me, struggling through the mass of truths . . ." (CTP 75).

Since the introduction of Maya, she is presented as reacting hysterically to the death of her dog, Toto. She makes it a reason of unrelenting misery. The dead body of Toto becomes Maya's insanity objectified. It makes her remember the predictions of the albino astrologer and triggers her death instinct. Neurotics always fear death, loneliness and destruction and so she does. Her reactions to events are not normal but unnatural outbursts. On the death of Toto she does not shed tears but indulges in a fit of furious pillow-beating, kicking and crying. She momentarily calms down, realizes her mistake and sees herself in the mirror and finds herself, "Like a foolish baby . . . a round faced child in a white petticoat" (CTP 55).

Maya's world is full of illusions and hallucinations. She bursts out, "God, Gautama, father surely it is nothing but a hallucination" (CTP 55). Brought up under undivided attention, love and care of her father, when she is faced by the stark realities of life, Maya is shattered and feels dejected. She craves for a similar consolation from her husband Gautama but fails to get it. From a world of wonder and excitement she is led into a world of

unhappiness and depression. Even Gautama blames her as abnormal and says, “Neurotic, Neurotic that’s what you are. A spoilt baby . . .” (*CTP* 99). Maya’s neurosis is aggravated by her physical and mental anxiety. She finds the atmosphere of Gautama’s house unfriendly and is disappointed at the lack of commonality between her and her husband. She finds the comfortable house of Gautama no more than a tomb. Although Maya’s neurosis is alleviated by her marital discord but the sole blame cannot be pelted on it. Her own hypersensitive and turbulent nature is also a major cause of her disorderly state.

Her neurosis is explored by the novelist through the summer, the dust-storm, various zoological images, the light and the sea. Maya grew without motherly love and in turn fails to be a mother. Her childlessness increases her neurosis and sense of loneliness. Toto was her emotional replacement of a child. Although Gautama tries his best to understand her problem and nurse her but her mind is always occupied by one or the other problem. She herself admits, “he drew me away from thoughts of anguish which rose, every now and then, like birds that awake from dreams. . . . Circle a while, then settle again, on other branches” (*CTP* 19).

The second part of the novel presents her recalling the forecast of the astrologer about the death of one of the partners and she is overtaken by the terrorising fear and persistent sense of disaster. She is over involved in life, as Gautama says, which makes her impatient to remain alive. Her heart is outraged with anxiety at the thought that one of them would survive. Uneasiness haunts her and she begins imagining Gautama as her “steel-hard adversary in this onerous battle, all night, all day” (*CTP* 140). She feels her life moving from failure to failure and blames Gautama for that. She is nauseated and stifled by the uncertainty of her future life. She is irritated by the terror of death, “But to perish? Who? Tell me who”? “Who knows which one is to perish? Perish one must”? (*CTP* 106). The prophecy that seemed to Gautama an ‘absurd fuss’ was to her like ‘a shroud of death’ (*CTP* 120). She felt him like a parasite. Her repressed desires of sex, tenderness,

emotionality, belongingness lead her to day - dreaming. She starts imagining her body float away and Gautama unaffected and undisturbed by death, "What is death to you Gautama? Do you believe it?" (CTP 120). She says to herself. Her mental conflict and psychosis is so painful that she is unable to avoid it. Her subconscious mind moves towards the thought of murder which she unhesitatingly executes.

Thus Maya's cries are mainly the outcome of her instinct for self preservation. The fear of death and the awareness that either Gautama or she is fated to die make her almost go mad with the apprehension that she would die.

The novel *Voices In The City* has a complicated pattern with four stories woven around four characters. First section revolves around Nirode, the brother, the second around Monisha, the third around Amla and the fourth around the mother. The narrative unfolds the story of three females - Monisha, Amla and the Mother. Different facets of feminine experiences are presented, underneath which lies the ground swell of frustration of a vegetable existence. Moving in the world of opulence, imagined freedom and mundanity these women lead a shallow, artificial life in direct touch with the harsh realities. Monisha is battered and bruised internally, though outwardly she is all composure as is expected in Indian ethics. Anita presents how the centre of negligence towards her has shifted from her maternal home where also she was the least cared for daughter and less loved sister of her siblings. She is uprooted just to be brought after marriage into a house with barred windows, full of passive inmates where her existence seemed absurd. Her relationships are devoid of true love. Bereft of any meaningful association she feels lifeless and wasted. She does not demand or revolt for any absolute mutation, in fact, dismayed with her condition she considers any change irrelevant. Devoid of any anchor of mooring she realises that her salvation is not possible within the purview of this physical existence. She gets morbidly melancholic, given to fits of severe depression and pronouncing a death sentence to herself proceeds to

commit suicide quietly effacing her existence. Monisha's character presents the novelist's vision of life that is based on contemporary reality where among other factors marriage as a social institution has lost its sanctity and relevance.

Her character is symbolic of the defensiveness and disillusionment of the postmodern being who does not lament the loss of platonic ardour but accepts it as a grim reality as Monisha feels, "from attachment arises longing. . . . If only love existed that is not binding, that is free of rules, obligations, complicity and all strings of mind or conscience, then - but there is no such love" (*VIC 134*).

Anita delves deep to explain the labyrinths of her characters, to explore their multiple injuries and lacerations of the psyche, all accounting for the identity atrophy. She presents Amla as an unaccommodated alien suspended between two worlds, that of her expectations and that which she encounters, unable to enter either or make a haven of her own. Amla's life presents a startling and powerful collage of diverse experiences intermingling many dimensions of human existence. What is remarkable is the psychological insight, the familiarity and the ease with which the problem is dealt. Amla moves out of the family and roots feeling excited and adventurous to pursue her career as an artist. However half way she feels sliced up, ripped and torn. Anita critically analyses the creative urge and energy of women facing the crisis of the present. Life in Calcutta, for Amla, becomes a deadly horror and terror in the novel. The city becomes identical with Kali, the universally acknowledged goddess of destruction. In Calcutta, in the beginning, Amla plunges into a world of parties and gaiety trying to escape the suffocating realities of life that have overwhelmed Nirode and Monisha. Amla encounters Dharma, a man somewhat older to her and already married, a couple of days after her arrival in Calcutta. She becomes a love-lorn maiden. Dharma's communion is like a utopian moment for her, although temporarily. It provides her some degree of psychological and mental refuge. Presenting the psychological aspect of their meeting Anita

deftly remarks, Dharma's symbolic paintings "modelled on and inspired by Amla present in a surrealistic style the psychological pulls and pressures of human life itself" (VIC 173).

Nirode representing the nihilism of postmodernism says to Amla about her relationship with Dharma, "With such opportunities at hand, you must surely want something greater than pleasure alone or the security of marriage alone - something more rare" (VIC 145). Amla soon realises that relationship with Dharma cannot be prolonged because of his commitment to his wife and children and because he is a conformist to society and would not be able to bless her with love. She leaves Dharma without guilt and once again falls into the pattern of life she dreads, "The atmosphere of underlit reality, of incomplete life began to overtake Amla again" (VIC 166). After all her experiences she drifted and floated again. Amla abhors and rejects the stereotypical idea about woman:

Women place themselves in bondage to women, whether in marriage or out. All their joy and ambition is channelled that way, while they go parched themselves. (VIC 217)

Amla is a postmodernist woman who does not shy away from reality but faces it socially and boldly. The novelist does not dedicate herself to the relevance of the values celebrated by the past generations but celebrates the life and independent attitude of each character.

The vague yearnings and illusory dreams of Nirode and Monisha in *Voices In the City* sublimate on the verge of insanity in the novel. Their entire life is woven in a strange manner inscrutably. They are in a state of constant frustration and anxiety which is the commonest form of neurosis. According to the view of psychoanalysts anxiety is closely linked to an individual's needs and motives. If the essential needs linked with affection, security, self esteem, achievement and freedom are not satisfactorily gratified, it may give rise to the feeling of excessive anxiety or guilt which

in turn results in neurotic behaviours.

Monisha suffers from anxiety and a sense of self-defeat. She, like Maya, had morbid inclinations, as pointed by her aunt. In Monisha, Desai has drawn a real picture of the contemporary woman who wishes to break free from the tyranny of her environment and explore new possibilities accepting the complete responsibility of the consequences. Monisha has an uneventful childhood and boredom accumulates in her over a period of time. As a child she was passive and unable to attract anyone's attention. She lived in her own silent world, full of mystery. Unable to communicate her feelings to anyone in the family she grapples for any emotional fulfillment. Amla comparing her sister to their deceased father says, "She has his silence and a touch of his malice. . . . Harmless to anyone but herself . . ." (*VIC* 206).

She has a powerful, silent stubbornness about her which had grown due to the unsympathetic attitude of her family towards her. She is outwardly submissive but inwardly carries a malice at being trivialised. Everyone around her tries to impose their authority over her and she feeling depressed says, "One must have someone who reciprocates, who responds. One must have-reciprocation I think" (*VIC* 194). She is considered a non-entity by everyone and is married against her wish to Jiban, without any consideration of her true happiness. After marriage she is clustered with the 'pettiest of people' (*VIC* 121) who had 'indoor minds' (*VIC* 121) and she finds it difficult to adjust to her claustrophobic existence. She has to face desolation and humiliation there. She is aware of the frailties and frivolities of life. Her failure to cope up with her environment result in her nervous breakdown. She loses her equilibrium. Obsessive secretiveness is the manifestation of her neurotic anxiety which appears to be the result of the unpleasant incident of setting fire to herself. The repressive atmosphere and absolute absence of privacy of any sort and her inability to manage her stress do not allow the necessary freedom to develop freely and of self-expression which makes her full life worthless. Genuine human communication and co-

existence seemed impossible to her and worsen her insanity. Her sense of insecurity and anxiety due to rejection make her wallow in self-pity. Sorrow after sorrow in her life makes her recede into loneliness. As Amla says, "Monsiha alone stood apart, unnaturally cool, too perfectly aloof, too inviolably whole and alone and apart" (*VIC* 236).

Introversion is also a characteristic symptom of neurosis as is put by Sigmund Freud, the renowned psychologist in *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*:

Introversion describes the deflection of the libido away from the possibilities of real satisfaction and its excessive accumulation upon phantasies previously tolerated as harmless. An introverted person . . . is in an unstable condition; the next disturbance of the shifting forces will cause symptoms to develop, unless he can yet find other outlets for his pent-up libid. (365)

Similarly it is the feeling that she is unique begins to separate Monisha from the rest of the world. She withdraws into a world of her own and remains aloof. She is unable to identify herself with the people around her and glorifies herself as an intellectual and courageous woman. We can say that this feeling of being different from all reverberates through both *Cry, The Peacock* and through Monisha's diary and this is what spells disaster for both. In fact feeling 'different' from others and being an individualist is a difficult assertion in itself.

Her hypersensitive nature, trying to find a substitute for lost self, continuous distress, mal-adjustment, the thought of childlessness detract her from normal activity and she becomes neurotic unable to resist herself.

It is interesting to note the artistic excellence with which Anita Desai presents the plight of Sita, the protagonist of the novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer* with her oddities and limitations. It depicts her intimate

understanding of the psyche of women and their problems. Through her novels, Desai has tried to shatter patriarchal hegemony. A woman's significant difference underlies her sexuality, and it is from her sexuality that most of the problems arise. Concentrating on women's problems Anita has given vent to a new approach where roles of men and women are not segregated and there is a consciousness of a new phenomenon. Desai penetrates psychologically deep into the inner workings of women and externalizes their passive reaction. The novel deals with the inner-outer world of Sita and her fatigue from life. She is a typical Desai character who like Maya, is unable to adjust to her given environment and considers everyone around as hostile and insensitive to her.

Her life with her husband Raman and four children does not offer any sense of enjoyment except satisfying her erotic urge because even after two decades of married life the couple does not have any mental affinity or feeling of closeness. To her, her 'survival seemed hopeless' (*WSWGTS* 50). She is disgusted with the life of her husband's family who lead an inauthentic existence in their age-old rotten flat. Raman never tried to take care of her. Earlier she had thought that she could live with them mentally and emotionally but then she felt bored, dull and unhappy with the encounter. She gets confused between her creative and destructive urge. Sita feels deserted as there is an absence of any co-ordination between Sita and her surroundings. She feels she is being snatched of her vitality and living a hypocritical life. After her fifth pregnancy she is totally disintegrated because she is unable to involve herself completely in her husband's culture who is "not an introvert, nor an extrovert - a middling kind of man, he was dedicated unconsciously to the middle way" (*WSWGTS* 47).

She is infuriated by the trauma of the painful marriage. Broken up she regresses into an interior monologue with herself which undermines her grip on practicality and reasoning. She is unable to think of anything, only yesterday and tomorrow remain, effacing the present from her memory. She fails to relate to anyone including her children. The thought of giving birth



to the fifth child surfaces her hopelessness and void of life. She suffers from various difficulties and psychic problems. Desai describes the intense feelings of her characters and portrays their inner psyche with the use of symbolism which play an important part in novel. Sita in her anguish feels like a pot with fire simmering inside her. Sita felt that she had this fire present in her all this time. Her internal struggle is between her own survival and her psychological temperament as being a reserved and dominant woman. She does not like anybody bossing over her. Her thoughts, views, attitudes and goals and interests are contradictory to her family. Thus there is a constant psychological conflict inside her.

Like other protagonists of Desai, Sita too becomes the victim of socio-cultural and family atmosphere and loses her psychic balance. The incidents like fighting of cook with ayah, quarrelling of ayahs on the streets, disturbance of children at home, children getting hurt, the gracelessness of Raman's family members contrast with her own sense of pride, Raman's not paying attention to her, ignoring her when talking about business and other important matters, lead the way to psychological conflict in her mind.

She was herself also unable to adjust to anyone. Neither was she an obedient wife nor an over caring mother. She was adamant about her choices and way of life. "She never got used to anyone" (*WSWGTS* 43). People of her husband's family were 'unacceptable' (*WSWGTS* 45) to her and she became defensive in their presence. She took their insularity and complacency as well as the aggression and violence of others as "affronts upon her own living nerves" (*WSWGTS* 45).

Sita feels acutely strange amongst these incidents and grew nervous. She found the dream island of Manori to be an alternative to her crumbling existence. But even there she is perturbed by the behaviour of the people around her. She herself does not cater to the needs of her children but expects them to be her associates in her disintegration and disappearance.

She did not find this atmosphere also congenial to her and felt uncomfortable, being very sensitive. Her native island turns out to be very different from what she had perceived as a child. Describing her state of bewilderment Anita says, "She had herself almost ceased to believe in magic, in life, in animation. . . . There was nothing to do with it but watch it, listen to it, sighing at the window" (*WSWGTS* 99). She longs for Raman's heart and metropolitan life of Bombay once again against this 'island of the dead'. Thus, Sita is portrayed as an unsatisfied individual who wishes to escape reality wherever she is and lives in a world of illusion. However in Manori she gets a chance to redefine her life. Anita presents a woman in Sita who does not adhere to the stereotypical image of women dictated by society. Wavered by her natural instincts her position is rendered pathetic and painful. As a postmodernist, conflict of tradition and transition is presented insightfully by the novelist. Revolving around women's issues, the personal regime of a perturbed woman is superbly scanned in juxtaposition with the virtual harbingers of the traditional practices and customs. Sita ultimately succumbs to her lot submissively accepting the existing order of things in society with the realisation that if she acts otherwise her life would become appealingly unbearable. Anita presents the psychological belief that every individual has an intrinsic nature which is the outcome of different factors and is unique in itself and we need to realise and respect that. Different reactions are produced by different states of mind in different situations.

The novel is a presentation of a kaleidoscopic picture of the mind of Sita who is at the threshold of insanity due to her meaningless existence. Sita's psychic perturbations are the perceptible outcome of an encounter between the hypocritical world and her inherent honesty that repels any such compromise. Outwardly she displays an adaptation to her husband and his family but mentally and emotionally she travels alone. She feels herself turned to a "living monument of waiting" for some real moments of intimacy and harmony (*WSWGTS* 49). It seemed to her that all the years of her life

“were dyed, coloured through and through with the colour of waiting. It was not a pure colour - it was tinged at times with anxiety, at others with resignation” (*WSWGTS* 49).

Anxiety and resignation, both, as already discussed are the commonest symptoms of neurosis. They fuel a person’s irrational response to the circumstances. In her distress she finds the thought of giving birth to the fifth baby unbearable. She feels trapped in a mechanical life and loses the ability to comprehend her own wishes. In a hysterical moment she says about the fifth child in her womb, “I mean I want to keep it - I don’t want it to be born” (*WSWGTS* 32). Any sense of clarity is blurred by her unrealistic vision of hope. Raman, her husband, unable to understand her extreme actions bursts into a fury and observes, “Mad. . . . You’re gone mad” (*WSWGTS* 32).

She suffers from fatigue and nervousness. She is ever haunted by the world of destruction and violence. Neurosis is her safety mechanism, as in the case of Maya and Monisha to save herself from the menacing danger. She resorts to violent outbreaks at small provocations. When she discovers herself pregnant the fifth time “She wept and flung herself about” (*WSWGTS* 27).

Before going to the Manori island when Raman tried to console her she is infuriated and begins to beat him with papers, slippers and nightgowns. Raman realised, “Control was an accomplishment that had slipped out of her hand” (*WSWGTS* 29).

Anita Desai has followed the pattern of monsoon winds to convey Sita’s unusual behaviour - dark and threatening, sometimes pour down widely and passionately, then withdraw quietly and calmly - thus, delineating the inner life of the heroine. She is terrified by the violence prevailing in nature which is a shadow of her inner conflict and insecurity. She is excessively disturbed by the greedy chase of the cruel crows, the

warring of ayahs and the dustbins of Bombay. Upset by the world, she experiences anxiety. Anxiety is normal to a human being but when it becomes persistent and starts injuring other people and effects the normal course of life, then it is converted into a psychic abnormality and can be labelled as neurosis.

Sita in her depression, forgets her role as a mother and wife and behaves with a total lack of control. She even takes to stammering which is another symptom of neurosis. Mentally disturbed by her helpless condition she often stammers which is indicative of her repressed rage and unfulfilled wishes. The following lines reveal this, “Hu . . . a breath fell from her heavily like a stone dropped. Wh . . . what’? She stammered, ‘Wh\_\_ abortion” (*WSWGTS* 9).

It is her conflict between her conformity to the set roles and rules and the desire to escape the everyday life of disappointments and anti-climaxes which provoke her neurosis.

Sita is neurotic like Maya and Monsiha, but she is different in the sense that at the end she redeems herself by leaving the island along with her husband and stepping towards a world of adjustment and compromise. She feels ashamed of herself and agrees to put up with her disappointments for the sake of her own sanity and for her children.

Nanda Kaul in the novel *Fire on the Mountain* has been projected as a middle aged widow, who having crossed the age of erotic pleasure, voluntarily retreats into a desolate house in Kasauli (Carignano). Unlike Sita or Maya, Nanda Kaul exhibits wisdom and courage and her complete self content, desirability and seeming state of moksha is not totally deceptive. But her life is also not devoid of the psychological conflict and struggle, typical of Desai’s heroines. Sensitive etchings of human frailty echo in her novels.

The novel begins with Nanda Kaul standing all alone under a tall pine

tree in Carignano. In spite of her age she is revealed as an elegant, graceful and beautiful woman. She is introduced as a lady who has withdrawn herself from the clutches of all duties and responsibilities. As a householder she offers her life completely to her husband and children. She had gained all the conventional wisdom of housekeeping and proves herself a perfect, well versed domestic woman. Her conflict arises due to her subdued and suppressed emotions. Her conjugal life is scorched by the prolonged extra-marital life of her husband and by his emotional negligence of her feelings. After her 'ironic bow to duty that no one had noticed or defined' (*FOM* 20) she wishes for silence. She did not wish to punish or blame anyone but to be with oneself. Her inner suffering is described by Anita as, "She had suffered from the nimity, the disorder, the fluctuating and unpredictable excess . . . she was so glad when it was all over" (*FOM* 32). She realised that her existence was mechanical and thankless. Even her family members did not appreciate her devotion to them. The estrangement that the women in Desai's novels suffer is largely caused due to the absence of desired relationship. They feel lonely and helpless on one hand while on the other they also have an authoritarian temperament as well as a potential for violence. Nanda Kaul wishes to be left alone at Carignano. She loves solitude and independence which depict her proud temperament. Anita Desai's characters are self-conscious of the reality around them and carry a sense of loneliness, alienation and pessimism. She adds a new dimension turning inward into the realities of life and plunges into the depths of human psyche to score out the mysteries and chaos in the mind of characters. Ramesh K. Srivasta, a renowned critical writer, rightly points out the dichotomy presented in Anita's world of fiction in *Perspectives on Anita Desai* :

While most of the women characters are sensitive the male characters are not and as such they often aggravate, even cause, the problem of women characters. Gautama is detached, philosophical and rational, . . . Raman in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* fails to understand the problems of Sita. . . . The

Vice Chancellor in *Fire On The Mountain* is inconsiderate and Preet Singh rapes and kills Ila Das very brutally. (29)

Whereas in modern societies and also in traditional Indian extended families, elderly women tend to be marginalised Anita Desai remarkably and distinguishingly centres her novel on the character of an old woman, a crone, who deliberately chooses a marginal place to live in, refuses the exhaustive role as a mother and wife and retreats into an inhospitable landscape which exemplifies the negation of the role model. Thus describing Nanda Kaul neither as a conventional stereotyped character, nor a role model for readers.

Carignano has also been presented symbolically as the house where all the past inhabitants risked or underwent violent deaths. Apparently many of the women living there manifested violent attitudes. One almost killed her husband with a knife and it was said that his ghost still haunted the house; another was famous for her ill temper and whipped the gardener; another one grew stranger herbs and almost killed the cook with a fork. This line of women seem to share some of the characteristics of Nanda Kaul in her violent, obscure, magical power against domesticity of her mundane life.

A letter brought to Nanda Kaul introduces a new character in her life and the novel, her great-grand daughter, Raka. It is Nanda's interfering daughter Asha who wants to send Raka, her daughter Tara's child to her care. Thus four generations of women are introduced in the novel, though the narration mainly focuses on Nanda Kaul, the old lady and Raka, the inexperienced child. Little Raka is immediately identified as an intrusion and a distraction. Nanda Kaul due to Raka is not able to have things the way she desired. She is called back to her domestic duties unwillingly.

Raka shares some common features with her great-grandmother. They are both skinny to the point that while embracing each other "Each felt how bony, angular and unaccommodating the other was and they quickly separated" (*FOM* 40). Because of their proud and independent attitude, the

two female characters hardly interact. Raka has a unique disposition of destruction and she had a special talent of disappearing at any and every time. They did their best to avoid each other. Their separation is both physical and emotional. As for Nanda Kaul, "She did not want to be drawn into a child's world again - real or imaginary, it was bound to betray" (*FOM* 50). But Nanda Kaul was unwillingly attracted to Raka's willful rejection of her in turn. "Raka was not like any other child she had known, . . . she appeared a freak by virtue of never making a demand. She appeared to have no needs" (*FOM* 52). Raka loved to be alone in the pines of Kasauli. Nanda felt her own image reflected in Raka and was drawn towards her, "she was finished, perfect model of what Nanda Kaul herself was - merely a brave, flawed experiment" (*FOM* 52). With her undemanding nature and independent existence, Raka leaves Nanda wondering what an extra-ordinary child she is. Raka, regales in ugliness, danger and destruction. Given up all childhood pleasures just like her grandmother. Raka's is a rare, albeit significant portrayal of a character-type for whom recluse is not a compulsion but an alternative willingly chosen. Raka becomes insecure by any show of affection and care towards her as these emotions are alien to her upbringing.

Anita presents the psychological fact that we perceive the world in accordance with the beliefs we treasure or the thoughts we nurture. Nanda Kaul feels Raka to be a natural continuation of herself. Their assimilation has been stated explicitly by the novelist. Anita has effectively portrayed through Raka the negative effects of domestic disturbance on the psychology of a child. Nanda Kaul, being an elderly lady very well understood this and saw the personification of family conflict in Raka and as a result grew more protective towards her.

Desai probes the psyche of the emotionally disturbed self in *Fire on the Mountain*. Lack of response in love and failure in communication give rise to psychic malady in Nanda Kaul. In Desai, the conflict is not so much between the society and the lone individual, as between two polarised

choices. Desai points out an important psychological fact through her characters, that, the more intensely and religiously a person is involved in the fulfillment of societal demands, the more is the conflict between his desire to deviate and the need to conform.

Nanda Kaul loses trust on the very fabric of society and after her husband's death moves away to her childhood house at Carignano. Anita Desai very artistically pictures Nanda's bedimmed and beguiled psyche at every stage. Her withdrawal stands for an emotional satisfaction, a kind of psychic alienation that refuses to take note of any movement around.

Her philosophical musings lead her to love the bareness and isolation of Carignano. She wished to remain at the periphery of the world outside and say the great 'No' to the demands of the society. The announcement of coming of Raka bring to her the memory of the frustrations and rejections of her past. She becomes anxious with the fear of being pulled back to the mundane reality of life. Neurotic fear is in response to some anticipated fear. Choked with duty and activity stops her breath and she felt, "Hurry man, she mentally snapped - get it over with? She is given to hysterical fits and asks herself the terrifying question, "Would Raka's coming mean the opening of that old, troublesome ledger again" (*FOM* 23).

Raka's arrival further bruises Nanda Kaul's psychological wounds. Raka sets her life on fire, literally. Even the coming of her childhood friend, Ila Das draws 'black furrows of desperation' on her face and she unwillingly allows both of them to come with: "words dropped like small, cold pebbles into the mouth piece of the telephone" (*FOM* 23).

Her hypersensitivity makes the situation deplorable. In a state of hysterical neurosis she goes into the kitchen to order Ram Lal to cook the delicacies which a child would like. On one hand she wants to enjoy the bliss of solitude while on the other she knows that a life without human bondage is impossible. She will always be bound by her duties. Nanda's own



moral scrupulosity does not allow her to cross the boundaries of the family but unreciprocated in her love and dedication she ends up emotionally and mentally sterile.

*Clear Light of Day* is chosen to evince and examine the wide space that divides the two types of women hailing from the same family - Tara who represents the women do not act against the established norms but surrender and so keep the tradition alive and next the women like Bim who choose not to surrender and be meek, but break the convention to face their situation and take up a new road where no one can dictate terms to them. Time acts as a catalyst agent in their lives. The novel begins with Tara's visit to Old Delhi, their ancient family home and ends with the departure of her family, that is her husband and children.

The novel deals with crisis in the life of both Bim and Tara. Anita shows how contemplative she is about the predicament of the new woman, who chooses either to protest against or accept the stereotyped norms and currents. Bim is the chief protagonist of the novel and perhaps one of the most powerful and mature woman in the novels of Desai, in the enactment of a woman who represents a fine blend of self-realisation towards both her family as well as society amidst her flustered existence. Her world is that of a nexus between the two. As a postmodern writer Anita does not favour grand narratives, thus, neither the theme nor the characters of the novel are legendary but they are restricted to a very small cross section of a middle class family in old Delhi. The setting is characterised by a dishevelled house and garden which establishes the limits of Bim, Raja, Tara and Baba. Bim, a history professor is a strong, independent woman who remains a spinster by choice to look after her brother, Baba. Bim hails from a stereotypical Indian family in which women including her aunt, sister and mother are obliged to act according to the dictates of patriarchal society. Bim, in this novel, is portrayed as a woman who is totally different from the other Indian girls in her choice of sports, studies, language as well as marriage. She hates any kind of dependence on anyone - whether it be financial or emotional. During

childhood she wishes to be a heroine while either girls nurtured only the ambition of being married. Like a boy she enjoyed playing outdoor sports, she had a "natural affinity with the bat and the ball, and had the most splendid coordination, trained in sports as she was by Raja and Hamid who had often made use of her as a fielder when they got up a cricket game between . . ." (*CLD* 124). Playing vibrant sports rather than playing with dolls is reflective of her rejection of the representational pattern of the society. She cherished her time with books and in school. She lacks the shyness and rectitude characteristically expected of Indian girls and revelled in her contradictory approach to education and life. Bim displays her own firm indoctrination about independence and teaches the same to her students later as a lecturer. She did not await marriage as other girls but her mind was preoccupied with other problems and concerns as Dr. Biswas says to her, "you have too many worries" (*CLD* 123). And accepting her responsibility Bim says, "I'm head of the family now, am I ? you think so, so I must be" (*CLD* 123). Bim's ebullient and vivacious nature found its full expression when she was away from home. School brought out her inherent energy and she enjoyed her lessons, "To Bim, school and its teachers and lessons were a challenge to her natural intelligence and mental curiosity that she was glad to meet" (*CLD* 189).

She loved to be confronted by challenges and meet them. At school she became a different person, away from the peculiar atmosphere of their house. She was a bright and organized student and took part in all the activities of the school with full zeal and vigour. She had both - ability as well as the will to learn new things. To vent out her frustration she resorted to teasing other students many a times. Her sister Tara's meekness was scoffed by her and she had an innate sibling rivalry for her. So much so, that once she cut Tara's hair against her will, in order to take revenge and enjoyed when her sister lamented. She had no yearning to be in a cocoon-cosiness and rejected Dr. Biswas's marriage proposal as she wanted to serve her family, assuming the role of an eldest male member. Dr. Biswas is not

able to visualize Bim as a strong woman who wants to be independent, “Bim’s mouth fell open with astonishment at this horrendous speech so solemnly, so leadenly spoken as if engraved on steel for posterity. Then to her relief, Dr. Biswas left and she was alone . . . her tangled emotions twisted her face and shook her, shook the thought of Biswas out of her” (*CLD* 148). She found his proposal ‘ridiculous’ (*CLD* 148) and impractical. She knew that she had her limitations but tried her best to overcome them. She, like other women is suppressed twice-first by the society and second by her family. But without any masculine support, she rejects the caricatured belief. hypnotised by her own vision of self-achievement remaining within the periphery of the family structure. Bim pursues her ambitions by being productive and active. Bim gains her transcendence from life by her economic and mental independence which Tara opts for in quest for love and protection. Bim refuses to confine herself to her role as a mere female, connoting an insignificant prey or object for other’s use and pleasure.

Tara presents a totally diverse aspect of feminine psyche who restricts herself to a woman’s place and respects herself in this role. She is a construct of her culture and upbringing. She represents what Neeru Tandon, an acknowledged feminist writer, in her analysis of women in *Feminine Psyche: A Postmodern Critic* observes:

Cultures create male and female as central identities. Cultural elaborations of sex difference, however, move far beyond the bare facts of physiology to create inequalities. I feel that woman is a female to the extent that she feels herself as such. It means that a woman can be defined by her consciousness under circumstances dependent upon her society and her psyche is a product of social-constructs. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuchs, which is described as female or feminine. . . . The main tragedy is; if patriarchy considers a woman inferior; the female psyche is not different from this. She considers

herself inadequate in herself and thinks that a woman must seek her identity and self-fulfillment through masculine desire. She should remain passive, content, pleasing to her man. (4)

It means that a woman is defined by her consciousness which, in turn, is effected by the circumstances dependent upon her society. Tara is a woman who feels that her own sense of reality is in collaboration with men. She should remain passive, content, pleasing to her man. Since childhood she perceives her role in relation to the masculine world and voices her ambition of being a wife and a mother. She shies away from school and other boyish activities. Disdained by her sister and brother she seeks her fulfillment through masculine desire. She is a character with totally defenseless approach. Through her Desai describes the disposition of a girl, governed by patriarchal norms in her maturation process. Tara assumes the so labelled – normal-passive female sexuality, and accepts the superiority of men which is a pointer to the psychic mechanism of the patriarchal structure. She dislikes any sort of deviation to it including games and education. School to her was a blight, a terror, as it seemed to mock at her meekness. She always yearned to be within the protective boundaries of her home. She had lack of ability and will to display any sort of talent except in hunting the right match in marriage. She felt herself like a lost soul who found solace under the paternal care of her husband, Bakul, who in turn treated her like an inexperienced child. She allowed herself to be trained by Bakul without any inhibitions and is happy to be relieved from the boredom of her childhood abode. However, when she returns to her home after some years, she feels guilty of her action of running away from all responsibilities. She tries to reconcile with her elder stronger sister without having any permanent solution to the problem facing them. Anita presents the traumatic realization in her psyche after observing the grim reality of living which Bim was faced with. She felt her own life inauthentic and unreal against that of her sister. Tara represents the female-values of pacifism, non-violent settlement of differences, and a harmonised regulation of life.

Anita in *Clear Light of Day* is unique in exploring the mind of unwomanly women, lonely and haunted by various obsessions. The plot in her novel is connected with the vision of the whole action which is chiefly an inner journey. What is unique about the women in the novel is that they are prepared to face the consequences of their choices. Anita's protagonists here are brought up to be diffident, meek and quiet in the face of exploitation, yet are highly sensitive and intelligent and are desperate to find an outlet to their pangs. Their extreme sensitivity however channelizes their mode of liberation in various directions.

What Jean Francois Lyotard observes in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report On Knowledge*, about postmodern knowledge and characters is true to Anita's world of novels:

Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. It's principle is not the homology but the inventor's paralogy. (Introduction xxv)

Such paralogy, dissension, questioning the just society and legitimization of social bonds is found in the character of Uma, the protagonist of *Fasting, Feasting*. Uma is a postmodernist character who, unable to perceive the world from the point of view of other people and unable to justify the geniality of the existing power structure of society, finds herself in an atmosphere of pervading gloom and rejection. Uma is disgusted with the disorder of her family comprising of MamaPapa, her younger sister Aruna and her overprotected brother Arun. There is a lack of harmony between the needs and hopes of Uma and the social group in which she lives. The result is psychic entropy or decline. Uma, the eldest daughter, is neither very beautiful nor even good at studies and often is the cause of disappointment for her parents since childhood. MamaPapa who themselves are a single identity fail to realise and respect her uniqueness from others

and are always reflexive and critical towards her. Anita mocks at the patriarchal attitude of the parents who had a long desired dream of getting a son and when the second daughter was born, “Mama’s eyes swollen with crime as she lay across the bed and wept. Papa scowled his concern and embarrassment . . .” (*FF* 15). Finally, the son arrived and “. . . papa sprang out of the car . . . his arms flung in the air” (*FF* 17).

Anita presents the unquestioned acceptance of the traditional conceptions of the society by MamaPapa because that is the only way they know how to live. With this collective consciousness of the parents Uma and Aruna suffer discrimination in their family. They do not approve of their daughters' education in a public school. Uma is always busy with one or the other errand of her parents. With the arrival of the precious son she was further entombed in the household chores. Uma is very fond of her school as it satisfied her curiosity and she got an answer to her every doubt and question, which were silenced at home. The novelist says about her love for school:

She would have confessed how the order pleased her, the rationality of the whole system, each element having its own function and existing for a reason. Clearly the outer plainness and regularity of this convent world contained within its secret chambers dark with mystery, streaked with golden promise.  
(*FF* 20)

Uma, though not a good performer in academics always made excuses to stay on in school as it meant being away from the trivialities of her home. However enthusiastic she may be about school, Uma is an average girl and an abject scholar. She failed in exams and reasoned by her mother's protocol she was pulled out from school to stay at home and look after her baby brother. MamaPapa’s dream about their daughters was only to get them well married. Uma was repeatedly made to feel ashamed of her failures at school as well as on the front of finding a suitable match. All her pleadings and

requests to continue her school go in vain. Finally her desire of going to school and getting education remains an unfulfilled dream. Uma is a girl of simple wishes. It was a sheer joy for her as a child to enjoy the delicacies which Mira-Masi made. And going with her aunt to the river or temple lured her very much but her father did not approve of it finding it hot and unsafe or too crowded. When she grows up she also wished though not as desperately as Aruna or other girls to get married and get a secure life. But to her misfortune she has to suffer further embarrassment when rejected by the first suitor who chooses her younger sister instead. Great hue and cry is made at home about it. Her marriage is made as the first and foremost concern by the family. Her psychic trauma is mirrored deftly in various incidents like Desai expresses Uma's feelings when the first suitor comes to see her, ". . . mother scrubbed at Uma's face as if it were a piece of hide to be offered for examination" (*FF* 76). Uma was expected to look good and present other accomplishments like skill of making samosas. After the second betrayal and financial loss of dowry, Uma was finally married off to a party hailing from another city, without showing any interest in her preference or choice. Uma becomes a victim of the notion of system. Everybody feels happy to get rid of her presence which seems to spoil the harmony of the home. However the bargain proves to be a failure for her ailing psyche and for her family who shunned her responsibility. They find, to their misfortune, that her husband already has a first wife and even children. They had wished to avoid any disturbance as they only believed in the advantages of the performativity criterion which had proved its viability in Aruna's case but they failed miserably. Uma could not help, but reconcile with her fate and be busy in the day-to-day work. Her life is devoid of any privacy and she is denied any external or internal communication. She is intruded by her MamaPapa all the time and not even allowed to shut her room. They do not allow her to move out of the house. She always gets bullying and threatening on one pretext or the other. Treated rudely and with contempt, she is even refused the visit to an optician in Bombay calling it an inessential expenditure and wastage of time. She has no tranquility or love or

respect. The exhaustion results in her desire for justice and the desire for the unknown which is characteristic of the postmodern time. Like the Kafka protagonist, Desai's heroines too, encounter the distressing conflict between external and internal obligations. Uma has a psycho- emotional urge for a larger life outside which is at war with her filial and societal obligations. Uma is a typical Desai heroine who is bereft of control and protection other than what she can generate for herself, faced by seething despair and discontent.

Namita Gokhale's novels present her postmodern approach about a rejection of labels of 'his' or 'her'- by a breakdown of male-female prototypes and restructuring of societal and familial boundaries. Her novels clearly expose the influence of the western culture which has seeped into the fabric of Indian life and culture. It has gradually filtered into the mainstream of Indian life style and has undeniably effected the views about individuality, space within relationship and sex.

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* expresses the pleasures of freedom and equality and speaks of sex as a normal urge. Paro, the protagonist, excels in her physical charms, socio economic status and attitude. Priya, the narrator and her ardent admirer believes her to be an exotic creature. The novel just like that of Desai's novels has neither a reformist motivation nor any utopian dreams of a better world to live in. Namita is neither a dreamer nor a futurist. She cherishes the plurality and difference of individuals and their experiences. Paro breaks with the age-old and restraining ethics of the male-dominated world. Sometimes she resorts to extremity in sexual promiscuity or extra marital relations, in order to redefine herself and her happiness and satisfaction. Namita brings forward a new dimension of troubled sensibility of a woman in an absurd world who defies the conventional codes of the social world. She presents the new sexual ideology where women treat sex as a natural and primal instinct and give free expression to their physical desires as it symbolises for them a sense of feminine freedom. As Charlotte Holt Clinebell the well known feminist writer expresses her idea in *Meet Me*



*In The Middle:*

Liberated sex means an end to the double standard about who can enjoy sex and who can't and how much, or who can initiate sex and who can't. It means an end also to the dehumanizing effect of the double standard which detaches sex from a relationship of respect and caring. It means an end to 'nice girls don't' and 'real men must'. (229)

Paro is such a woman who prides herself in her belief in this sense of liberated sex and in being authoritative and passionate. She does not wish to be an ideal wife or mother. She rejects the concept of chastity or a husband-worshipping wife. On the contrary she felt uninhibited and was in love only with herself. Priya appreciating her says, "Her audacity and self-confidence took my breath away . . . she stood proud and straight, and led the way" (*PDP* 9). Since the beginning of the novel, Paro is presented as an emblem of disparagement of the established norms and is strikingly deviational in conduct and beliefs. She wields her feminine power to earn money, goodwill and status. She commits adulteration at different levels of her life. Even as a child, she is not so innocent and when she engages in an affair with the art master, Marcus she does not feel guilty even after being expelled from the school for this. She is mentioned as the wonderful temptress who has a long line of admirers like B.R., Bucky Bhandpur, Lenin, Shambhu Nath Mishra and even her best friend Priya's husband, Suresh. Paro has seduced all of them. She is alluring and rapacious.

Paro is first married to B.R. but she discovers his infidelity soon and without any hesitation breaks off with him and subsequently had many affairs after that and considers it as her liberation. She compares her life with that of Clymnestra and feels that this conflict of tradition and transition has degenerated her. She is natural and spontaneous with an articulation tutored by her instincts rather than the patriarchal conditioning. She lives in a world of vanity and reveries. She expects everybody to listen to her when

she goes on talking only about herself without any emotional attachment with anyone - her husband, child or friends. Namita deconstructs the past idea of feminism in that Paro does not believe in equality with men but moves ahead to follow her own path. She does not look for comfort and security in her marriage but is only committed to herself. She lives in a world of fantasy as Priya says about Paro, "Differentiating between fact and fiction was always a problem with Paro" (*PDP* 27). She nurtured unrealistic dreams like being the P.M. of India. She loved her body and cried at the slightest injury to it. She personifies the new woman who is daring and rejects the hegemony of the male dominated world. She mocks at men and clarifies to Priya the futility of following the rules of the society as they have been formulated by men themselves as per their convenience, "Look sweetie . . . they made the rules" (*PDP* 31). She exploits her physical potential daringly and confronts the male counterparts enjoying unquestioned supremacy. She proves to be an irresistible attraction for everybody around her. Priya examines her as, "But Paro was as full of beans as ever when we arrived; and determined to dazzle them all, whatever the means, and dazzle them she did" (*PDP* 58). She had a determination to dominate the world and to achieve that aim she did not care about the means to reach there. She did not suppress her desires for the sake of traditional role such as B.R.'s or Bucky's wife. Though she dares to cross the patriarchal threshold one by one, at the end she is caught in her own web and her spirit is curbed, and the readers are given the impression that all that happened in her life appeared too good to last.

Namita like Desai displays an understanding of the psychological patterning of people at different levels through her novels. Desai presents how different women characters in the novels undergo a change in their emotional and mental structure with the change in their external circumstances. They either attain maturity like Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* or lose their balance altogether like Maya in *Cry, The Peacock*. In Namita's novels too the experience of each woman is different and

therefore unique which gives a striking psychological dimension to her novels.

Another important character, Priya in the novel lives in a world of dual morality. A middleclass girl aspiring to rise above her dimensions. Priya, like Namita's other heroines, is wavering in her mind, perplexed, sometimes happy and at times anxious and frustrated about her course of life and her decisions. She is faced by a gender-biased society which lays its constraints on her on one hand while on the other she is motivated to realise her own dreams and ambitions. Born in a conservative middle class family, Priya had to take on the mantle of the provider. Her mother had been widowed very early and she being the only earning member had to provide for her and her younger brother who was studying to become a doctor. As she mentions, "Family circumstances had more or less forced me to take up a secretarial course rather than completing college, all our family savings went into making my brother a doctor. As there was no prospect of our being able to shell out any dowry for me, my mother forbode a bleak spinsterhood" (*PDP* 7). Namita here brings out the social evil of dowry attached to marriage as Desai does in some of her novels like *Fasting, Feasting*. However, Priya does not let misery settle in her life. She asserts her independence to think about herself which she materialises by going to the parlour and organizing her look. Her mother is aghast at her fashionable appearance, her fastness. Namita presents the inner conflict faced by Priya due to the contradictory expectations she has from the society and from herself. She finds her diary a way to let out her inner frustrations, Priya's diary is an expression of her thwarted creativity.

Gokhale vividly depicts the struggle and ensuing pain that Priya undergoes in her journey from the insecurity which her mother's attitude instills in her to a life of contentment and liberation that she desperately desires. Priya falls for B.R., her boss because of his position. Her pre-marital sexual indulgence with B.R. brings out the ambivalence in Priya's conventional / modern personality. She is unconcerned with rigid moral

norms and violates them without a single tinge of guilt as long as she is with B.R.. When her relationship with B.R. does not materialise she chooses to marry and settle her life as per the traditionally accepted pattern. She had the characteristic feminine feeling of jealousy for Paro who had managed to hunt B.R. In her marriage with Suresh she is faced with an unromantic superficial bond, work-priorities and monotony. She has a latent infatuation for B.R. even after marriage. Refraining from grand narratives, Namita does not present her protagonist as a typical angel or a perfectly ideal wife. It was just that Priya was careful to convey the image of a caring and concerned wife. Securing her marriage by deception, morally deviating, she caters to the demands of her adolescent mind and physically indulges with B.R. even after marriage.

Another important aspect of Priya's personality brought out in the novel is her ability to adjust to situations and get back to her normal self as soon as possible. Priya knew how to maintain the ostensibly happy exterior of acceptance and realised the compulsion to make a virtue of necessity. Thus when Suresh has a short affair with Paro or insults Priya as 'a stupid woman' (*PDP* 113), a nobody without him she sobbed loudly for some time and then after exhibiting her displeasure temporarily she says, "the next morning I was quiet and withdrew. . . . I responded with a passionate kiss, and soon we had made it up" (*PDP* 45). She is a woman who has an innate wish to wrest power but within the familial structure.

Priya shares characteristics with some of Desai's protagonists like Sita of *Where Shall We Go This Summer* and Tara of *Clear Light of Day* in certain aspects. As Sita struggles to establish her own identity remaining within the purview of her family and in the end succumbs to adjustment to keep her family intact so does Priya. She faces the gender crisis like Tara and at the stake of her own self-respect many a times keeps the ego of her husband intact. Both Tara and Priya accredit their male counterparts for providing them a way to escape their childhood insufficiencies and earn a privileged position in society.

Neurosis is reflected in Namita Gokhale's novels also as in Desai. *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is a richly woven tale of the self-dependent, tall, sexy Paro narrated by the observant Priya, who records not only the amorous involvements, the demonization and failures of her deconsecrated friend and combatant, Paro but in the course gives her own psychic revelations. The novel deals with reason, passion and death. The novel, labelled as pornographic by many critics breaks from the traditional theme of Indian English novels and presents the aghast reality of the contemporary Indian society. Priya, in the novel, fluctuates between the aesthetic and psychological. She is at once ravaged and inspired by Paro's life style. The conflict between the do's and don'ts, voluntary and involuntary actions, rational and irrational, freedom and bondage, affects her mental balance greatly and she undergoes a psychological trauma leading her to hysteria, anxiety and delusions.

In a haunting way, Priya's anguish both ends and does not end in the novel. Her diary is an articulation of her recurring agony partly due to the burden of the traditional codes and mostly due to her own psychological disposition. As a postmodern artist, Namita presents the distortion and contortion in the life of Priya and Paro. With a dynamic vision the notion of ephemerality is presented tinged with melancholy. The continual uncertainty serves as a catalyst for psychological changes in Priya. The perception of uncertainty has been identified as a significant factor leading to psychological distress. Parental uncertainty is directly co-related to her disorder in later life. Her mother is unsure of her marriage and underestimated her by saying, "even a deaf-mute would expect his wife to be respectable" (*PDP* 7). Her mother was self-contained and Priya knew that she "barely existed for her" (*PDP* 7).

Since childhood she experienced endless gloom and later when she is rejected by B.R. as a marriage partner she becomes obsessed with taking revenge from Paro. Obsession is a symptom of neurosis. Lost in a labyrinth,

she is over impressed by Paro who seems to be determined, flawless and stern in her decisions. Obsessions are repetitive thoughts and images that don't go away. As Priya accepts:

Gradually, she became an obsession for me. Subconsciously I would find myself mouthing her words, . . . gestures that were hers would enact themselves in involuntary mime. For example, I would throw back my head in a deep throaty laughter and my eyes would narrow in a pale shadow of her piercing gaze. (*PDP 12*)

Variations of this fantasy overcame me almost every night. (*PDP 13*)

She frequently transposed her role with Paro and felt a triumphant power in this assumption. Depressive-obsessive neurosis according to psychologists like Pierry Janet and Freud is characterised by a lessening of function of reality. Mental ruminations and inability to relate to a situation are its symptoms. Impulsive action is the resultant phenomena. Priya's quick decision to marry Suresh and later get involved in extra-marital affair with B.R. are spontaneous and devoid of any rationality indicating her psychic imbalance. With mixed feelings of 'jealousy' and 'love' in her mind she accepted the amorous advances of B.R. as an urgency. Having done the deed and having taken recourse to neurosis she openly accepts her conduct to relax her prolonged psychic struggle which perhaps she herself had not known. In psychotics, the moral agency becomes completely inactive. However, Priya saves herself from plunging from neurosis to psychosis by the purposeful action of maintaining her marriage with Suresh by way of making a compromise.

Another symptom of her neurosis, besides obsession, is hysteria. She becomes peculiar, eccentric, hypersensitive and defiant. When Suresh discovered that Priya was writing a book about their life and rebukes her, her

reaction is, “Suresh looked sterner and sterner. I felt hysterical with anger and relief-anger that they were mocking at my book and relief that they were reading it” (*PDP* 112).

Insecurity is another aspect of her neurotic behaviour. The psychic needs of an individual vary according to his personal inclinations, social expectations and social status. Priya had married Suresh as a nodule of social status and security. When she felt her wedlock crumbling she was overtaken by fear of unknown misery and past instability and says, “I could feel all my buried insecurities surfacing . . . here I was, feeling as gauche as ever inside” (*PDP* 71). She becomes a victim of benign neglect and feels that things were getting out of her control. Bereft of any affection and control, she is struck by terror.

Namita has taken the bold step to trace the fundamental crux of the psychological crisis in the pervading gloom of human affliction. Lack of interpersonal fusion of living and loving is the cause of Priya’s neurosis just like Maya, Monisha or Nanda Kaul of Anita Desai. All of whom suffer from this lack of harmonious balance in their lives.

Mental health of a person cannot be assessed out of context. Every action has a root in the environment of the person and to separate or neglect them would be completely illogical. Paro’s life is a portrayal of her bizarre beliefs and strange behaviour which can be analysed in the context of her past time and experiences and relationships. It seems madness to her was a strategy for survival.

Paro’s neurosis can be justified in her survival instinct and her ambiguous relationship with every person in contact. Paro has been presented as a free creature but in-depth analysis shows that her freedom is not free from agony, jealousy, envy and fear. As she had no reverence for the conventions of the phallus, she resorts to neurotic defense mechanism of avoidance of social and sexual mores bluntly. Neurotics nurture a super-ego

as Paro does. She is antagonistic to the social imperatives. She experiences a split personality as she subtly accepts the institution of marriage on one hand, while foils it without hesitation, on the other. The preservation of her physical self becomes more important to her than protection of social image. She was unconcerned about anyone but herself. Her obsessive neurosis is about herself, “She would talk on, compulsively, about herself, always herself. She loved self- dramatization” (*PDP* 27). She liked to be scandalised and be a topic of the talk at the parties. Her love for fame made her pair with the influential figures of society. Her overindulgence in uninhibited sex is also symbolic of her vanity and hysteria reflective of her unfettered feminine sensibility. As Priya says, “The edges of her vanity were showing, and the hysteria that lurked within” (*PDP* 54). In the inversion of social values, in her daring and unpredictability, Paro finds satisfaction of her ego and her sense of being different from others.

Linda Hutcheon’s essential traits of the study of postmodernism in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Fiction* characteristically defines the protagonists of Namita Gokhale in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*:

Paradoxes can either delight or trouble depending on temperamental make-up, we shall be either seduced by their stimulating teasing or upset with their frustrating lack of resolution. (Preface x).

Gudiya is another such woman of ambiguous nature. Gudiya faces the various sign systems prevalent in the society expecting her to conform but inherently seeks adventure and thrill in her life. The contradiction is that she does not wish to choose sides but has the inclination to give in to both the urges.

Women in Namita’s world violate out rightly the reality principles operative in dominant male - passive female structure of the society. Gudiya,



the narrator, struggles with her innocent nature in the story. Since childhood her life is full of transitions of place as well as emotions. Abandoned both by her father and mother, her pole of strength is only her grandmother. She enjoys certain privileges owing to the godwomanship of Ammi. Thus when she is admitted to St. Jude's Academy for her schooling she says, "Needless to say, I was the talented child in my class, but the fact that I lived in the temple near the peepul tree with a grandmother who was the local godwoman gave me a certain aura" (*GGG* 14). She enjoyed this attention but misses her childhood bungalow with a hundred and thirty rooms. She loves and respects human relationships and longs for communion with grandmother which subsequently reduces with time. Thus, she feels arrested in her mind and body. As a teenage girl, she is attracted to the charms and beauty of Kalki which leads to havoc in her life. As an escape from the quotidian atmosphere of the temple she has adolescent libidinous desires. Namita presents how women in India, seasoned such, place their unconditional faith in men but men most of the times deceive them. In fulfillment of her sexual desires Gudiya, like Priya and Paro, deconstructs the long-standing traditional pattern of ethics. However hard she may try to free herself of the phallogocentric ideals she becomes emotionally dependent on Kalki, her husband. Kalki marries her not out of will but unwanted external pressures force him do so. It is the strategic decision of Gudiya's caretakers, Phoolwati and her husband, Sundar Pahalwan. Their marriage, for Kalki, is just a transgression of his personal freedom and he finds the bond restrictive. He is ever-ready to break the socio-religious norms. Gudiya realises this fact and makes a conscious decision to liberate him. She realised that she loved the wrong person at the wrong place and felt life to be deceitful. She knew Kalki's mind was always somewhere else after they were married as she says, "He was cool with me sexually and for the most part ignored me altogether . . . my girlish infatuation for Kalki had long since subsided" (*GGG* 215). He sulks and acts difficult with her. He was full of anger and hatred for her. Gudiya longed for his attention but the intimacy between them had disappeared. However, she is blessed with a unique knack

of survival in every situation and adapt to it. Blessed with an intuitive perception she poignantly understood Kalki's inconsideration of herself and her feelings and his wish to run away which she grants to him, reminding herself that, 'pain was a general principle of life" (*GGG* 220).

The only solace she had were the dreams of her caring dead grandmother and the present care of her surrogate mother Phoolwati. Living in a world of illusion she had visions of her grandmother after her death who asked her to take care of herself, "Arre Gudiya, she remonstrated, why haven't you combed your hair since I died? It all tangled; you'll get nits if you are not careful. And why are you crying? You know your Ammi will never leave you" (*GGG* 97).

Namita portrays how the fabric of family life is gradually losing its hold in postmodern society. People are getting distanced from the humane element in relationship and mutual bonding. The ideal of love without domination is difficult to achieve in this material based society. Hope is still an illusion far away.

Ammi, the prostitute turned saint, is another powerful female character in the novel. She is a 'resourceful' (*GGG* 1) woman who rejects the Victorian ideals of womanhood as shyness, meekness, submission to male authority. Urge for survival is more dominant in her than to follow the traditions. She has to search for food and shelter for herself and her dependent grand-daughter Gudiya. Ammi represents a woman who is confident of herself and does not shirk her responsibility of rearing a child forlorn by her own daughter. She does not complain about her circumstances. Her choice of choosing a temple as a refuge is in a way a reversal of the power structure where even the males bow before her assumed austerity, and grandeur of her ironically platonic personality. Although she is a Muslim woman, she throws off the worn out stifling customs in the form of burka and hides her identity. She does not shudder from illegal encroachment of a place to make it a temple, knowing very well

that anything can be done in India in the name of religion. Being intelligent and gifted with a rare perception she knows that nobody would revolt against the religious abode in the Hindu community amidst which she had to survive. She chose the best and easiest way to gain power and position.

Avoiding idealism of any kind Ammi is not portrayed as a woman who undergoes a total internal transformation but only believes in God as much as is imperative to her existence. In Desai's novels also no such moral reformation is suggested or picturised. Ammi uses worship as a way to defy the patriarchal establishment. Ammi is a mysterious woman who on one hand is full of love and care for Gudiya while on the other becomes 'stone hearted' and distances herself from her and rebukes Gudiya's adolescent physical changes like menstruation. Instead of receiving life's experiences as a harsh reality and grumbling she wonderfully accepts it and passes the same trait to Gudiya. She rejects all superstitions like belief in lunar eclipse or astrological interpretation and comments: "If one were to start listening to these astrologers, the second foot would never follow the first. I am ready to undertake any journey on an Amavasya night! Let the girl go if she wants to" (*GGG* 71). She was eccentric and inward at the same time. In her reversed role she accepts life as easily as her past and does not lament. She believes in God and destiny, "I wanted to be like Zubaida or Jayshree. But look at me now-a holy woman! Truly, no one can understand the ways of God!" (*GGG* 51).

Namita presents Ammi's talent of articulation and independence of ideas perfectly in the following words, "She had by now perfected the art of presenting confusing abstractions as exalted philosophy and converted her lack of specific religious knowledge into a Gnostic strength" (*GGG* 67).

Duality of society and their standards have also been reflected through Ammi's godwomanship, who rever her unconditionally in the garb of a holy woman just because of her outward appearance and if she redressed in her past appearance would have been loathful to the same intellectuals.

Virtuosity is linked to hypocrisy rather than intrinsic qualities.

Namita Gokhale in her novels aims at re-creating a separate female space by the overthrow of patriarchal institution, and the old order of hierarchy of power. The idea of specific qualities of a woman has been perpetuated by patriarchy for its selfish gains of oppression and dominance. Parvati's character in *A Himalayan Love Story* shows how she is reduced to an inoffensive and subordinate state by the unconcerned men around her. Parvati's mother plays the role of her daughter's emotional assassin wherein she leads a dual life of an authoritative strict mother on one hand marring the independence of her innocent daughter, while on the other she indulges in illicit physical relationship with a shopkeeper. For financial assistance after her father's death Parvati was dependent on her uncle, Hiranand Joshi who she says was, "a mean and humourless man whom we both hated" (*AHLS* 5). He had provided them with a house and the right to collect the rent from the Kirana shop for their sustenance. Parvati relieved her despair and hopelessness of life to some extent by getting temporary happiness in passionate relationship with her co-student Salman. It was her one way to revolt – a break up from sheer existence. She rejoices in it and says later missing the communion, ". . . the sexual bliss I had known with Salman" (*AHLS* 32).

Salman, however, betrays her thereby reducing her to a mere object of physical desire. He did not care for her feelings and did not even bid her good bye. His sudden disappearance left her fragmented. Her patron too had the traditional conditioning of society and thought that any identity that could be associated with a girl was in marriage. He decides the fate of Parvati is secure with Lalit and marries her to the boy without giving her any chance to contradict. Parvati was not at all excited but felt like a pet dog gifted to another owner, "Masterji wanted me off his hands. He had done his duty, and it was time for me to do mine" (*AHLS* 32).

Parvati becomes a victim of upholders of the patriarchal set up who

want women as a “devoted helpmeet, a self-sacrificing mother . . . women to look at. . . . To wash your floor and cook your food . . . women who do not complain . . . above all women who lose. (*AHLS*33)

Her marriage with Lalit proves to be a failure as he turns out to be a homosexual. Both suffer from a depressive state due to their unsatisfied desires. Describing their psychological state Parvati says, “It came as something of a disagreeable shock to realize that he was as unenthusiastic about our nuptials as I was” (*AHLS* 33). Parvati’s state of mind is remarkably depicted by Namita Gokhale by a comprehensive mapping of her psychology on the first night of her marriage with Lalit, “The decorum of the occasion demanded languishing looks, a tender appraisal of the bride by the eager bridegroom, and then, hopefully, down to business. . . . I could feel nothing but scorn for this farce” (*AHLS* 33).

Social restrictions and taboo compel Parvati to stick to her loveless marriage. She is guided purely by the traditional concept of feminine behaviour. Parvati is an incessant sufferer. The novel depicts Namita’s microscopic understanding of the psychological dynamics that has the power to shape the complete life of men and women. What makes Namita unique is that here not only is Parvati the victim of the traditional mores but Lalit is also victimised who has to adhere to the convention of a heterosexual marriage against his inclinations and demands. Even the dejection of Mukul, Parvati's childhood friend is portrayed where his happiness is undermined because of his unreciprocated love from Parvati which could not materialise into marriage, he so ardently wished. He is devalued by Parvati’s uncle due to the prevailing caste system. Namita’s perspective is essentially postmodernistic in the sense that she does not define women as essentially good while men as essentially bad. She rescues the women characters from being condemned eternally to virtue and breaks the monopoly of bad behaviour enjoyed by men. Even women indulge in immoral actions in the novels of Desai. Parvati does not her hesitate in becoming an anti-heroine by getting physically involved with Lalit's cousin. Her life is full of emotional

turbulence in her husband's house as she knew everyone there hated her so she finds some solace in her extra-marital affair and does not feel guilty about it. During the latter part of her life after Lalit's death she is left alone to shoulder the responsibility of her daughter Irra in the barbaric world. When she finds the support of Mukul she sticks to him like a barb. Her life had made her scornful, sadistic and an utterly pragmatic trickster. Like a postmodern character she is self contained and doesn't care about Mukul's frustration or hurt and says, "Give me the property and go" (AHL 183). Parvati acted shrewdly and made Mukul assume the responsibility of her daughter.

The condition of Parvati is like Uma of *Fasting, Feasting* in that the marriage partner is chosen by the heralders of patriarchy against any consideration of their choice and their states after marriage are also pitiful. While Uma's husband turns out to already married, that of Parvati is disinterested in the opposite sex. They differ in their approach. While Uma has to accept her pathetic plight and is at the disposal of her parents, Parvati has no one to look up to. Parvati, being less morally scrupulous finds some vent by engaging in extra-marital affairs. Furthermore, as Desai's Maya of *Cry, The Peacock* resorts to extremity of murder or Amla to solidarity similarly Gokhale's Parvati here chooses to become a selfish, unwanted, uninvited, unavoidable climber seeking financial support from Mukul, her only support system left. Thus the protagonists of both the writers protest but the rebellion differs in intensity as well as its way.

The protagonist, Parvati's, future in *A Himalayan Love Story*, of being taken to an asylum in Bareilly can be traced back to her turbulent childhood quite like Maya in *Cry, The Peacock*, the reminiscences of which enfeeble them throughout their journey of life. Only that Maya had too much attention paid to her and Parvati suffered from total neglect and loathful behaviour. The painful and disagreeable thing that haunts Parvati is the illicit affair of her hypocritical mother. One day after returning from school Parvati happened to witness the amorous encounter of her widowed mother

and shopkeeper through the window of the old shopkeeper's room. Having witnessed the sexual audacity of her mother in an almost infantile stage, it becomes the leitmotif of Parvati's life. Parvati, who had no one else to look up to, found her mother repulsive after the incident. An all consuming depression and hatred took over her. Even years later, she was consumed by the same sensation. She was give into hysteria and tried to imagine things, "I was more convinced that it was her shadow, her evil twin, that I had glimpsed downstairs" (AHLS 17).

Gokhale's skill in capturing the psyche of a woman is admirable. The novel posits an engaging picture of a woman who through a series of actions and circumstances experiences neurotic fears and anxieties. After the spiteful incidence Parvati becomes obsessed by it. William Mc Dougall, the famous psychologist, observes in *An Outline of Abnormal Psychology*:

Obsessions are those in which the patient not only displays bodily signs of emotion but also experiences the emotion, but without any awareness of the object or situation that occasions the emotion, that is to say, without consciously perceiving or otherwise thinking of any such object or situation. (223-224)

This theory is exact applicable to Parvati. Parvati exemplifying it wallows in her mind and imagines her mother and the tenant together in an insane union. She confesses, "I become obsessed by the window, and spent long afternoons watching my mother and her silly behaviour with a lecherous old shopkeeper . . . and sometimes a bright light spread over my eyes like a flash and blinded me" (AHLS 17).

Thus Parvati becomes a disintegrated personality and feared her own mother although she needed her desperately. Later, when she became ill and the doctors came to nurse her, unconsciously she kept calling to her mother. She sometimes wept, sometimes screamed. Nobody could understand her situation and her words. The mental and physical incompatibility in her

marriage to a homosexual husband further aggravates her despair and she recedes into a world of fantasies. She smiled to herself and was ravenously hungry all the time.

Even after being discharged from a mental institution at Ranchi, she had hallucinations. She was vexed and battered and obsessed with the thought of her mother and utter desolation and poverty. A strange hysterical panic pervaded her surroundings every time. She even gets beaten up by her relatives. She realised that she is condemned to die.

Gokhale describes not only the mental ailment of her protagonist Parvati but also a whole generation of her female ancestors. Parvati's insanity is the reflection of the inhuman treatment she suffers at the hands of her homosexual husband, and the society. Social indifference leads Parvati to madness.

Postmodernists believe in the evolution of such values and power structure where gender becomes a free-floating artifice. Namita too posits her view that man and woman should not be treated as exclusionary categories. We cannot make water-tight compartments of human traits and capacities. Gender is not an in-born quality but it is the result of social conditioning, male dominance and equation of sex and gender. They find their origin in social and personal relations, as in the case of Rachita Tiwari in the novel *The Book of Shadows*. Namita presents herself in this novel as a postmodern critique of gender. The gendered body gets its status from a continuous repetition of certain society driven acts. The novel depicts the pitiful condition of a woman who is eternally punished for a momentary act of physical indulgence. It shows how certain actions can be counterproductive in the absence of a clear perspective. Rachita temporarily fails to fit into the conventional role-model of a virtuous woman for whom virginity is a romanticized version of male domination. Rachita, as a rejection of rationalised closed system of moral codes enters into a physical intimacy with another man and resultingly against her expectations, has to



face drastic turn of events which determine her future course of action. Anand, Rachita's lover is very possessive and considers her to be her sole property. He had the "tendency to take recourse to extreme action upon the slightest provocation" (*BOS* 6). Rachita and Anand have a totally different temperament. While Anand is very aggressive Rachita is cool and calm. Rachita's reflections about their relationship show that Anand and her association is purely by 'luck' (*BOS* 6), not on the basis of intelligence or mutual understanding. They frequently have a quarrel over trivial things as he has a wish to subordinate Rachita every time. Rachita, an intellectual, engaged in the teaching profession finds it difficult to comply completely to his expectations that she must listen to him every time. He wishes to enslave her mind and body. When Rachita deviates from the laid standards, Anand unable to tolerate his hurt male ego commits suicide. Rachita is pained by it but does not feel guilty as she knows, "No regret at Anand's death- I hadn't killed him, for that I was sure" (*BOS* 20). In fact, she felt that communion with Anand was just an illusion which naturally did not last long, the reality was the security and seduction of her best friend's husband. Namita reflects the essence of sex in one's life as she feels sex is integral to the identity of a person.

Anand keeps suspecting Rachita and dominates her to such an extent that it crushes her individual identity. Love affair and individuality are weighed against each other by her. It is a matter of making choices. Self-obsession of Rachita hurts Anand and his reaction against this is in the form of violence. The death of Anand leaves behind only "the pain, the unbearable pain" (*BOS* 6). It represents the notion of pride that a man has in this society regarding the purity of the female partner. Ms Tasleema Nasreen writes in this regard in her article, *Feminism and Postmodern Fiction*:

In our society a woman is like a disposable sanitary napkin. If she is used by a single male she becomes an entirely untouchable object henceforth. (128)

The writer employs various attitudinal strategies to present the dilemma of Rachita and her agony of remembrance. As Namita says, “Human affairs are an amazing web of trivialities” (*BOS* 142). Namita through Rachita realises that world is in a transitional state and we must learn to accept it as such. The conflict between Rachita and Anand is not between two people but between tradition bound patriarchal thought and culture and postmodernism. Rachita feels futile and helpless after Anand’s act. Namita also presents the bitterness and lack of understanding of women towards each other in the novel like Anita Desai’s pairs of Monisha-Amla, Bim-Tara, Uma-Aruna. Anand’s sister failing to understand Rachita and giving her space, took recourse to extreme action by throwing acid on her. This left her broken hearted and a diffused feeling on purposelessness which she expresses in the form of moving alone to Ranikhet. Moving to solitary abodes is a way of resistance and self-discovery adopted by Desai’s Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* and Nanda in *Fire On The Mountain* as this gives time and place to them for deep contemplation. Rachita’s move to Ranikhet is akin to this credence.

Rachita, the protagonist, of *The Book of Shadows* too displays the symptoms of abnormality since the beginning of the novel. She longs for reciprocation in love but her feelings are repressed brutally by the unfortunate incidence of suicide of her fiancé, Anand. It shudders the depths of her mind and she feels convicted for ever. As she herself fears, “I am in danger of getting lost in my internal labyrinth”. “What was real was terror” (*BOS* 205). Haunting sense of death, of Anand’s hanging body create in her acute mental tension and disintegration. Hallucinations flicker in the form of shadows.

Hallucination is seeing things that are not there; or in more technical terms, to hallucinate is to think of remote objects with sensory vividness. She senses imaginary dangers. She is disturbed at the bottom of the heart. Her neurotic condition is further aggravated by the acid attack on her by Anand’s revengeful sister. She, thus, expresses her pain, “Pain is a weak and

inadequate word. It cannot speak of what happened that afternoon when the acid poured and dripped from the beaker in that bitch's hand" (*BOS* 20). The ruthless force of fate overtook her and she contemplates the horror that struck her both physically and emotionally. She could not even remember how she looked like, "My face had been banished from my memory" (*BOS* 20). Which reflects the complete annihilation of her personality.

Nightmare experience is also one of the forms of neurosis. It is the dreadful memory of a horrible experience. Rachita's nightmares replay her terror and obsession with fate-fatality. They leave her paralysed and full of derision towards life. She dared not face them and says, "I am afraid of closing my eyes, I dread both dreams and reality, but most of all I dread the half-light of that moment when one is not yet asleep, when the realities of night and day interlap, when the will is suspended and unreason begins its reign" (*BOS* 22).

Her grip over herself begins to slacken and she has hallucinatory visions of shadows appearing and disappearing. Namita skillfully projects the inner fears and turmoil of her neurotic heroines. She poignantly deals with the conflicts and disappointments that beset modern young women who are educated, sensitive and excessively self-conscious. Her remark about sanity is praiseworthy and notable, "Sanity is like a nail polish, it chips easily, it has to be restored and renewed. Too constant a use can cause a yellowing of the nail" (*BOS* 19). It testifies Namita's deep insight into the psychology and inner emotional world of women. Namita seems to tell us that if one wants to lead a meaningful life, one must learn to maintain a discreet balance reality and illusion.

Both Anita's and Namita's novels are a strong testimony to their deep understanding of psychology of human beings, particularly women. Women are presented as caught in the net of the inescapable without any possibility of mercy or release, which results in their irritation, inability to think or work, persistent anxiety and feeling of fear. Their abnormal behaviour is

betrayed in the change of their voices, its tone and the words, in perspiration, absurd gestures and unjustified actions.

Shakuntala's character is evident in the few beginning pages of the novel *Shakuntala: A Play of Memory* where Namita gives her postmodernistic confession about her love for chaos, "I saw no error in disorder, it seemed to me the natural condition of life. Of course I kept my opinions to myself, for they were neither asked nor valued" (*SPOM* 11). Gokhale, in the novel, is amused by the disharmony of the postmodern era and reflects at the lack of communication rampant in the world. Since childhood, Shakuntala, though loved by her mother, has to face gender discrimination where her mother displayed a wider field of vision for her son and ensured that he got the opportunities he deserved, while expected Shakuntala to just help in her housework and foresaw her future only in marriage. As Anita does in *Fasting, Feasting* where she presents the future of a girl in stereotypical set-up to be only marriage and also the partiality extended to boys of the house as compared to girl child. Shakuntala's mother goes to the extent of even forbidding her daughter to listen to the Gayatri Mantra saying:

Mother: "You can't listen to the mantra",

Shakuntala: "Or else what?" I challenged.

Mother: "Or else you'll grow a moustache and no one will marry you". (*SPOM* 19)

Shakuntala was helpless and had no alternative but to submit to the traditional orthodox belief of her mother. She is torn between tradition and modernity. She used to stand at the door listening to the lessons taught to her brother, Govinda by his grammar teacher to satisfy her curiosity.

How women, even young girls are viewed just as sex objects has been deftly portrayed by Namita in the incidence of the snake charmer who tries to sexually exploit innocent Shakuntala, who is struck by horror and dismay.

As against the patriarchal role expectations, Shakuntala is not so fragile and docile mutely performing the female function, but she is strong and determinant and offers comfort to her passive and apprehensive brother. The death of her father when she was just five had left a permanent scar in their lives and she yearned for a male presence in the house, thus she enjoyed the presence of Govinda's tutor. Emotional dryness and boredom lead her to aspire for marriage as an escape into the territory of a wider world. As she confesses, "I too was ready for love, eager for the exquisite sting of Kamadev's arrow" (*SPOM* 24).

Lack of meaningful companionship and restrictions imposed on her lead her to ricochet into a world of dreaminess and romance. She hopes, "King Dushyant would surely arrive to claim me, his horses panting from the hunt. He would take me to distant lands beyond our unchanging hills" (*SPOM* 24). She married to a much older man, Srijan, who married her for the sake of children. She was his third wife. He was a serious man as against the frivolous nature of Shakuntala. Shakuntala had no platonic idea of love but believed in passionate and satisfying amorous contact. She had no hesitations in communicating her feelings to Srijan and said, "I told him that true love had no philosophy but the joy that gave it sustenance" (*SPOM* 41).

She had neither the inclination nor the wish to abide by the rules or rationalize them. She felt like a free spirit and wandered like one without restrictions. However, Namita just like Desai makes marital monotony not female specific but rather integral to the structure of marriage and hence oppressive. Not only is Sarla oppressed by the unfulfilling wedlock in the novel of Desai's *In Custody* but so is Deven, similarly oppressive is the marriage of Srijan and Shakuntala.

When she was unable to bear children, Srijan brought another lady, Kamalini into the house. Shakuntala was torn internally and said, "but this was worse, a collapse of all that had been good and true in my life" (*SPOM* 58). Namita has a fiercely feminine sensibility that articulates the hurts that

the protagonists receive in an insensitive man-made world. Shakuntala feels extremely jealous and bruised and battered. Srijan, the pillar of her strength, now seemed to crumble. She is pained to see Srijan so obstinate and unsympathetic. Namita presents how the males are unaccountable to anyone and are justified socially in every act of breach of trust and fidelity. Reckless of Shakuntala's emotions, he indulges in polygamy. Thus we can reason the following proposition of John Stuart Mill in *The Subjection of Women*:

The principle that regulates the existing social relations between two sexes - the legal sub-ordination of one sex to the other - is wrong itself, and is now one of the chief obstacles to human improvement; and it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality that doesn't allow any power or privilege on one side or disability on the other. (1)

Namita similarly here rejects the notion of any partiality or freedom to men that legalises any unjustifiable act of their race. Srijan leaves Shakuntala fragmented with a host of unanswered arguments. Shakuntala is led to scorn the practical principles of life and she leaves her home to elope with Nearchus. All reasoning evaporates from her mind and she feels empty. Even when she allies herself to Nearchus, she is disillusioned soon and knowing that this path is unending leaves him too without a second thought or reasoning. The clash between tradition that dictates the confinement of woman within the four walls and the urge for freedom and knowledge takes shape in the life of a young lively girl named Shakuntala. Namita presents Shakuntala as an atypical, unorthodox person who does not spend her life lamenting the mockery of the matrimonial promises of love. Moral sentiments, the regulating principle of world's affairs, are denounced by her with the realisation of a reality that we are instinct itself.

Both Namita and Anita through their novels, vouch the significance of the inner world believing that one's real world is not what is outside him. It is the fathomless world inside him that is real. What is important is to

delve deep inside and find its true essence which lies in finding our true self.

Neurosis is the condition in which a function of the personality escapes conscious control, as is evident in the case of Shakuntala in *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory*. The origin of neurosis can be due to various reasons, most common being childhood frustrations. Unresolved emotional conflicts that remain in the unconscious mind since childhood trigger neurosis very easily.

Neurotic individuals as Shakuntala experience maladaptive fear since childhood and resist sharing their fears. She is oppressed in her infantile and adolescent days by her mother who relegates to her a secondary place in the family-after her brother Govinda. Retained in the four walls of domestic confinement she is condemned to male dictates in the society. The outside life of freedom fascinates her. She grew weary from the constant plough of feeling. Helplessness arose within her. She became blank and submitted herself to Srijan with the hope of a nourishing and sustaining relationship. But her marriage is discordant and her infertility increases her imbalance. Everything was in order, except her life. She lost all reason and sensibility. Her jealous rage at the coming of Kamalini, another woman in her husband's life, takes her to the height of neurosis and she loses the discretion between good and bad, right and wrong. She expresses the barrenness of her mind, "lulled myself by thinking of nothing". "It was oppressive in the house, for she was there" (*SPOM* 97). Her hallucinations of past memories become unbearable to her, things became non-conceivable, and she became impatient, "I was afraid to lie down, for there might be snakes, or scorpions, or river crabs, or memories. It was desolate . . ." (*SPOM* 127-128). Her repressed desire for unbridled passion and freedom from her domestic cage overpower her and in a fit she leaves her house. She became mentally and emotionally starved, "I did not know that about myself, either" (*SPOM* 144). "My thoughts, my vision, were awash with unnatural clarity" (*SPOM* 192). Shakuntala's disproportionate reactions to distressing situations is indicative of her depressive neurosis, where hostility is directed more towards self than

others.

Namita gives a picture of the people who deviate from the society and become neurotic owing to the lost sense of belongingness. The prognosis of her neurotic heroines lies in the stress of life and living with people who are unemotional, insensitive entities contrary to their own hypersensitivity. Her novels show her thorough knowledge of psychology. She is at her best while presenting the silent introspections and retrospections of her characters.

She resembles Anita Desai in the way that both present the fact that the root of conflict is man's primal desire to live a life of satisfaction-physical and emotional and the contradictory frustration of this libido for life. The strings of the unconscious play an irrevocable role in shaping of the destiny of the individuals. Unstable relationship devoid of understanding play the most dominant role in causing the mental disorder of their heroines.

*Priya: In Incredible Indyya* continues the portrayal of Priya in her first novel, submerged all the more in the role of a wife and a mother. Priya is a divided personality, between her love and passion. Doomed to a repetitive routine, psychologically mutilated Priya tries her best to become a dutiful and watchful wife and mother. Suresh, her husband appreciates her concern, "thank you, Priya for being such a caring wife" (*PIII* 12).

The busy, mechanical life of Delhi debunks her vitality. She enjoys the influence she earned by being the wife of the Minister of State for food processing, animal husbandry, fisheries and canneries. But it was difficult for her to understand the equations of valuing the people of importance and ignoring the people who might need you, "It's hard for a middle-class girl to suddenly find herself at the top of the heap. But I'm coping" (*PIII* 3).

Reflecting on the snobbishness of the elite class Namita writes about their mannerism, "There is a trick to it - an easy trick. The smile must never reach your eyes, just hold itself in a tilt of lip" (*PIII* 3).



Priya is contemplative by nature and frequently moves between the past and present. Even after twenty-five years of Paro's death she is obsessed with her overpowering personality. She becomes impatient by her memory, "I'm overtaken by anxiety; it's the forgotten feeling of inadequacy I always associate with Paro" (*PIII* 10).

She has two boys, Luv and Kush- twins by birth but diverse in attitude and nature. She is presented as an understanding mother open to their choices. Priya's state is of vexed trepidation both as a wife and as a mother. Her marriage reduces her toil and economic hardship but fails to provide the promised happiness. She resigns to her fate and immerses herself in rearing her children, "I was so wrapped up in motherhood that I gave up on the rest" (*PIII* 14). "And our sons are not a statistic, Suresh. Or a note bank. And as their mother, it's my job to worry about them". (*PIII* 35)

Priya missed an emotional bonding with her mother, she did not want the same to happen to her children. She wished to prove herself trustworthy and dependable to Luv and Kush. As a caring mother she kept a watch on their private lives, tried to look for appropriate brides for them, helped them to decide their future course of actions but never marred their individuality. She did not force them in doing anything which they disliked. She readily accepts Kush's homosexual preferences and respecting his individuality says, "And I do (understand). We are each of us different, and still the same, somehow. Everybody needs to be loved and reassured, and not to be mocked or scoffed at" (*PIII* 186).

Priya is not a sadist who wants to pay back to the society what she underwent, but she uses her frustration and life experiences as a tool to better understanding of life and human-beings, related or unrelated to her. Her love for her children is similar to Sita's consideration for hers in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*. Both symbolise Indian mothers who are ever ready to sacrifice everything for their loved ones. Their escape from their duties is temporary and they finally reassume them mainly for the sake of

their children only. It shows both the novelists' cultural affinity and their sensibility towards the honoured mother-child relationship, running either parallel or antagonistical to a female's quest for identity.

Both Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale, taking up the themes like the tension between convention and exploration, family solidarity and individualism, social requirements and the personal needs frequently depict their heroines resorting to violence in words or action and revolting against the aberrations in the society. The novelists depict women of all ages and groups presenting the feminine psyche in all its varieties and shades. The personal sense of worthlessness juxtaposed by the society is vanquished by their protagonists by the expression of disjointed thoughts and by their overt actions. In its most universal form, rebellion, according to Albert Camus in *L'Homme re'volte'*:

involves a protest against the condition in which man finds himself. Finding the world to be unjust, the rebel protests against being a part of that universe and attempts to reorder his world according to his own version of justice. The act of revolting, even when it involves a level of injustice to match that which is prevalent in society, results in apocalyptic moments of freedom and power. (39)

This kind of revolt results in a new reconciliation with the self and the universe and infuses respect for oneself. Rebellion sometimes can cause pandemonium, calm it down and make life bearable and at other times it may disrupt the life of the protagonist and the people surrounding her/ him. Rebellion to the characters of these novelists means being true to their individuality even if it means going against the grain. They do not want to be constrained by the social or political conventions. The women in their novels continue to register their anger and protest against male dominance. Many a times they are also oppressed by beings of their own sex. As a result of their oppression, exploitation and marginalization they turn rebellious. Their

antagonistic attitude towards society makes them outspoken, bold, somewhat arrogant and unbelievably aggressive. They express their rebellion either by choosing to remain single or by establishing extra or pre-marital relationships and sometimes by remaining silent. Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale present experiences of their protagonists not as mere incidences, but as sensibilities.

Desai and Gokhale give an elaborate description of the mounting agonies and throbbing anxieties of the female characters which cause a lot of harm not only to themselves but to host of others including their husband. Caught in the claws of their past memories and male hegemony they show symptoms of defiance and rebellion.

The women in Desai and Gokhale's novels deny being reduced to marginal people. They seem to say often to their family-you don't deserve me. Due to the sterile married life and non-responsive altitude of husbands, they behave as autonomous beings, subjected to their own will. They often indulge in promiscuous sex and make their husband either to tolerate or ignore it. In the view of postmodernism these writers do not observe decorum and propriety as signifiers of gender respectability. The women in these novels have the courage to revolt and refuse being puppets in the hands of man in the name of tradition and society. They relentlessly struggle with all their strength to achieve joy and success in life. They stress the value of balance of power between the genders. As Shobha De writes in *Shooting from the Hip: Selected Writings*:

Eventually, every relationship is a power struggle either at an overt or subliminal level. . . . Control over the situation has been a male prerogative over the centuries. . . . It is time that they were aware of their own potential and power. The very concept of sexes locked in eternal battle is negative and destructive. . . . It is in maintaining the state of equilibrium between these two opposing forces that can lead to creative

and dynamic harmony. Man will have to come to terms with woman power. (111-112)

Likewise, the need and possibility of re-creation of a healthy perception towards women have been emphasised in the novels which is possible only by the realisation of their own capacities.

Anita Desai's *Cry, The Peacock, Where Shall We Go This Summer, Clear Light of Day, Fire on the Mountain and Voices in the City* explore the theme of rebellion by women in the honour of their own lives, who have learnt the important lesson-the first person whom you need to love is yourself. It is the stress in the life of the women characters in these novels that makes them realize their own strength which was even unknown to themselves earlier. Their victimization becomes the empowering gift of life. These novels are symptomatic of Desai's urge to present the female side of the human condition, a syntheses of women's insights gained from their own femininity. She depicts the change that is coming in the lives of girls and women. Maya, Nanda Kaul, Sita, Bim, Amla, Monisha all feel their heart throbbing madly. They could not accept their social failure- the deadening 'symmetry' that deserts their life. They feel miserable. Their inner voice echoes as, "Danger! Danger! . . . Run and hide, run and hide- if you can" (*CTP* 150).

The protagonists are not content in taking their anguish as their lot and do not believe in just shedding some tears in a dark corner. They are persistently struggling against the 'strangers' around them. As it becomes clear to Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, "She could not inwardly accept that this was all there was to life, that life would continue thus inside this small, closed, area, with these few characters churning around and then part her, leaving her always in this grey, dull-lit empty shell" (32). They refuse to be cowed down by the patriarchal dictates of the society and have a belief in some miracle to happen. They are astonished shocked as whether they should be "Grateful for disappointments"? (*WSWGTS* 131) and put up

with the meekness of the males in their lives as heroism! Desai strongly asserts that the risk of being your own person or trying to have something to do with your destiny is one of the major battles in life.

They are aware of the twin edged sword of the society and they choose to rebel rather than bleed endlessly. They are not convinced by baseless arguments in the favour of bleakness and the harsh environment but wish to create conditions that may give some meaning to their lives. In order to validate their existence they either commit murder like Maya, suicide like Monisha, sustain their position in the family like Bim and Sita, liberate oneself from monotonous slavery like Nanda Kaul or achieve economic independence like Bim and Amla. The position of the women characters is of victimization who try to become a non-victim in their own ways. At the thematic level the experience of Bim can be related to all the major women characters, "Life spread in a pool around her, low and bright, lapping at her feet, but then quickly, treacherously rising to her ankles, to her knees. She had to get out to it" (*CLD* 118). "That was the way life was" (*CLD* 119).

Therefore Anita calls for self-determination and action and a need for change. Analysing the behaviour she presents how the ultimate future of the heroines is decided by the immoderation in bizarre activities and abnormal demeanor. As women of free spirit they act on their own. They tacitly new modern roles and come forward just as a live woman.

This sprouting new picture of woman has shaped a crises in family and society as depicted in all of Desai's novels. Separation, pre-marital and extra-marital relations are not considered a taboo. Amla feels the revival of her youth in physical relationship with Dharma. She does not behave like an idyllic Indian woman. Knowing that the relationship was 'pallid' (*CLD* 213) she did not think or reason the consequences, "She gave no thought to the worm embedded in the fruit". (*CLD* 213)

She is an open-minded woman who did not pay any attention to

scruples which may involve strain, enjoying the perfection of the moment. Amla hated the rules and restrictions of the society and found them meaningless. She splintered patriarchal supremacy.

In this sense she bears resemblance to Bim who is a self-reliant woman. Rejecting the stereotyped community status of being a wife and a mother, she assumes her responsibilities, reversing the feminine role. She is the unwomanly man of the novel and impresses everyone by her stern decisions. For the sake of money and admiration she is not at all fascinated by the institution of marriage rather mocks at it openly. She is a dazzling, energetic and unconventional woman who does not find her own space but gives space to all around her.

Rebellion against the neglect meted out to women is accounted in the decision of Nanda Kaul and Sita to leave their family to attain the climax of satisfaction and inner accomplishment. In search of new prospects these women cross the social barriers. They took no heed of anybody's disapproval. They hit back, rebel and contour their fate by living for themselves. This was their "moment of private triumph" (*FOM* 28).

They had arrived to this state by the process of withering away and an elimination and now it was their turn to reject the camaraderie of the society, nushing for a "radiantly single life" (*FOM* 34). Disturbed by their mistreatment they struggle against slavery. As Sita says, "Put up with it? It would be cowardly to put up with it. . . . That's what I refuse to do, you know" (*WSWGTS* 131). With a view to remove all obstacles in the path of her release she preferred to live on the island of the dead than to belong to her family.

Valiant Maya too in *Cry, The Peacock* pushed her husband off her life realizing the importance to live with an undeniable actuality. As Maya voices: "We were as in a gigantic bubble . . . it was slowly compressing, concentrating, squeezing and we waited breathlessly, for that high moment

when east would clash into west, when Sun would explode cloud. The world grew smaller. It shrank, shrank soundlessly” (*CTP* 51). These lines present the psychosomatic enchantment of Maya with violence which makes her triumphant in contrast to her male foil.

The exquisiteness of Gokhale’s heroines too has stirred up the literary world. Her novels demonstrate the reprisal of the women against the power structure and its perpetrators. They throw light on the quandary of these woman living in disquieting circumstances. Gokhale’s women like Paro use sex as bludgeon to succeed and to mould men to their point of view. She is erratic, egoistic and manipulative. Both Priya and Paro use sex as a calculated strategy to get social and financial benefit. Even Shakuntala and Parvati use extra-marital affairs as a revolt against the traditional and moral values in the society. They battle ceaselessly to come out of the male shadow. These women are independent but at the same time vulnerable to some extent because of an inalienable bond of tradition. They are starved of emotional fulfillment. Women like Shakuntala are aware of the fact that they are committing adultery, but continue to plunge deeper into it with feelings of spite against their husband and feel no guilt when their husbands find out about it. Shakuntala says about her relationship with other man, Nearchus, “I cannot be his wife; I am the wife of another. But what can I say? The curse of Priapus brings sensuality without joy, satiety without fulfillment, degradation without grief and horror” (*SPOM* 163-164).

Adultery in Gokhale's novels is women’s sole defense against the domestic slavery in which she is bound and when a woman feels suffocated and confined in marriage and is sexually unsatisfied, doomed to male crudeness, condemned to male ugliness, she finds consolation in a young lover. Shakuntala, in the same vein, finds consolation in Nearchus and Paro in Avinendra or Lenin. Marriage takes its toll on Shakuntala, Priya, Parvati and Gudiya, who suffer frustrations and humiliations due to insensitivity and sometimes promiscuous nature of their husband. Flailing the emotional dryness of her husband if Priya rebels in the form of extra martial affair with

B.R., Paro's revolt is in the form of physical copulation with a numbers of males, thus raising the gender-based phallogocentric question. They refuse to accept any kind of external authority.

With no support and no clear path outlined Shakuntala, Rachita and Parvati are plunged into a dilemma where they have to make their choice, whether it be wrong or right. They find solace in solitude or temporary amusement. Breathing heavily they try to revive a dying fire. They mock the notion, that "It is not good for women from good families to be talked about" (*PIII* 40). as said by Suresh in *Priya*. On the contrary both Priya and Paro love to become the centre of talk 'a conversation piece' (*PIII* 40) at parties. Paro questioned the authenticity of traditional sublimity, "She was direct, even curt, and by now not in the least embarrassed. Paro could be very-rude when she wanted to be" (*PIII* 72).

Paro rejected completely and openly the social norms and she was surprisingly mature about the whole thing. Priya too took to her fantasy with B.R. and partook of intense sexual pleasure. The extreme moments of her rebellion are revealed in her confession of the same to her husband. "And do you love B.R." Suresh hammered. . . . "Yes, yes" I continued, still lost in my private rhapsody (*PIII* 117).

Even Parvati in *A Himalayan Love Story* was not shamefaced who by her involvement with Raja, Lalit's brother, took a great satisfaction by making "uncompromising, uncomplicated love" (*AHLS* 43). By being infidel she took her vengeance on Lalit and was not at all shameful of her conduct. Relieved of her frustration she says, "a sense of relief would settle over me, I would sleep alone on the kitchen, safe in my rebellion' (*AHLS* 43). After fulfilling her physical longing with Raja. "I reassured myself that this was no betrayal" (*AHLS* 42). On the contrary, she felt mysteriously cured.

Namita presents the opium plant as a symbol of female power in *Book Of Shadows*:



Significantly, its only the female plant which is used to stimulate the mind. The male cannabis, which is taller is used for hemp fibre, to make. . . . I am always slightly amused by the outrage our bhang causes in the outside world . . . (193).

In Namita's novels sex becomes a symbol of female defiance of a male regulated female sexuality. Hence, according to her, the overthrow of patriarchy requires a complete sexual revolution which would destroy the traditional taboos on homosexuality, bastardy, adolescent and pre-and extra-marital sex-in other words there should be unrestricted sexual activity of all kinds. This provides women the liberty to switch her role from being the used to become a user. Namita presents her protagonists achieve their self-renewed recognition and a relief from their emotional tension through sex. They become acts of non-conformity or rebellion.

Thus we can say that both Desai and Gokhale have successfully captured the intricate emotions, dilemmas and conflicts of women in modern India. Their protagonists are individuals caught between the convenient stereotyping and socio-cultural demands on one hand and their individual aspirations on the other. The texts posit Indian woman's consciousness against the male dominated, traditional society. They portray how social conditioning and societal expectations build fetters around the female will, making it difficult for her to act authentically. However the women in their novels refuse to accept the narrow roles assigned to them. They realize that inspite of superficial ease and adjustment their life is unreal without self-gratification. The trauma that the protagonists suffer is beyond repair but they do not succumb to it. Both Desai and Gokhale feel that women have tremendous strength but a lot of it is wasted in enduring hardships. Sometimes the women protagonists prove their vitality by accepting the social and familial ties but by and large the authors present women who establish authoritative defiance and retard men in their own terms, without caring for its effects. The women in their worlds are self evolved. The

women are shattered but they survive drawing on their inner strength. In spite of its ugliness, brutality and horror they love life. The novels do not end on a utopian note but project the positivism that life must be preserved in the form of self awareness at any cost. What makes their novels postmodern is the constant questioning of centralization of power in the hands of male counterparts. Both the novelists present the belief that contemporary situation can by no means be judged by traditional standards. The women characters in the novels are not formally organized or celebrated but they represent the concept of self-reflexivity decoding the established norms and power structure. Self help and one's own resources are to be trusted rather than any external belief which identifies with postmodernism. The characters value the tenets of postmodernism, that is, visuality, unmediated perception and emotion. They do not display any singularity or particularity of thought but extend the belief in the free play of choices at all levels. The approach is thus the same, what differs is the intensity and the pathway. While Gokhale's women make sexual relations acts of non-conformity and the way to relieve their emotional tensions, interpreting sex as a necessary step towards individual fulfillment. Desai's protagonists consider virtue and chastity still relevant to the new structure of living. Without obliterating their personal identity, Desai's women use other instruments like leaving their family temporarily, choosing spinsterhood, or even murder rather than using sex as an instrument to challenge the repressive society. All the females, however, in both the fictional worlds, are seekers of meaningful and lasting relationships.

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## Chapter – 5

# ALIENATION AND ASSERTION

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Dissatisfaction and fears dominate the texts of Indian women novelists; oppression and victimization are also recognisable in their works and there is a pronounced urge for withdrawal not only from the society but also from the self. When a person lacks a sense of identification with oneself or with the society, the dilapidated state is referred to as alienation. The concept of alienation is inclusive of different levels of experience and emotions, such as loneliness, dejection, angst, stress, rejection, rootlessness, powerlessness, meaninglessness, disillusionment, frustration, disintegration, confusion, nothingness, helplessness, anomaly and a sense of not belonging. It denotes an umbrella term which encompasses a multitude of perspectives. The following lines of Chandra Singh Badali, the famous Indian poet illuminate the baffling and all engulfing, remorseful state of alienation:

Red hot is the sky above,  
The earth is a steaming pan,  
All round it is the same ire:  
Life is trapped in a pit of fire. (19)

Psychologists have given a deep analysis of alienation. By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He becomes, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the centre of this world, as the creator of his own acts, but his acts and their consequences become his masters whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship. The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He is not able to relate to oneself and to the world outside productively.

Alienation is considered as an offshoot of self-estrangement. In the

deeper sense, alienation can be described as a feeling that one's destiny is not under one's control, but is determined by external agents as fate, luck and institutional estrangements. It is the lack of comprehensibility or consistent meaning in any domain of action. It represents a state of detachment from oneself and prevailing sense of loneliness, or exclusion in social relations.

Alienation is closely associated with the existential predicament of man. It is a feeling of despondency by the realisation of inescapable reality, where person becomes the victim of either her own limiting compulsions or the prevailing social evils. It is, we may say, close to psychic death. It indicates an existing tension and incompatibility.

Alienated protagonist is a recurrent figure in Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale's fiction. There are serious attempts in their novels to sketch the confusion, frustration, alienation, disintegration and estrangement of their characters. Alienation serves as a basic theme underlining the plight of an individual boiling with loneliness and restlessness. The life of the characters is punctuated by the unfolding silence in their relationship with the society and with oneself. He is estranged from his essential being, thus finding it difficult to find meaning in his very existence and the existential situations. He finds life absurd and full of agonies and indifference. Buffeted by the chaotic circumstances of the postmodern age, Desai and Gokhale's protagonists undergo a physical and spiritual harrowing which leaves them literally with no future. They project that the world is not a place to be at home with. The two novelists are utterly conscious of their age where man suffers as per Edmund Fuller's evaluation of contemporary society in *Man in Modern Fiction* :

not only from war, persecution, famine, and ruin but from inner problems fully, as terrible despair, a conviction of isolation, randomness, meaninglessness in his very existence.

(3)

The predominant subjects of their novels are isolation and segregation and the feeling of being unimportant inside the bigger framework of the social order. The novelists present their protagonists with two alternatives for their tragic plight: modern man may either try or adjust to the others, to society, to the system abdicating his true self or he may strive to maintain and develop his individuality and thus alienate himself from the society. Both Desai and Gokhale speak of alienation as a distinctive characteristic of our time.

Anita's characters suffer from a gnawing sense of void and meaninglessness which are so pervasive that they corrode every sphere of their life.

In *Cry, The Peacock*, Anita endeavours to portray the existential predicament of Maya with a unique touch of the universal estrangement. In the novel Desai explores the turbulent emotional world of the neurotic protagonist, Maya, who suffers from an acute alienation arising from marital discord, and verges on insanity. Anita presents Maya's life which is completely mismatched to Gautama. Gautama, like Buddha is totally detached from physical and carnal pleasures while Maya longs for the satisfaction of physical needs. The presence of Gautama is only in person, the couple did not heed to listen to each other, as one lives a life of illusion and the other of reality. Maya's need for nurturance and getting pampered like her father did, remains unattended.

She does not long for archetypal love but a complete romantic union of body, mind and soul, only to realise that "It was a cruel world, cruelly spoken, and I felt a pang as the solidity of real existence gave one little gasp and collapsed, like a worm-eaten fruit at my feet" (*CTP* 21). With the realisation that Gautama was away from her thoughts and seductions, she was teared by a stormy rush of passionate anger and felt, "I am alone". "I was filled, filled to the point of destruction, God, God, I gasped, enough,

enough, no more” (*CTP* 25).

Gautama, was no romantic. He, inspired by Gita tried to teach her its gospels, “Human beings all the same,” Gautama’s voice ran on. “But of course it is impossible for you to see them in a detached light, objectively” (*CTP* 121).

To make the matter worse, the indifferent behaviour of the husband’s family increase her sense of lack of belonging and loneliness which gradually develops into a sense of alienation. The solitude and silence of the house prey upon Maya when her in-laws go back to their place leaving her and Gautama alone. “No”, Maya cried miserably, “What, the house empty again, and I alone with my fears and night mares”? (*CTP* 136).

All her alienation and fury have their root in her being motherless, her father drawing a curtain to all realities and harshness, and her sensitivity to long lost brother who ran away from home at the age of twenty-two never to return again. All this made her feel that the world was unnatural, such things were impossible and she felt the world a strange place to live in and herself a misfit, “This is not natural, I told myself, this cannot be natural. There is something, weird about me now, wherever I go, whatever I see, whatever I listen to . . .” (*CTP* 122).

Deep in consciousness, the terror of her own assumptions, hallucinations and memories persist and parlyse her. She is unable to understand either the course of life or her own wishes. She has no means to fulfill them. Her pre-occupation with death explodes like a lava with the death of her pet dog Toto and the recall of the prophecy of the astrologer. They glare at her in her state of alienation. “Words tortured me now, as memories did” (*CTP* 88), says Maya in a stage where she found no refuge. She feels helpless with nobody to console or protect her. Her feeling of alienation emerges partially from her total disillusionment with the life of meteropolis that has little regard for emotional relationship, and

paradoxically due to her too much attachment with herself. She felt betrayed and dejected. In a state of utter loneliness she remarks, “Torture, guilt, imprisonment, dread-these were the four walls of my private hell, one that no one could survive in long. Death was certain” (CTP 88).

She did not want to die young. Time shot at her like an arrow ready to murder one of them. She feels separated from the world of Gautama and realised that in the ‘city of the dead’ they had ‘no hope of survival’ (CTP 70). She aspires for love and life which she helplessly struggles to get. This very consciousness pushes her towards alienation.

Thus alienation to Desai is more related to the emotional and mental moods and attitudes than to moral or spiritual temperaments. Maya suffers the pangs of emotional isolation not spiritual or intellectual angst.

The experiences of Nirode, Amla and Monisha in *Voices in the City* have been delineated with a tragic exploration of personal suffering that they unredeemable undergo. The events in the life of Nirode, Monisha and Amla have been narrated in consecutive sections. Nirode, who is an angry young man, is very bright and sensitive. He is aggressive and clever but not cruel. He finds his job, his relationship and even his family name useless and loathed them. He gave up all of these in a state of continuous unrest. He did not question or expect answers from life but found it “Better not to live” (VIC 19).

He felt the world whipping at him with its superciliousness, arrogance and blindness. In the very beginning of the novel, he feels belittled by the scholarly prospects of his brother, Arun, who goes abroad to pursue his studies. The feeling of sibling rivalry has a permanent scar on his psyche. Further he suspects his mother of an alleged affair and so feels disgusted and estranged from his family. He wants to live in shadows, silence and stillness. Life for him becomes a deadly horror and terror. He does not dare communicate with friends or family and does not leave any



chance to ridicule or humiliate others. Describing his painful state of being emotionally unattached to his father or mother, Anita says:

he soon saw that he himself was not an inhabitant of it (their home) . . . between him and his mother's brilliant territory was erected a barbed wire fence, all glittering and vicious. To his astonishment, he found at his side, also on the wrong side of his cruel division, his father . . . (VIC 28)

Nirode's state is ambiguous where no one could tell whether he was at work and serious or idle and at play. Prominent figure in the novel, Nirode, presents the sordidness of an alienated individual. He found everyone around him, even his mother hideous. He never confided in anyone as he trusted no one. He persistently fell ill and drowned in his thoughts and beliefs. Even his friend Jit says, "I didn't know you were so full of self-contempt" (VIC 32).

He had no hope of happiness or success. In fact he wished for failure. About his own idea of editing a magazine, he says to his friend David, "Of course it is. I want it to fail-quickly" (VIC 40). He believes in absolute negation of life. Even the idea of marriage is heinous, destructive and negative to him. The city to him is a haunting ghost, a tomb. He hated any intrusion in his privacy. Presenting his vision of life Desai writes, "He had determined that aloneness was to be the very foundation of this venture" (VIC 49). "He loathed the world that could offer him no crusade, no pilgrimage and he loathed himself for not having the true, unwavering spirit of either within him" (VIC 63).

Nirode's isolation is instinctive and self-imposed. Both forms of alienation-self and social strike him. Internally fragmented, he finds everything beyond definition. Wearied by his own unsurity, Nirode is always on the lookout of escape which in reality he finds none, thus resulting in a tumult of deep unease.

Anita has made her novel instrumental in expressing her consciousness of victimization of man entrenched in a deep sense of isolation and utter loneliness. In this novel, she remarks, “nothing existed but this void in which all things appeared equally insignificant, equally worthless” (*VIC* 63). She also posits the question whether the characters would be able to come to the edge of the void ever or sink deeper into annihilation.

Monisha is also doomed to emotional estrangement. Monisha suffers in her husband’s house due to her intelligence and sensitivity and her thirst for freedom. The events in her life are inscribed in her diary which is her sole mate. She is an extraordinary, highly educated woman of intellectual accomplishments who reads the thinkers, Kafka and Camus. Deeply in love with books, she feels ridiculed to see her in-laws mock at her preference for the written word. Feeling stifled she says, “I wish they would leave me alone, sometimes to read or that Nirode would come again and take me to sit under a tree with him” (*VIC* 116).

She found her house a ‘barren enclosure’ (*VIC* 195) and lived in a state of silent dread. She was tired of “Demands, proprietoriness, obligations, extortions, untruths, bullying . . .” (*VIC* 195). She feels disgusted by the mediocrity of Jiban, her husband, and the monotony of the household chores. Her tragic suffering is a classic example of suffering of educated unemployed women in India. She feels her life to be futile and the only escape from this state of existence is to accept solitude and to be in exile. Frustrated and dejected she feels, “The family here, and her surroundings, tell me such a life cannot be lived - a life dedicated to nothing” (*VIC* 121). She feels herself in a desert, desolated and untilled waste. Caught in a web of unreal relationship life to her is weird and disturbing. Feeling of incompetence and panic shroud her reasoning and she feels the urge to turn and run.

Amla, Monisha's younger sister, too suffers from want of love and care. She posits the question before herself, "what does it mean to exist"? (VIC190). Anita, in *Amla*, spotlights an extremely complex nature of life. She is alienated from herself and her family but in a mysterious way. She is unable to form any warm or harmonious relationship with anyone. Clashes of realities affect Amla's life. She feels aloof and isolated pining for love and meaningful communication. It is her self identification that generates anguish in her. "Amla's love, knowing no possibility of manifestation, becomes one uncontrollable desire to communicate, signalling with forlorn glow-worm desperation from the still twilight of her frustration" (VIC 191).

Amla is seemingly aware of her loneliness and overlooking her own flaws finds the world to be hard and unrestrained. It made her distant and over sensitive. Anita expressing the plight of the protagonists says, "If Nirode's suffering had made him an ill-tempered hermit, then Monisha's suffering- . . . had made her not only distant, but devoid of the compassion which in Amla was so quick and unstinting" (VIC 191).

Amla feels life to be "How unfair, how criminally unfair" (VIC 196). Her relationship with Dharma also turns out to be unreal and ends abruptly, adding to her disillusionment. What made her most vulnerable was her imagination which had retained its childhood vivacity and credulity. Yearning for a dream like exterior without walls and boundaries, Amla found it difficult to keep pace with the despicable realities of life and felt limp and wasted. Living in a state of bewilderment she is caught in a dangerous game of questions and answers, "in which Dharma's answers were all questions to Amla and her own answers, further questions" (VIC 207). All this gave rise to an 'inner volcano' (VIC 207) in her and made her painfully rigid.

Anita Desai by unravelling the mystery of inner life of her characters shows her perpetual interest in their psychic life. Anita's characters are all lonely and haunted by their own obsessions. They are not slaves of rigid

social conventions or false fetishes. Anita, thus deals with the total disillusionment and inner disintegration at the heart of living where the city plays a vital role.

Desai presents her characters as shrunken, etiolated and wasted things. *Where Shall We Go This Summer* has the central female character, Sita, who fears involvement and battles with her conscience to face reality. The Island of Manori concretises her feeling of isolation. Her return to her native island suggests both renewal and regeneration as well as alienation. Through the island she is closed and cut off from all outside relationships. The island is a projection of her inner psyche. Stung by the indifference of her family, Sita finds her survival hopeless. Destruction seemed to her the true essence of life. Her struggle is that of life-in-death and death-in-life. "She knew it was because ordinary life, the everyday world had grown so insufferable to her that she could think of the magic island again as of release" (WSWGTS 90).

She wants to escape the tyrannous grips of her stale life, locked up in an empty theatre. Pained by an emotional violence she sees the illusive enchantment of the island as a protection, a refuge. She feels "if reality were not to be borne, then illusion was the only alternative" (WSWGTS 91). A violent storm is created deep within her heart as she feels imprisoned being torn between the stark realism and the life of dreams and imagination. Sita's alienation and the loneliness result from her maladjustment in her marital life. She is painfully distressed at "the tedium and ugliness of a meaningless life" (WSWGTS 145).

A dissatisfied wife can find solace in her motherhood, but the challenge that faces Sita is that even her children are alien to her. They are self-contained. She feels suffocated in an aching void where there is no commitment or concern. Sita is hypersensitive and pessimistic and has "sudden rushes of emotion" (WSWGTS 48). Sita has the constitutional inability to accept the values and the attitudes of society. Mapping her

psychology, Sita is presented as excluded from vital experiences of life. Her circumstances limit her liberty. Sita is continuously at war with oneself as well as with her society. This crisis leads to her estrangement. The purpose of her retreat is to avoid any contact and in turn any anxiety which may make her uncomfortable and knock her mind. Negative feelings keep squirming in her head and she knew resignedly that darkness was her only companion. "Sita noticed the haste with which they ran from her. They had all got together, she decided, her family, to fight her, to reject her, to run away and hide from her" (*WSWGTS* 126). This misery traumatizes her deeply, disintegrates and frustrates her.

Anita, thus, creates a galaxy of characters who feel excruciating pain in the isolation, in the suffocating darkness of their life in which no healthy communication is possible. The pendulum movement of the alienated individuals have been presented by Desai with a dreadful glamour in the eternal suffering that they undergo. Sita is the symbolic modern house-wife whose sensibility is perpetually under stress. Her mental agony in the outcome of her inability to cope with the society.

Deven, the protagonist, of the novel *In Custody* is an embodiment of alienation itself. The hieroglyphics of the character of Deven reveal his utter internal isolation due to his inability to penetrate the dark alleys of the divided and dichotomized self and the quizzical and unfathomable universe which he inhabits.

His life has a labyrinthine quality lacking any emotional support and characterised by the impossibility of clinging to a definite interpretation. Deven is unable to find hope in any association or relationship, resultingly he becomes doomed to a terrible existence where hollowness lies at the core of the self. He is the wanderer who can find neither peace nor a place to hook on to. His life is based on perpetual and endless wandering.

Deven is a person of meek disposition who nurtures fantasies of

sudden wealth and fame. The discrepancy leads him to find emptiness in what he already has - his family, his job or the companionship of his colleagues. He is a boring teacher (who teaches Hindi in a private college), friendless and an uninvolved husband. A fear of uncertainty always hangs on his mind as he encounters the harsh realities of life single handedly. He trembles by his dread of being ruined. He has a stubborn resistance and the attitude of dismissal of what is familiar and similar. His students disliked him and he in turn had no particular interest in teaching Hindi. Instead, he was fascinated by Urdu. He nurtured the dream of becoming an Urdu poet himself. Thus he found his job a drudgery. He finds even his family an obstacle in the way of fulfilling his ambitions of becoming a renowned writer. All his life he had known only one way to lead his life and that was to be dull and low which conflicted with his wish to realize his sky rocketing dreams. Deven's problem is that he himself has no clarity about his ideas and aspirations and the way to fulfill them. He confesses, "if I knew a way to change my situation, I would do it but - what is there to do"? (IC 13).

Deven is a character who feels mutilated and handicapped in his limiting surroundings. He feels caught in a 'no-man's land' (IC 24) threatening in its desolation. Mirpore, his native city, to him, symbolised a desert which had deliberately narrowed his horizon - which otherwise seemed so vast and majestic. As Desai says, "it became for him the impassable desert that lay between him and the capital with its lost treasures of friendships, entertainment, attractions and opportunities" (IC 24). He gets embarrassed by his own bold step to leave Mirpore to meet his dream poet, Nur. It conflicts with his stasis and rejection of anything hopeful. He is an example of a man who exists but lacks the comprehension about life. "He had never found a way to reconcile the meanness of his physical existence with the purity and immensity of his literary yearnings. The latter was constantly assaulted and wrecked by the former . . . in the form of an agonized dog, . . ." (IC 26).

He felt himself dying of woe and indignity in his small town. Even in

Delhi he could find no comfort or serenity. The great city, in fact, made him feel small, low and inefficient in contrast. He faced the conflict of disappointment and amazement. The journey of interviewing Nur becomes to him, easy to board, hard to leave. It is an endless journey of yearning and frustrations. He is shocked to see Nur and his living conditions, who to him had been a synonym of perfection in his thoughts. He sees Nur living in a small dirty house, hated by his own wife who does not want him to recite his poetry in public. His wife, Imtiaz Begum does not even care to clean the room when due to illness Nur vomits and lets him be in dirt and squalor. She abuses and curses him of pushing all of them towards poverty and a life of worthlessness. Deven finds difficult to adapt to the truth and tries to resist it abortively. His life becomes the receptacle of several bitter truths and several concepts. This plurality leads to eternal homelessness and loneliness. Deven tries hard to interview Nur as it is quintessential for his career as well his personal upliftment. He manages to get some of the great poet's time but it does not turn out to be so productive. He is able to record only useless bits and bits of some of the conversation with Nur to his great disappointment. All this happens due to his own disabilities, lack of smartness on his part to manage the circumstances as well as because of the limiting surroundings of the poet and the faulty tape recorder which Deven did not even know how to operate. Owing to this failure he was belittled in his college as well felt ashamed with himself. He detested his own shortcomings and dreaded the mirror. He felt his life empty where nobody not even he himself understood him. All the options offered to him are devoid of hope. His life becomes a compilation of 'empty years', 'heavy and palpable with gloom - a flattened grey world' (*IC* 83), horribly inferior lacking a definite meaning and aim. Living in an oppressive environment he felt there was no release or escape. "He did not want the day to dawn. He had hoped to stretch the night endlessly by walking on and on, as day would bring with it. . . , an enquiry, an interrogation, exposure and blame" (*IC* 23).

He wished to be alone and escape all action, argument or critics. Thus

the life of Deven vividly presents a state of alienation, solitariness and revulsion. It emphasises his blindness to his own flaws and universal limitations. He suffers from a non-inclusion in society and his rejected position creates in him the feeling of being a ostracized being inhabiting a world to which he does not belong. He is infinitely embroiled in a battle against the ambiguity of the self and the world. His alienation is alienation from the self as well as the society. He is in a continuous search for an oracle to find an answer to his baffling questions about himself and about life. There is an absolute absence of coherence and meaning at the root of existence in the case of Deven.

Anita Desai expresses her concern about man's helpless and pitiful existence. She, like them, reveals that man is essentially a questioning being who spends his entire life seeking answers and explanations. In her novels man appears crippled, faced by the unapproachable and unperceivable, where nothingness is the only reality.

Alienation is the thematic motif of the novel *Fire on the Mountain*. Isolation experienced by women in a male dominated world is significantly portrayed by Desai in this novel. It mirrors the inner voyage of Nanda Kaul who fails to amalgamate herself into the society around, revealing her consummate and mysterious attitude to plunge into darkness and silence.

Nanda Kaul is mutilated by the surface social life of a University Vice Chancellor's wife where she kept inexorably busy. After her husband's death and marriage of all her children she had no wish to domesticate her existence any further or bear any semblance of control. She realizes that she cannot penetrate this world where she is chained in shackles without any love or any determinate meaning. Frustrated she feels "When would she be done"? (*FOM* 51) with her responsibilities.

She had no reliable frame of reference except her solitude. She is full of resentment and grievance and loses the connection between reality and



illusion as Desai says about her dishevelled mental state, “her eyes very still and thoughtful as though she had visited strange lands and seen fantastic, improbable things lingered in the mind” (*FOM* 50). She closed all portals to her faculties and avoided everyone. She wished no direct correspondence between the world and herself. She mocks at the so called civilized mankind marked by hollowness and meaninglessness. Nanda Kaul is disturbed by the announcement of coming of her great granddaughter Raka as “She did not want to be drawn into a child’s world again - real or imaginary, it was bound to betray” (*FOM* 50). She had lost faith in life and faithfulness of beings. Finding any intrusion hateful she feared its effect on her emotionality. She moaned the tedium of arrival of Raka. Raka herself is symbolic of ambiguity of life. Both, initially had no wish to enter into any communion and remained almost indifferent to each other. Raka was a born recluse. Malaise for the world was inherent in her. Reared by parents who were hostile to each other, Raka had receded into silence and had an overt love for violence. Her attitude is similar to the protagonist, only that the former’s alienation had reached its extremity. Raka had no intention or wish to communicate with Nanda who was her temporary guardian. Raka did not bother to gain admittance in anybody’s life and had no realisation of her dependence imposed by her age on anyone. She had a linear attitude towards life that only lead to destruction, “Raka wanted only one thing - to be left alone and pursue her own secret life amongst the rocks and pines of Kasauli” (*FOM* 52). “Nanda Kaul saw that she did not care for her company” (*FOM* 61). Any communication or companionship to Raka was like collar and chains. She was apprehensive of it. She found darkness friendlier and had a distaste for socialization. Disaster enchanted her. Desai reveals her character in the following words, “Solitude never disturbed her. She was the only child Nanda Kaul had ever known who preferred to stand apart and go off and disappear to being loved, cared for and made the centre of attention” (*FOM* 87).

Both Nanda Kaul and Raka refrained from being enslaved or involved

in the hum-drum of life. They stubbornly loved to be alone, only in varying degrees. They abhorred any intimacy. Even while dining together they hardly talk to each other. Their silence and muteness manifest their willful alienation. Living in this uncanny world their seclusion and exclusion is self-imposed.

The island which may represent closeness to others, means openness to Raka and Nanda Kaul. They dismiss the world as being totally irrelevant to their existence. They withdraw into themselves and draw a line between themselves and the world. Alienation here represents their tendency to retreat from the world.

The phenomena of alienation is all-pervasive in *Clear Light of Day*. The characters Bim, Tara, Raja and Mira Masi are all aware of their lives like dead branches - rootless, not belonging, not being wanted and sometimes even being despised. Their alienation is both self imposed and social. It is largely temperamental in case of Bim who is the sacrificial scapegoat and is left alone to take care of Baba and other household matters with everyone else making an easy escape. Her siblings Tara and Raja had left the old decaying Delhi and chosen their happy independence. Their childhood was marked with boredom, dullness and lovelessness. They all hated to even remember the past days full of monotony. As Bim teases Tara:

Do you know anyone who would-sincerely, sincerely, in his innermost self-really prefer to return to childhood ?

Oh I never go anywhere. It must seem strange to you and Bakul who have travelled so much-to come back and find people like me and Baba who have never travelled at all. . . .

How would you have liked that? (*CLD 6-7*)

In search of something brighter Tara and Raja had fled. The family suffered from non-communication. Tara had always lived under the misconception that her father had killed her mother by some deadly

injection. Anguished by her own interpretation she felt like burning the illusory paper world of their family and running away. Meekness was nascent in her character. Having a dominant and strong elder sister in the form of Bim, Tara led a denigrated and marginalized childhood. She was time and again reviled and ill-treated by Bim who was in turn remorseless. Tara abhorred any human proximity, even school and friends threatened her psychologically. All these made her feel oppressed and powerless. She did not enjoy even the childhood sports and was a persistent loser. She had a passive acceptance of her inabilities and lacked any will to overcome them. She dreamt of an illusionistic life with a husband as her safeguard. Denial of childhood experiences and indulgence in a life after marriage seemed to her the beginning of a new story of her life. Tara was always “looking for an escape” (*CLD* 54). “Throughout her childhood, she had always stood on the outside of that enclosed world of love and admiration in which Bim and Raja moved . . . excluded” (*CLD* 39). So, Tara marries Bakul at the early age of eighteen and makes the complete escape right out of the country.

Raja, too, felt the atmosphere of the house disturbing. He felt uneasy there " . . . for unease was in the air like a swarm of germs, an incipient disease. The empty house across the road breathed it at them. Its emptiness and darkness was a warning, a threat sometimes” (*CLD* 95). Raja had no wish to live in the perpetual sameness of their lives and the house, having made friendship with Hyder Alis he too fled away, deserting Bim and Raja. He snapped all the emotional ties with them and as a representative of a typical patriarchy, assumes the dominance of a landlord over Bim, being the sole sane male of the house. Carelessly and thoughtlessly he says to Bim, “No, I don’t care what my father has written in his will - I don’t want to be a partner. I won’t have anything to do with it” (*CLD* 100). Mocking at Bim and making the least effort to associate with his family, Raja marries Hyder Ali’s daughter and goes to Hyderabad, leaving Bim stranded alone with Baba forever. From there he writes to Bim in an authoritative manner, projecting that he was doing a favour by letting Bim and Baba live in their

paternal house actually owned by him. It was the crudest thing to do and it belittled Bim's love for Raja - the love that had grown since childhood but was one-sided. Raja overlooked everything to fulfill his pragmatic ambitions.

Bim, the atypical woman in the novel is a person who is aware of her responsibilities and is ready to shoulder them. She is appalled to find her dream of exploring the outer world broken, stranded at home forever. She can hardly forgive Tara or Raja for abandoning her and had bitterness for both of them. She is left alone for the custody of Baba. She feels most diminished by Raja's total disregard of her plight and feelings. She is utterly desiccated and desolated. Her dreams have been confined by her filial ties. She is a victim of both physical and psychological sense of exile and alienation. This results in Bim's abstraction towards everybody who have left her to "contemplate the quality of disillusion" (*CLD* 2). She was grey and heavy with the treatment meted out to her by her siblings. She hated to revive her childhood days and loved to tease Tara and make her feel guilty. She had developed a stubbornness, a knack for cruelty and destruction. She knew her life was marked with stagnation and had no wish for any change. She decided to nurture this scorn for Raja, the deceiver and kept his letter assuming an authoritative position regarding the inheritance of the house in her desk preserved - to remind her repeatedly of the hurt that he had caused. Bim says, "Wherever I begin to wish to see Raja again or wish he would come and see us, then I take out that letter and read it again" (*CLD* 44). She knew she had no choice - either to flee or call the others back so she accepted her alienation as an unending pursuit. Explaining her psychological state Desai says, "Bim would not tell her why she needed this bitterness and insult and anger" (*CLD* 44). She has no desire to be owned or consoled. Scarred by yesterday Bim is immersed in her own thoughts and becomes mute and barely communicative, which increases her sensitivity.

The theme of immigration and consequent alienation of the self has been dealt with by a number of Indo-Anglian novelists like V.S. Naipaul,

Kamala Markandaya and Bharti Mukherjee but they are chiefly concerned with cross-cultural and racial encounters. What differentiates Anita Desai from them is her skill to transform such alienation experiences into living art. What is distinguished in Anita is socio-psychic representation of alienation as against socio-political or socio-ethnic. She explores the depths of human psyche placed against the reality of absurdity that is confronted by the characters. It is the psyche and emotional void in the characters that alienates them from their family and society. Anita's protagonists face the postmodern tragic isolation of the individual from himself and the society and the consequent sense of absurdity of human life.

Alienated individuals have a gnawing sense of being a misfit with other individuals or groups, a tendency to withdraw from others and an alternating vacillation towards and away from the social context. There is a tendency towards absorption with ideas and fantasy. The person experiences himself as an alien. He feels estranged from himself. Alienation is a recurrent theme in Desai. In the novel *Fasting, Feasting* also estrangement of Uma and Arun are represented. Uma's family is a plastic representation of the patriarchal system which is feverishly involved in looking for a match for Uma. They lack the inner harmony and ability to handle any situation coherently or emotionally. Uma is made to feel insignificant and worthless by societal standards. She lacks any substantial relationship with anyone whom she can depend on. She is a dismal failure and is considered as a terrible embarrassment for her family. She even fails to make meaning of the marriage in which she is pushed unwillingly and with great difficulty. Her parents and siblings are callously indifferent towards her needs and feelings. They are grossly selfish and passively inhuman towards her. Uma has a longing to love and be loved but all her wishes are cruelly thwarted at every step of life. This makes her develop a negative attitude towards life and a perverse disapproval for everyone and a love for solitude. She is a tangible reflection of modern man's condition. Uma is caught between her love for order as contrasted to the confusion and agony in her life, ". . . trivialities of

her home, which seemed a denial, a negation of life as it ought to be, sombre and splendid . . . the heat reduced even that pointless existence to further vacuity” (*FF* 21). Her raging enthusiasm and lack of ability to match to the laid standards were her fatal flaws. She failed every single test. As Desai says, “There was not a thing Uma put her hand to that did not turn a failure” (*FF* 21).

Shame and frustration marked her life. She was happy when not noticed and supervised. She was extremely glad to be with Mira Masi and spent her happiest days with her when she took her away for almost a month because that way she got a chance to escape the emotional torture and monotony of her home. She is obliterated by the institution of marriage, relegated to toil for her family and rarely permitted to leave the periphery of the house. She realises her inability to extricate herself from the web and thus feels disappointed and discontent. Uma fails miserably to express her outrage against neglect and misunderstanding and compromises with her singular existence with a frothing discomfort.

Arun, her brother, is another character, who is drowned in a deep well of greyness. Arun is tethered to the same family caught in the flux of too much involvement of his parents. He feels chained to and surrounded by lifeless shadows. He finds his life and any attachment superficial and has an urge to escape from it:

Arun was overcome by the sensation of his family laying its hands upon him, pushing him down into a chair at his desk, showing a text book under his nose, catching that nose and making him swallow cod liver oil, spooning food into him, telling him; Arun, this, Arun that, Arun, nothing but . . . (*FF* 175)

He is suffocated by too much kindness and concern, “So much kindness, so much goodness, how was he to defend himself”? (*FF* 178). He

realized the futility of living among his family whose only aim was to keep an eye on every act of his. He feels alienated from his family and escaped by moving to America. There too he finds himself under trial as Mrs. Patton, his aunt, took the role of his mother. She makes Arun accompany her on daily expeditions to the supermarket and ironically takes extra efforts not to leave Arun alone so that he feels at home, to the extent of turning vegetarian for his sake, “. . . he is caught up again in the sugar - sticky web of family conflicts” (*FF* 194-95).

His alienation is unique in the sense that Arun suffers from a split-personality. The more he tried to escape his past and be self-contained, the more he found his dream disintegrating. He hated to be questioned and judged. He wished for “the total absence of relations, of demands, needs, requests, ties, responsibilities, commitments”. He wanted to be Arun who had “no past, no family and no country” (*FF* 176). Social and family gatherings were repulsive to him. He feels himself a captive caught in the web of life infinitely. He fails to transcend his disabilities and constraints and is fragmented by the loutish grip of life.

Thus self-alienation is the most important form of alienation in Desai’s novels. Desai explores the psychological processes of the mind to discover its plumbing depths. Anita Desai portrays how the characters in the novels inhabit their space within their family and society and move about in it as strangers, unknown to each other and completely detached. This realisation of self-alienation makes her essentially postmodern in her approach.

Namita Gokhale too like Desai asserts that this world is full of contradictions and paradoxes. Her characters live in the midst of the absurd and recognize that life is a futile cycle of knowing nothing. Both these writers insist that man starts with knowledge and assurance but finishes with absurdity characterised by mere hypothesis and a lack of coherence. The protagonists of Gokhale are dubious about their role and aim of life and feel

like a prisoner in a cave where the air is full of cold. Nothingness is perpetual in her work which is a fundamental principle of postmodernism. Emotional and psychological alienation exist in her fiction. She portrays how one can be alone even in the midst of a crowd. The novels of Gokhale like Desai go into the depths of alienation and represent the silent anguish and sufferings of the characters.

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* presents Priya and Paro, both the protagonists, as suffering from the demons of absurdity and alienation. Their failure lies in the inability to choose and to commit themselves in the face of too many possibilities - none of which appears more legitimate or fulfilling than the other. They remain drifters in an unlikely environment. No matter how hard they try to come to terms with the universe, they find themselves standing on its edge - incompatible and hopeless caught in the mechanism of their own contriving. Their absurdity leads to estrangement. Alienation strikes Priya because she is caught midway between a notion of good and evil, right and wrong, violation and confirmation of social norms, identification and deviation, exploiting and being exploited, happiness and anguish, material and emotional, being involved and detached. Caught in a man-centred fabric of social relationship, Priya finds her experiences unconvincing. Since Priya's aloofness has reached a stage where all meaningful communication is almost impossible, she is shown reflecting on her own problems repetitively, in the novel. There is a temporary, fragmentary quality about every relationship she enjoys- whether it be with B.R, Paro, or Suresh. She has a phobic terror and insecurity lurking in her mind even in the magical moments of intense passion with B.R. which keeps her away from enjoying its complete bliss. She admits, "And I think of the sea at Marine drive, the first time that he kissed me - vast, ugly and compulsive. I yielded almost immediately to the pressure of his plastic lips; but a part of me held back, observant and detachedly clinic" (*PDP* 2). She is in a way disjoined to B.R. and has an inner conflict between a strong wish to diffuse herself in his romantic haze and a wish to separate.



Being fatherless she suffered doubly as she was kept outside the world of her mother's dramatic maternal solicitude. As Priya says, ". . . those emotions were rarely directed at me. In actual fact I barely existed for her" (*PDP 7*). Priya and her mother were on non-communicable terms. Devoid of any love since the embryonic stage, Priya chose to act like a person of flesh and blood and did not hesitate to get physically involved with B.R., but soon to meet failure. She feels psychologically and emotionally alienated and belittled and enters into an unadorned marriage with Suresh. No emotional attachment materialises between the mismatched couple. Both are alienated from each other under the same roof. They had some happy moments in the beginning but gradually the love and attachment disappeared. Their relationship becomes unbearably strained after Priya's miscarriage. She says, "I lost my baby. Never before and after, have I known such a pain. I am not referring to the physical pain which was negligible, but to the desolation, the sudden emptying out of reason and beauty and hope from life" (*PDP 70*). The loss of baby causes great anguish to Priya and leads her to a psychotic state. She resorts to taking sleeping pills and lots of medicines. Priya feels ignored and sidelined as Suresh further immerses himself in his career. She finds life exhaustive and devoid of any meaning and faith. Expressing her utter loneliness and frustration Priya says, ". . . but it was so rare of anyone to really talk to me that I burst out with a detailed critique of Suresh and our sterile, loveless life together . . . all my pent-up loneliness found relief" (*PDP 96*).

Paro is an enthusiastic romantic, much higher in spirit than Priya. She has a merciless overconsciousness about self which is predominant in her nature. She maintains a 'vice like hold' (*PDP 56*) on everyone she encounters but is internally melancholic and insecure. She is highly articulate and determined to talk only about herself. She believes in an indispensable co-relation between power and sex. She is 'shameless' and 'relentless' and 'an absolute tyrant' (*PDP 56*). "She would show off her skills to all and sundry, quite unmindful of the suitability of the occasion"

(*PDP* 57).

Paro externalises her every wish and desire but is hollow internally. She is free from any inclination to take any justified stance in life. Desiring an unfettered growth, Paro enters into illicit relationship with many men when her marriage with B.R. breaks, but only to find more frustration and disappointment. She moves from man to man in search of a permanent bond and a secured life. But every relationship turns out to be worse than the previous one. She is unable to sustain any relationship and emptiness lurks in her life. There lies the grand swell of frustration and humiliation in Paro's existence. Everyone detests her vanity. As B.R. says about her, "That lady, although she was my wife, is definitely one of the crudest, most castrating, selfish women I have ever encountered" (*PDP* 143).

Her own actions make her life amorphous and unpredictable. Outwardly she appears to be an enchanting socialite but inwardly within the depths of her soul she is lost and bleeding. She is full of pain and anger and even cuts her wrist with razor in an attempt to commit suicide. Her personal failures and all the happenings of life begin to haunt and torment her. She is flooded with memories of past, of B.R., of Lenin, of her early life and the accompanying formlessness and nebulousness. Self-mutilation that Paro commits reveals the intensity of her pain and acuteness of her isolation.

Namita's second published novel *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* is about a female protagonist, Gudiya, who is all agog to retain her individuality in the midst of disintegrating and divisive forces that threaten her sentimentality. The novel is a fine study in the psychological working of a woman recording minute details of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. She wants to be loved, admired and desired, but has to face trials and tribulations since childhood. She is left by her mother. Gudiya and her grandmother are left alone. Gudiya is denied paternal affection and has to face partial cold-bloodedness of grandmother after she assumes sainthood.

She felt the lack of commitment growing in grand-mother's attitude. She finds herself confined in a neglected loveless condition. The futility of relationship strikes her and she feels alienated from herself and everyone. She reflects on her own predicament, "Yet so much had happened to me in my short life that I simply did not respond to grandmother's arrest or her subsequent release and vindication. Fear, sorrow, surprise or any kind of reaction completely failed me. Even memory abandoned me . . ." (*GGG* 23). Gudiya realises that love is a deception and an aspiration for harmony is not feasible in contemporary life. She learnt from her grandmother a stubborn resistance to the world's outrage. Unplanned retribution always kept overtaking her. Ardor and warmth were missing from her life. Her psychology was permanently scarred by the neglect she faced in her early years and this made her dream of unrealistic romance and escape. It tainted her perception. Her spirit "had floundered in the confusion of identity and norms" (*GGG* 57). Her life "became an increasing torrent of inner turmoil" (*GGG* 56). She yearned for stability and security which became an illusion to her. She had no one to guide her, to understand her. Gudiya is under great psychological stress and nervous tension, and feels the burden of loneliness weigh down upon her without any support from her grandmother. Her grandmother's godliness becomes a sham unbearable to her. She finds her grandmother's sanctity hollow and begins to hate her. "The detachment that she had developed and her preoccupation with some illusive inward journey only aggravated my need of individual attention. I began to hate her with desperate longing. . . . I withdrew further into confusion and hurt" (*GGG* 69). In the entirety of her childhood she had grown up looking up to only one person, that is, her grandmother. Now finding her unmoved by her emotions, Gudiya feels deserted and begins to oscillate between the world of temple and the unknown world of glamour and excitement.

She loses visualization of pros and cons of plunging into unknown depths attracted to a world which bears semblance of fulfillment, wearing a mask of romance she falls into the trap of Kalki's world. Having a life which

“possessed a haphazard and unreal quality” (*GGG* 76), she found Kalki cordial and imagined him as a miracle come true. With Kalki she believes, “All that was known and familiar and sure had passed, and the future held in its palm every possibility and impossibility” (*GGG* 80). She did not know what was to happen of her but nurtured a positive imagination. She felt free. She shunned any belongingness with a maniac intensity and dreaded any sort of community life as it meant drowning of her own spirit. Any charity or piety or ownership were obnoxious to her. However the ecstatic relationship with Kalki was also short lived. After Kalki is forced into marrying her, he loses interest in the alliance. He is far removed from her emotions and reveals his indifference openly by his gestures. She had committed no crime to bear such monstrous behaviour. Her life becomes intolerable and miserable struck by one misfortune after another. Even when she becomes pregnant Kalki’s attitude does not change. He is neither concerned about the coming child nor does he bother to look after his wife. Gudiya has no one to share her problems. Although Phoolwati, grandmother's devotee, constantly urges her to return to her house, but some vestigial shards of pride keep her away from accepting her favours. She inwardly agonizes in pain and says, “I found I was constantly tired and depressed. Kalki’s ultimately coarse nature, his vanity and cruelty, wore me down to the extent that my considerable natural resilience seemed to have disappeared altogether” (*GGG* 216).

A fundamental ambiguity overpowers her and reveals her intense alienation and depression, “Who was he? Who had he been; this man I had so rashly given myself to”? (*GGG* 223). Emotionally uprooted and psychically fragmented she withdraws into herself and finds the conventional marriage plot extricated from its prevailing morality. Struck by cynical hopelessness she realizes that all escape routes are after all, an illusion. Her situation aggravated with every passing day. Kalki goes to the extent of beating her and she sees the ugly truth of her burdensome marriage. She becomes quite a stranger not only to others but also to herself. Her ambiguity is characteristically postmodernistic. She can grasp the temporal

truth of her existence every moment. There is a conflict between her freedom and servitude and neither of the two wipe out the other.

Parvati, the protagonist of the novel, *A Himalayan Love Story* is instrumental in demystifying the concept of a perfectly happy life and marital harmony. The novelist gives a vent to the mental tension of a middle class girl torn by conflicts, the struggle of a woman against traditions and the daring nature of an ordinary middle class girl for whom the middle-class conditioning is both a strength as well as weakness.

Parvati is a girl who does not wish to spend her life in eating, sleeping and studying. In her early childhood a gulf is created between her and her mother by her perverse involvement with the tenant shopkeeper. She saw on her mother's face 'a mask of deceit' (*AHLS* 19) and this anguish keeps churning in her mind day and night. The thought feeds on her emotionality and she becomes prone to be fragmented, "I had become even more withdrawn, there were dark circles under my eyes and I would tremble at the slightest sound. School was out of question. I did not even venture downstairs any more, except to go to the privy in the backyard" (*AHLS* 19). Bereft of attachment with her mother she did not feel sorrowful even when she realized that her mother was dying of tuberculosis. She stays unconcerned and alienated and says, "I had no grieving to offer" (*AHLS* 21).

She longs for companionship and is attracted to the handsome youth, Salman. She has no wish to preserve her virginity and enters into physical pre-marital relation with him, devoid of any emotionality. Their association is poles apart from any sentimental courtship. It is to her just an escape from her stifling paraphernalia - just a mutual give and take and barter. She wanted both involvement and independence and interacted with a sense of detachment. So much so, that she feels rather happy when Salman leaves her permanently. She says, "I was stoic, even relieved, about his departure. A part of me had recognized the risks I was taking" (*AHLS* 31).

All her pleasures are short lived and she toys with the idea of attachment and secretly uses others for her superficial satisfaction. She fails to comprehend Mukul's true love for herself and makes him a vehicle to satisfy her ego objectively. "I enjoyed flirting with Mukul Nainwal. His absolute adoration and the transparent ploys he employed to be with me were balm to my soul" (*AHLS* 31).

She liked both Mukul and Lalit as good friends and frankly and boldly enjoyed their company. But she had to submit to the patriarchal decisiveness of Mr. Hiranand Joshi who dictated his choice of marrying Parvati to Lalit. She would have preferred to marry Mukul but submits to her fate. Her sacrifice of her personal likes and dislikes and the lack of clarity of her own choice leads her to self betrayal as well as well betrayal of her hopes and desires. Lalit turns out to be a homo-sexual. She says about Lalit:

My young husband looked puzzled, even oppressed and kept a stubborn watchful distance from me. (*AHLS* 33)

The pressure only escalated with time. A bitter silence built up between us during those waiting nights. Months passed and the reluctant bridegroom still did not get down to his duties. I began to suffer from constipation and a ceaseless mounting tension. (*AHLS* 33)

Whatever Parvati had expected from her married life, everything happens to be contrary and pushes her further into isolation. Both become depressed and alienated by the disagreeable relationship. She found it unpleasant to live in close proximity to such a man. They lie with each like 'hostile strangers' (*AHLS* 34).

The atmosphere of the house is far from being congenial and she feels suffocated. She finds no chance to express her desires under the stress of social burden. She tries to divert her attention to domestic works and with full devotion immerses herself in them. But Lalit's willful neglect abases

her. She starts sleeping in kitchen to materialise her emotional alienation into a physical one too. Her pent up emotions fail to get a release, thereby tormenting her further. She looks for a solace in her numerous nieces and nephew-in-laws. She says I “began to encourage them to even sleep in our room; their presence was an effective shield against the cold hostility of our nights together” (*AHLS* 34). Lalit’s unemotional behaviour disheartens her. She feels insecure. She had enjoyed a free life before marriage uninhabited and bounteous but by the confinements within the walls of Lalit’s house, stranded with a stranger, she is reduced to speechlessness verging on insanity. There is lack of any normal interaction in her life. Repression of natural instincts in her reach to such a stage that she is unable to restrain them and she enters into a physical relation with Lalit’s cousin, Raju. But that fills her with guilt and repugnance. She says, “I could sense that I was hurling towards a terrible and inevitable fate” (*AHLS* 43).

Raju had appeared as a ray of hope but soon to be eclipsed. This drew her further into a state of self-alienation and she refused to recognize herself in the mirror, “It couldn’t be me, I decided. This was an impostor” (*AHLS* 50). Pregnancy as a result of relationship with Raju and the sudden death of Lalit render a tremendous shock to Parvati. She is jolted into deep apprehensions. She wept and screamed but had nobody to console her. She even calls out to her dead mother which reveals that the only source of her sustenance had also been lost, which aggravates her alienation and psychosis further.

Her frustration and alienation are caused by the conflict between the codes and concepts of fidelity and sanctity of marriage ingrained in her psyche by the cultural conditioning and the wish to liberate herself from them. The dejection that Parvati is subjected to, her desperation and sufferings, transform her into a meek and silent person as against her instinctive and spontaneous nature, and alienate her completely from family, society and herself, turning her insane.

In *The Book of Shadows*, Namita Gokhale explains the concept of alienation through the mouth of Rachita as, “Alienation is a device to make the unfamiliar familiar . . . or to render the familiar unfamiliar” (*BOS* 4).

Rachita is the alienated protagonist in the novel. Alienation is a major theme of human condition in the contemporary epoch. In this novel Namita presents the chaos, disorder, annihilation, fears, frustrations, crumbling traditional values including loss of faith and trust rendering the life absurd, meaningless, directionless and futile. Rachita experiences undue pressure in her life due to the unexpected suicide of her lover, Anand. She finds it difficult to salvage herself from the incident and the psychological infliction caused by it. Anand’s ‘wanton act of self-destruction’ (*BOS* 7) actually ironically enshrouds her sub-conscious permanently confronted by feelings of guilt and infinitude of mystery of existence. The act makes her a stranger to herself struck by turmoil, agony, tiredness and depression. The tremor of his death and the consequent acid attack by Anand’s sister spread like a panic in her brain and the confusion and horror overpower her. She is faced by all odds irrepressibly. Rachita, after the inhuman acid attack, feels her state of being as only material existence. Finding life mean she found no relief amongst the familiar people. She wished to ‘heal, to hide, to forget’ (*BOS* 6).

“Silence is always the best option” (*BOS* 13) and in a state of puzzlement and pain moved to the hills in her childhood home where no one except the servant Lohanju recognised her. She has an urge to dissociate herself from her unsavory past. She deliberately chooses to live alone. Her social prestige and physical damage force her into loneliness. She begins to fear herself and the shadows. She is drawn into a postmodern state when, “the will is suspended and unreason begin its reign” (*BOS* 22). She feels her dream pool dried up. She says, “I am sleepy. I am tired. The shadows are lengthening” (*BOS* 23).

Even her contorted face becomes a source of alienation for her. She is



horrified to see that the detestable face that repulsed her in the reflection of the mirror was her own and finds it difficult to accept the reality. Rachita finds herself bereaved of any authentic existence. She suffers from self-dispossession.

The alienation of Rachita is different from other heroines of Namita as she being economically independent is on the outlook not of financial security but of an emotional harbor which she miserably fails to find. From the pattern that emerges in the novel we can deduce her message, i.e., as long as one has roots, one survives; and if one's roots are injured one dies emotionally. Faith and logic had abandoned Rachita and her senses were overshooting themselves. She had hallucinations and she says, "I had a curious experience. I was overtaken by the sensation that my feet were not where I expected them to be. The ground below me had lost its authority, it no longer exercised the inevitable pull of gravity. . . . I felt weirdly disembodied" (*BOS* 25).

She felt her own voice hollow and suspected herself. Her extreme sensitivity lead to her death wish. She suffers very deeply and is unable to come out of her psychological dreams and stab her infidelity. Unnamable burden sat upon her and she is left companionless and defenseless. Her guilty conscience fills her world with the gradual loss of sense of self. The mood of anxiety rising from her isolated being makes her aware of the nothingness in her existence. Her life is damaged and changed forever. Rachita is made to pay too heavily for her sexual transgression by the patriarchal set up of society. The smell of murder pervaded her sense. The past tyrannizes her repetitively. She came to the isolated hills to seek refuge but the unvanquished strict code of conduct formulated by the society obliterate her personality further pushing her towards a state of paranoia. 'The dust, the grime and vengeance' (*BOS* 70) of Delhi encounter her troubled mind and she becomes hopeless. She relates her condition with the poem of Mahadevi Verma:

Pain sticks to my mind like a damp cloth; as though drowning,  
these wet sighs come drowning to my lips. (*BOS* 72)

Her pain and guilt lead her to the paranormal world. It becomes difficult for her to cope with her isolation. To escape from reality she resorts to a life of illusion. She has visions of ghost and day-dreams. She feels herself being stalked. She loses her confidence and is overcome by dreadful thoughts, "I saw the panthers, hungry, angry, green slits for eyes, the smell of flesh and flur, as they bounded up the stairs. They leapt right through me, as though I did not exist" (*BOS* 224).

She becomes oriented to bear pain and says, "My world had been undermined, taken apart, reduced to anarchy and chaos" (*BOS* 230). Rachita's sufferings are her own and she endures extreme torture of her soul resulting from one weak moment. Namita adroitly explores the emotional life of Rachita. The novel is pervaded by an overpowering sense of loneliness and isolation in the deserted life of the protagonist, Rachita whose alienation arises due to incompatibility in her personality with the expounded rules and norms of society. Both Anita and Namita present the heartbreak and pain of their protagonists as a physiological phenomenon, an internal conflict, a hostility felt towards something seemingly linked to oneself, a barrier erected which is actually no defense against the alienated self and the world.

Alienation occurs from the proliferation of the other world as in the case of Shakuntala in *Shakuntala: A Play of Memory* who finds herself in an emotional squeeze and a tragic mess due to the absence of any supportive primary relationship. Namita asserts that estrangement operates as a hostile force highly pernicious to a man's elemental well-being. Shakuntala's entire existence seems to be paradoxical. She is a stock figure in the novel, persistently experiencing the twing of emptiness. Shakuntala is a lively girl, full of vigour who is faced by the enigma of the patriarchal norms and conditions. The novel since the beginning introduces the theme of death and

escape. Soaked with depression and humiliation at the hands of her own mother, who being gender biased feels Shakuntala to be her trouble and burden. Shakuntala feeling utterly distraught by the societal prejudices says, “I have ceased to cry. I am blank and stiff. Weary from the constant ploughing of feeling” (*SPOM* 6).

She finds her life unsheltered owing to the early death of her father and the discriminatory attitude of her mother whose affections were solely directed towards her son, Guresvara. Her mother due to her gross misconceptions even denies her the basic education saying, “else you’ll grow a moustache and no one will marry you” (*SPOM* 19). Shakuntala developed a disapproval for her mother and recoiled from her embraces. She wished to get married as she says, “I was eager to be married, for I saw it as an escape from the bondage of my situation” (*SPOM* 18).

There is a vast temperamental difference between her and her family and also their expectations from Shakuntala. She feels defenceless and desolate. However, her alienation grew day by day as she could not find true companionship even with Srijan who was much older and sober than her. Srijan had married her for a legal heir. Her married life is punctuated by the discovery of her infertility, which made her feel inadequate and humiliated. Her rootlessness increases every day. Her own outlook and belief are at striking contrariety with that of the society. Shakuntala is acutely aware of her own vulnerability and the monstrous and rapacious tentacles of society. She lives between two worlds and is aware of her ambivalence. Her initial bliss of marriage is eternally shattered when Srijan, the male representative of anarchy brings home another woman-Kamalini. Shakuntala feels insecure and fears that Srijan one day will replace her by the newcomer. She takes to visiting temples in an endeavour to get a child. She is so deeply hurt that she even thinks of becoming a nun which is quite contradictory to her nature and disposition. Spirituality does not minimize her alienation in any way. She felt inescapably jealous and furious. She lost her balance and frustrated she says, “I screamed and sobbed loud, beating my head against the stone walls

of the temple like the kind of woman I had not imagined I would ever become” (*SPOM* 58).

Her tears were her only comfort. She felt relieved in her isolation and says, “I was not afraid. I felt safe, even secure, in my fierce despair and loneliness” (*SPOM* 58). She had illusions that Srijan would miss her and search for her when she hid herself in the abandoned temple. She found a cathartic pleasure in the thought and felt it would be a partial revenge against Kamalini who “had looked down at me from a great height and viewed me with contempt” (*SPOM* 59). But nothing expected by her happened.

The unfortunate incidences of her life had made her lose her childhood courage and enthusiasm. Darkness enveloped her and she was overtaken by the wish to forsake every transient relationship in the world. Finding everybody selfish and narcissistic she says, “I believe in no one and nothing” (*SPOM* 71). She looked at everything and everybody with suspicion and had no intention to forgive anyone for the hurt they had caused. When her brother came to revisit her she was further pained by his insensitivity toward her: “could he not sense my pain? I was tired of his magnanimity” (*SPOM* 72). She decided that her brother knew very less of real life and was in no situation to give her any solace or tangible advice. She felt hollow and afraid and in such a state met a young man, Nearchus. The repression of her emotions and desires; her alienated soul finds a release with Nearchus and she leaves her husband and home. She knew she “was doomed to be barren” (*SPOM* 90) and was rocked by alternating waves of joy and panic. Her restlessness finds temporary respite in the unbridled passion of Nearchus. It was a kind of remedy against her fate. She just followed Nearchus abstractly. She is enchanted by his disorderly life. Baffled, she “feels empty as the picture in my mind, and vast as the sky above” (*SPOM* 109).

But her alienated soul did not find exculpation in Nearchus also and she leaves him. She can find no contentment in the relationship as she is torn

between the dilemma of choosing between the matrimonial fidelity and the urge to flee away from it as fast as she could. “Two voices rise within” (*SPOM* 11).

She lost the concept of past and future, before and after and takes refuge in the holy city of Kashi. She realises that she has been leading a life of unwilling compromises that had drained her life. She is enslaved both by the society and her own limitations. Shakuntala suffers from things common to most of the Indian women like: sense of frustration, inner conflict, inner disintegration, sense of fear, pain and silent suffering, persecution and complex mental agony, repressed feelings, suppressed desires, sense of meaninglessness, hopelessness in life and identity crisis.

Shakuntala feels excluded from the society which expects her to speak rarely about herself and keep her real feelings hidden as against her inner proclivity, which is instinct itself. The dictates of the society force her to snuff off out the life force within her influencing her psyche negatively rendering it to a state of neurosis and alienation. The contradictory pulls make her knuckle under affliction and dolor.

Thus according to both Desai and Gokhale discord and disagreement are the primal causes and symptoms of alienation. Alienation describes the crisis of the contemporary life and defines the vicious impact of dehumanization on the life of society. Man’s internal life in the contemporary society has been displaced, externalized and trivialised. The brutal and inhumane postmodern society, cold towards the alienated human beings, annihilates the individuals. The individual leads a meaningless life with his faith obliterated and psyche crippled. The disturbed and uprooted characters wander restlessly in an inept and sordid world. An alienated individual reflects on his meaningless past, feels anguish and despair and is equally apprehensive of his meaningless future. He realizes the futility of human achievements and purposelessness of his life. A person disenchanted from the contemporary society insulates himself from others. He shuts

himself up against all communication because of frustration, anger and despair. Alienation causes serious emotional disequilibrium, uncertain of oneself, feeling powerless and hopeless, an individual struggles desperately to find enough meaning to validate his existence. He is sapped of his energy and vitality and feels immobilized. The entire life of an alienated individual is plunged into inner darkness by his emotional torment. Alienation breeds depression and deep despair.

The protagonists of Desai and Gokhale flounder with the vision in their minds that is set against the established norms and patterns of society, culture and their agencies, and find their achievements in their own way. They either perish for their rebellion or learn to behave within the fixed parameters. Awareness of their self leads them either towards acceptance of their environment or fighting their way through the traps of illusion to come out in the dawn of enlightenment and relative truth; the truth of their individual being. The intense struggle helps the characters to find themselves anew. Both Desai and Gokhale have created female characters of flesh and blood, courageous, bold and sensitive in their approach towards life. They maintain that men and women have different and complementary nature which tend to direct them to different spheres. Each has what the other has not; each completes the other, and is completed by the other: they are in nothing alike, and the happiness and perfection of both depend on each asking and receiving from the other what the other only can give. Thus redefining the identity of women these novelists support the postmodern polarity of sexes. The women in the novels are intrepid and audacious in asserting what they desire - to attain fulfillment. They seem to proclaim that their will is their own. Their wishes are their own. No one can kill them - no one, not even they themselves.

Anita's one of primal and seminal concerns is to declare that a woman is a being, not an appendage to man. A woman is not the 'other' but an autonomous being, capable of, through trial and error, finding her own way of self-fulfillment. Her women are seekers, after what has since long

been a quotidian pursuit for their male counterparts but what appears ridiculous and appalling in their case.

Assertion is a prominent trait of Desai's novels, where women being the objects of oppression, revolt against the established norms and ethical parameters in search of their identity and its relation with the universe. Maya, feels entrapped and encaged with Gautama, and evaluates her own expectations from life. She refuses to get crushed under the weight of her personal tragedy either caused by fate or by the fastidious insensitivity of Gautama. On one hand she is tied to the patriarchal yoke of perpetrating her loveless wedlock, on the other she had a "longing, a dread, a search for solution, a despair . . ." (*CTP* 35). She realised that love had no importance for Gautama. It was merely attachment. She tried to involve him in her matters, "my wants and cares, which to him were childish tiresome and even distasteful" (*CTP* 43). She accepts the responsibility of choosing her path of action, of putting an end to her victimization and discontentment, instead of accepting the void and emptiness in her life. The shroud of death blurred her vision and she meditated murder of her husband to be the only solution of ensuring her own survival. She says, "Murder, that too, followed me, relentless as a well-aimed arrow, as I passed through avenues of thought, recollection, doubt and horror" (*CTP* 139).

With the dominance of fear in her about her own annihilation, she wished for a finality that would remove all suspicious shadows. Instead of any reconciliation, she preferred to bid farewell to any possibility of insecurity - physical or emotional - in the form of Gautama. She asserts her right to live. Having lost any hope of compatibility she secretly decides her own response to the situations and apprehensions. As a victim of alienation she fights her despair alone, even if it be with madness. Without looking for a supporting yoke to tangle herself around, she boldly declares that "It revolved around me, about me, it was mine, mine, this life was mine" (*CTP* 157). "What agony in ecstasy, what pain in magnificence" (*CTP* 156). When the time came for annihilation, she felt, it was only the beginning, not the

end. The psychoscape of Maya mirrors how her self craves to withdraw from the life of past regrets and disappointments. She lets a different choice - a choice to break free-guide her actions, without any restraint. Realizing that her husband is already a life-less being, she shuts from herself any feeling of guilt by projecting that death would make no difference to his narrow and shallow existence as he is a “a body without a heart, a heart without a body” (CTP 163).

The grain to assert her own individuality and safeguard her survival grows into such a mass that Maya succumbs to its inadvertent pressure unmindful of the societal framework or the consequences that would follow.

Women in Desai’s novels employ the methods of negation and affirmation to resist their oppressive situation. The protagonists in Desai’s novels are on the road to self-discovery. They are usually propelled in this quest by some domestic crisis. They wrestle with the worn-out societal values and endeavour to transcend its mundane limitation either through self-sacrifice like Monisha or rebellion like Amla in *Voices in the City*. The struggle of the self for liberation culminates either in an affirmation and assertion of the right to live on one’s own terms or a sheer compromise with the societal rules.

Desai presents the inner crisis and psychological fluctuations of Monisha resulting from overt and inert discourses. Monisha’s tragedy is that she cuts an insignificant and good-for-nothing figure in the eyes of her husband and his relatives in spite of her exemplary intelligence and sensibility. She is constantly aware of her conscious self-conflicting with the outer reality. Her incompatibility with the surroundings throws her into doldrums and she shudders from such an existence. She has no privacy and no say in the matters concerning her own life. Her plight is similar to what Shashi Deshpande describes in *The Intrusion and Other Stories*:

She was only a woman, she was to be disregarded, ignored:



her will, her determination had to be set aside as nothing because she was a woman. (98)

Monisha, a silent sufferer, felt trapped in those inner rooms. She feels the need to control her life but cannot find the way to do it. Her feelings were quite immaterial to anyone. The sheer loveless monotony and the uncommunicative dreariness of the domestic chores and the relationship are mortifying to her. They pose a challenge to her selfhood. In her agony and privation she feels it better to embrace the unknown darkness and kills herself to give her life a finality of her own choice. Denying the glum servility she found the mystery of death profoundly attractive, as Amla says, “Monisha . . . , her gaze fixed on some mysterious point as though it were a secret window opening on to darkness, gazing and gazing, with not a word to say of what she saw” (*VIC* 196).

Identity, has been presented by Desai, as a dynamic process which evolves with time, rather than being a static entity. Amla’s life is a rejection of her mother’s notion of men who says, “Men? . . . but they like to imagine they run everything, so women ought to just go on and let them imagine it while they get on with the work” (*VIC* 197).

Amla is a strong, self-willed woman who dares to assert her individuality and assert her freedom, shattering the roof of old traditions and rejecting their overriding influences. She wishes to access the world of reality beyond the household boundaries. By virtue of being able to survive alone she embarks on her journey of selfhood without seeking marriage as an alternative to her bondage created by the parental life. Aunt Lila thinks of Amla as “absolutely free and in the centre of such as exciting world” (*VIC* 144).

Amla decides to enjoy the city, her new job and freedom. She confidently expresses her decision, “Calcutta does not oppress me in the least . . . it excites me . . .” (*VIC* 142). She is a keen observer and although

the beautiful city attracts her, she is also a witness to the sensitive events happening there. She worries about her brother and sister. She is shocked to see them as victims of the ruthless society and feels “that this monster city that lived no normal, healthy, red-blooded life but one that was subterranean, under lit, stealthy and odorous of mortality has captured and enchanted-or disenchanted both-her sister and brother” (VIC 150). Her attempts to help them go futile. She is full of youthful excitement and longs to enjoy her job and independence. Although the devilish city and her illusory relationship with Dharma try to oppress her, she is not a woman who could be victimized or traumatized easily. Although she is flustered by the fault of falling in love with an already married man but she brings herself out of it gracefully and unfortified by its viciousness. She is not the subdued heroine but a woman who questions the machinations of male authority. She is a representation of what is suggested for the improvement of women by the thinkers, cultivation of the mind as the only way to independence and freedom. In this vein Amla displays a strong will-power which makes her pursue her ideal of independence with dedication and fearlessness.

Desai in the novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer* describes the tension between illusion and reality by the use of postmodern device of irony and shifting of focus. She elaborately portrays the miserable position of a highly sensitive and emotional woman who is tortured by negligence and loneliness. She depicts excellently the inner furies of Sita and rising tone of emancipation and empowerment in her. The frustration and storm raging inside her mind intensify her predicament. Struck with dull tedium she feels that her existence in the house is based on sufferance as there was no point of meaningful contact between her world and those of her husband and her children. They had deemed her immaterial and had deprived her of her identity as a human-being. The dead weight of the mortified love and rebuffed affection keep on assuming ingravescient proportions until one day Sita boldly decides to leave the house. The passionate longing for a fuller life lead her to a defiant behaviour and she rebels against her family. She

finds her illusion of the island more protective than the bludgeoning and harsh reality, “. . . her fire had turned on him and even on the children, in spite and ill temper” (*WSWGTS* 123).

Sita’s agitation grew and she realized, “I should have known how to channel my thoughts and feelings, how to put them to use. I should have given my life some shape then, some meaning. At least, it would have had some for me - even if no one else had cared” (*WSWGTS* 108). The everyday life had become so insufferable and unreasonable for her that she thought “if the sea was so dark, so cruel, then it was better to swim back into the net. If reality were not to be borne, then illusion was the only alternative” (*WSWGTS* 91).

Her inner consciousness, raging mental conflict, discord, disharmony make her cultivate her own art of survival. Laden with the traditional roles she has an obsessive identity crises. Her alienation is bio-psychic, not environmental. Sita refuses to live in fragments any further and insists on fleeing from mainland to the island of her childhood fantasies. After spending a few months there, she begins to realize that it was a frantic and desperate bid to be away from her family and her boredom and hypocrisy of her bourgeois existence. Through this realisation, Desai expresses the philosophy of acceptance of life, the bitter truth of transcendental reality. Her manifestation of individualism is by the way of replunging into existential nullity, by making a compromise and achieving a triumph over her illusions rendering the island devoid of its powers and miracles. She resumes her role as a homemaker. She willingly accepts "the normal, everyday life of disappointments and anti-climaxes, and avoid disasters and climaxes” (*WSWGTS* 131).

She is presented as a wave who clashed the sand, separated and then mingled again. The storm had not ended, the play over and she felt the return to her life of duties was ‘the one sincere and truthful act of her life” (*WSWGTS* 139). As it was impossible to disentangle, her psychic turbulence

lead her to see the irony of the unreal and shadowy life of the island. It suggests the impracticability and implausibility of a permanent illusion or a permanent reality. When her husband ceases to pursue her to return to the qualms of the abandoned home she felt herself liberated and free, “he released her and at last she was free” (*WSWGTS* 136). She allowed Raman to have his triumph and thought how nice he really was. Her individual self-coincides with societal consciousness. This novel is unique from other novels of Desai as here the assertion of identity does not close in death and desolation but it halts with compromise and reconciliation.

Thus the character of Sita portrays how in her march towards emancipation, modern woman has to struggle against insensitive fatality of options and the indoctrination of centuries which endeavour to fashion her into the mould of 'womanhood' with a silent persistence. The result of this indoctrination is visible on the psyche of Sita. Her diminished ego paves the way for her becoming conscious of her life of illusions. She realizes herself as being a perpetrator of power equations whereby she becomes a symbol of the mother and wife figure as men expect the women to be. For her family's comfort she accepts her role as a passive sufferer and a tireless worker selflessly and incessantly working for her children and husband.

Nanda Kaul of *Fire on the Mountain* is a typical protagonist of Desai whose hypocritical situation in which she spends her life and the bitter experiences of marital life concede her to live in seclusion. She wished nothing but privacy for herself, “to be left alone and pursue her own secrets of life among the rocks and pines” (*FOM* 48).

In order to achieve transcendence, Nanda Kaul rejects the eternal concept of feminine and chooses her freedom, she queers her gender role and “groaned with self pity and pain, certain that she was alone and no one would hear” (*FOM* 37). Casting off her ideological commitment and aware of the constricting role of social institutions she chooses an escape route and becomes desperate to find freedom. She cannot come to terms with the

despair of her unwantedness as a wife. She wishes to live uncluttered. Her life was marked with ingratitude and oppressive paradigms of womanly sacrifice. She felt “. . . choked and blackened with the heads of children and grandchildren, servants and guests, all restlessly surging, clamouring about her” (*FOM* 19).

She now wanted stillness and calm. However it was fouled by the arrival of her grand-daughter, Raka. She sees the possibility of elimination of her responsibilities, of limiting her domestic slots, but she is confined again to her inexorable duties. She felt her substance deteriorating and a renunciation impossible. She wanted no one to follow her out of her past - neither Raka nor Ila Das, her childhood friend, were welcome in her seclusion. She was upset at the thought of being disturbed. Having relinquished her present and past self, Nanda Kaul totally merges with the house at Carignano and its isolation. The identification of Nanda with the house is an assertion of self. The house is concerned with the quest for self-identification, away from the socio-cultural roles assigned by the flagbearers of patriarchy. The house becomes a means to be walled away from the unwanted space. Nanda realises that it was impossible to shape sense of self by being knotted to the emotional and social trauma she experienced in her family. Anita stresses that selflove is of foremost importance to bring to the surface the latent identity of women. Nanda feels that her afflictions and lacerations can be cured only by snipping off all ties of connectedness. In the desolateness of Carignano she asserts an identity, different from all bewilderment and passions. She ventures on the core self-project of making sense of oneself.

Self and identity theories assume that people care about themselves, want to know who they are and can use this self-knowledge to make sense of themselves. Nanda Kaul is also motivated by the same and thus embarks on her journey away from all expected actions and possible complications. Even her suicide at the end is a move away from particular contexts and social structures. It is her attempt to break down the fallacious world around her

and rejection of any involvement in the painful process of life.

Nanda Kaul cannot be called a coward, but a bold and courageous lady who does not shudder from her responsibilities but her life is an embodiment of sacrifice and she suffers silently establishing herself as a rock. It is only after her widowhood and after she marries all her children that she thinks about herself. Anita Desai explores the psyche of Nanda Kaul. Nanda has been portrayed as an assertive, strong personality whereas inside she was totally shattered by her husband's unfaithfulness. Tired of her life, it is only at a later stage that she decides to retreat to the solitude of her imagination to redeem her self-esteem. She asserts her feelings by rejecting the social norms. By accepting social death she expects to achieve personal salvation.

Courage and not escape is what woman of today requires. She should have the courage to uphold what is right for her and adhere to it with firm determination and tenacity. A headlong plunge into the social milieu with pertinacity can alone bring harmony and fulfillment in her life. (113)

Anita Desai's Bim is a character in *Clear Light of Day* who is an embodiment of the above spirit as commented by Malti Agarwal, a writer and critic in *New Perspectives on Indian English Writing*. Bim is a woman who is prepared to make her choice, she is woman of awareness and consciousness of her responsibilities towards her family and society, she is one of the components of woman's movement for economic and emotional independence. She does not surrender to the traditional notions but challenges them openly. She chooses spinsterhood and takes up a new road where no one can dictate terms to them. She says, "I can think of hundred things to do instead. I won't marry, . . . I shall earn my own living - and look after Mira Masi and Baba and be independent" (CLD 140).

She embarks on a journey to find the true meaning of life, through the

slings of misfortunes. All her relations hold immense significance for her but she does not depend on anyone, not even her father. The oppressive atmosphere of the house does not undermine her spirit, she remains strong and confident. She does not lead her life as an insignificant victim but always makes an effort to cope with the available situations. Tired of her situation sometimes, “Bim wished she could remain such a baby in a cot, innocent and malleable” (*CLD* 143). But this does not lead her to retreat into an illusory world, self-contained and confined. She is quite assertive and assumes her domestic responsibilities. She says to Baba, “So now there are just you and I left, Baba, . . . Does the house seem empty to you? Everyone’s gone, except you and I. We’re just by ourselves and there’s nothing to worry about. . . . It’s as if we were children again . . .” (*CLD* 154).

She subverts the traditional model of woman and takes an elevated position of power. She is firm, determined to rule others rather than being ruled. She does not accept the marginalised role of a woman and the imposed value system. Her wearing of trousers, instead of frock, also symbolises her attempt to raise her status in the family as trouser is a symbol of masculine power and recognition. Bim cannot accept being cornered as a meek girl destined to be married. School is also her spatial arena where she exhibits her power and victory. In school, she appears to inherit all the qualities that are supposed to be associated with maleness. For example, she is the patrol leader, later a girl guide, then captain of the netball team, class prefect and the head girl, “school and its teachers and lessons were a challenge to her natural intelligence and mental curiosity that she was glad to meet” (*CLD* 189). She does not make any excuses in the domestic or external sphere. “Bim has her own mind” (*CLD* 246).

She is a rebel and has a stubbornness to go against the rules of patriarchal society by seeking an equal status with men and use it as a weapon against the wrongdoings of other people. Bim may also be viewed as a tragic character whose potentials are wasted in terms of her ambitions and extremity of compromises she makes. But it can equally be argued that she

channelises her liberation and independence by non-conformity which can be said to be an intermediary stage in women's fight for their rights and liberty. Her identity has been constituted as being more powerful and valuable than others. Bim, unlike Nanda Kaul or Maya, has an extraordinary ability to reconcile to her situations. Although she experiences temporary anxiety due to the ambiguity in her life resulting from a conflict between her personal aspirations and the demands of the household domain. She tackles the confusing condition of her mind, the clouds of dilemma and frustration disappear and she experiences a calmness of mind. She accepts that she incurred all the burden of the family because she loves them and cannot imagine a life segregated from them. She confessed to herself:

The anger or the disappointment she felt in them was only the anger and disappointment she felt at herself. Whatever diminished them, diminished her. What attacked them, attacked her. . . . She could hardly believe, at that moment, that she would live on after they did or they would continue after she had ended. (*CLD* 251)

Resolute about her pathway she is tenacious not to lose hope and says, "come what will, I have launched by bark upon the waters" (*CLD* 255).

Anita through Bim asserts that modernity is not defined or decided by the touchstone of marrying or walking out of marriage or getting a divorce or even by staying single. What matters is what a woman makes of her life and how far she can take her own decisions and stick to them accepting the responsibility of the consequences.

*In Custody* marks a departure from Anita Desai's earlier novels where the protagonist, Deven, reaches out to an outer, wider world instead of seeking refuge in an internal consciousness, in the hope of self-fulfillment. Deven is a timid, average, lower middle-class man who longs for literary distinction. He longs to transcend the 'entirety static and stagnant



blackwaters of his existence' (*IC* 104) but lacks the adequacy and courage to take the necessary action. His own obsessive sense of insecurity and lack of confidence become a stumbling block. Although Deven likes to portray himself as the victim of other people and situations; but in reality he is the victim of his own speculations and inabilities.

He feels chained to his life of boredom and mechanically earning a livelihood. It is to him a state of lifelessness and desolation. He has a number of humiliating experiences in life and the liberating event is to be his interviewing the famous Urdu poet, Nur Shahjehanabadi. He hopes to find his own strength and revoke his own creativity through the rendezvous. But the whole project ends in a fiasco. He is deeply pained to witness the chaotic and decadent life of the poet, whom he so greatly romanticized. After observing Nur's life closely, Deven comes to understand that even the poet, once a fiery symbol of Urdu literary world, had degenerated into a drunken, complaining, ill-tempered and whining old man. Gloom and darkness pervaded the house of Nur eclipsing his creative vision and glory. His depravity and mediocrity mock at Deven's fantasy and shock him irrevocably. Deven realised that Nur was as trapped as he himself was. "He felt it inside him like an empty hole, one he had been staring at all his years, intimidated by its blackness and blankness. Even his attempt to fill it with a genuine and heartfelt homage . . . , had been defeated by all the obstacles that sprang up in his life like shards and pebbles" (*IC* 148).

Deven finds it difficult to accept this fact of reality. The situation becomes unendurable to him. All his waiting had been proved to be futile. He emerges as a pathetic, trapped male character with no possibility of success. Deven is cheated and bullied with the project that ends in his literary disaster and financial ruin. Defeated aims, frustrated ends, and thwarted wishes fill Deven's heart with gloomy darkness. Self-pity resulting from his self-defeat weakens him further. He oscillates between dreams and realities. He finds it difficult to sort out the problems of his life, "his struggles are not different from those of a swimmer in unknown

water” (*IC* 191).

To reach wholeness of life he marched away from his self-created trap and readily casts off his role as a teacher, as a husband, and a father and seeks to add a dimension to his existence. Although he is an unheroic hero and feels paralyzed by the crisis of his unfruitful journey, but his suffering eventually gives him a philosophical outlook. Each new failure and blow fill him with a new resistance. He undergoes experiences of various complexities and eventually emerges as a wiser and mature person with a more complete knowledge of being in this world.

Deven accepts the human conditions as it is and reaches to an existential dimension of personality. Though he could not achieve the idealised image of himself, yet he is able to recognize his actual self. He becomes a changed person till the end of the novel. He begins to find himself and his own strengths. He gains optimism after his bitterness and rebellion. He becomes noble by taking upon himself tremendous responsibility, “he had accepted the gift of Nur’s poetry and that meant he was custodian of Nur’s very soul and spirit. It was a great distinction. He could not deny or abandon that under pressure” (*IC* 239).

He realised that the joy of listening to Nur’s voice, having an alliance with him was itself a “shining honour” (*IC* 238) and would give him enough strength and reason to survive. “He had to believe that” (*IC* 238). He developed a self-congratulatory attitude towards life and considered himself as a patron of Nur’s lost poetry, thus gaining a sombre profundity and satisfaction.

Uma in the novel *Fasting, Feasting* along with others like Mama and Anamika represents the repressed modes of existence where women are entrenched in cultural biases, hegemonic orientations and patriarchal oppositions. Anita Desai, a postmodernist, assesses feminism in terms of change and a growing consciousness challenging established stereotypes and

reservations. Uma's life embodies non-fulfillment. Uma's life, like many of ours, centers around the bitterness of being deprived of her share and the humiliation of being oppressed and branded.

Uma is a woman uncared, marginalized and almost unconnected since childhood. An acute sense of denial of her needs even at the basic level gnaws at her inner self, and makes her psychological insecure and alienated. Her life seems to her uncoloured and monotonous like a gloomy, dark shadow. "Uma, unfortunately, was her clumsy, undependable self, dropping and breaking things . . ." (*FF* 18).

Uma resembles Deven, as both wistfully yearn to overshadow their flaws and inadequacies and achieve a dreamy wholesomeness and fulfillment in life, but are utterly dazed and fazed, unable to differentiate the real from the unreal. Uma is unable to keep pace with the expectations of her family and is perpetually described as disgrace to the family. She is always asked by her mother to give preference to domestic works and concentrate on improving her looks. "Leave all that'. Mama snapped at her. "Mama had never taken seriously the need to do any schoolwork, not having gone to school herself" (*FF* 18).

Although she tried to maintain the belief of her childhood hymn, "Jesus loves me; this I know, for the Bible tells me so!" (*FF* 20), the irony is that she had to suffer total disillusionment in life. Whenever she attempts an alignment with someone, within the family, at school, in marriage or in professional world, she has to face failure and destructiveness. She suffers from a disjointed self always on cross-purposes. In an attempt to become the centre of attraction, she even feigns having fits. She is referred as a 'madcap' by her mother (*FF* 148). Uma is never taken seriously by her parents. They completely overlook her human and natural identity. She is the consummate symbol of a woman pushed towards a life of negation. She is disgusted with her cloistered presence in the house but has no means of escape. It is only the knowledge of similar plight of her brother, Arun,

though being away from domestic statistics, which brings her the searing realization of the fundamental alienation of man and the pervading gloom and she moves from egotism to altruism, from alienation to accommodation which she discovers in the latent bond between her dying mother, her lone father and herself. Her bitterness is transformed into acceptance just like Deven and Sita. A significant decoding of the interest of patriarchy takes place in the novel, presenting the irony of social reality wherein a woman's helplessness, lack of availability of options, and a compulsion imposed by the society to follow the established codes of conduct lie behind the seemingly happy exterior of acceptance.

Namita Gokhale has also revealed the life of women, their struggles for basic rights and survival and assertion of identity. Just like Desai her characters are also not rural, illiterate women but an educated lot hailing from urban middle or high class families who become aware of their self-reliance nurturing the desire to blossom in the real sense. They are bold, outspoken, determined and action-oriented. Their life is, in most cases, family-centred but in the quest for self-realization they either embrace it or cross the patriarchal threshold thereby refusing to curb their free spirit. Their fight for autonomy remains an unfinished combat in their effort to move out of the caged existence and realize their practical or impractical ambitions. Both the writers suggest that women are no longer decorative flowers lying lifelessly in a pot but are lively flowers adding to the aesthetics of a garden braving storm and rain.

Both Desai and Gokhale portray through their novels the concept which was supported by Abraham Maslow, a famous psychoanalyst, in Hierarchy of Needs, that the way in which essential needs are fulfilled are as important as the needs themselves, as they together define human experience. If a person finds co-operative social fulfillment, he establishes meaningful relationship with other people and finds internal and external harmony and peace, while if there is a selfish and competitive fulfillment, a person acquires hostile emotions and his internal and external environment

are at unease (125-30).

*In Paro: Dreams of Passion* Gokhale portrays the desire of two chief protagonists Priya and Paro to accomplish everything they can, to become the most that one can be. They are guided by their own vision of self-actualization. They exhibit aberrant behaviour when their needs are thwarted.

Priya is an observant lower-middle class girl, who is expected by her mother to endure the ordeals of life as per the conjectures of the society for a woman. In order to fulfill her physiological needs she takes up the job of a secretary at B.R.'s office. Her basic humanitarian needs are not fostered by anyone but herself. She has no one to depend for the fulfillment of her legitimate human needs - be it money, safety, love or esteem. She knew that she needed to act strongly to move up the ladder and decides to act selfishly. She, being a postmodernist, was insistent to resist any call of morality or ethics, driven just to satisfy her needs. The urge to fulfill the needs is potent in her. This instinct has been defended by Maslow too in Hierarchy of Needs who says that there is nothing wrong with the human desire to scratch where we itch. As long as we can work to satisfy our cravings we're moving towards growth. Blocking gratification makes us sick. Satisfying needs makes us healthy. Maslow classifies the needs as deficiency needs and special needs –

Self actualization needs

Esteem

Love

Safety

Physiological

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The lower four needs have been referred by Maslow as deficiency needs as their lack create anxiety and frustration. It is not easy, although not

impossible to resist these needs. They have great influence on every action we take. Once these needs are met, a person moves on to the upper rungs of the ladder. Once a person is deprived of these, he is motivated towards a stunted, depraved behaviour, which has been justified by most psychologists (125-30).

Priya, too, deficit of love and security, suffers from a crippled psychology and consistently hunts B.R. for affection as well as position. She has an optimistic attitude and an innate tendency for growth. She looks forward to an “incredible new world that was unfolding bravely before me” (*PDP* 4). Even though she is heart broken by B.R.’s marriage to Paro, she is aware and conscious of her longings and wishes and finds in Suresh a reliable indicator of fulfilling them. Without much assessment or reasoning she proceeds to marry him. Physiological needs or security remain no longer a concern for her but the aspect of love and esteem remain only partially fulfilled. She finds true ardor and companionship missing and again turns to her past lover B.R. without any hesitation. Extra-marital relationship with B.R. comes as a vantage to her. After her miscarriage and her discovery of the garish association between Paro and Suresh, she finds life to be an ugly array and feels chronic deprivation. Her dominant need to be loved and to belong is crushed and she feels the urgency to gain a sense of worth. She wanted to “do something so totally mad and daring and unpredictable” (*PDP* 135). She left her husband’s house in a rage and disappointment but soon realised her fears and dependence and recounting them returns to her home again. There was a certain pleasant relief in her mind as she understood that to forfeit Suresh would be her failure. It would engulf her entire future. In her rallying moment she decided to reconcile to a life defined by societal and cultural norms, performing the role of a wife and a socialite, which at least provided the hope of having a glimpse of self-actualization. Priya turns out to be mature in years as well as in the process of living. Through a plunge in uncertainty, perplexity and unsettlement, she develops a positive approach accepting the sanctions of marriage and family and tries to connect her self-

driven motives to the beauty and hope in conformity. In this sense she resembles Desai's Sita of *Where Shall We Go This Summer* and Deven of *In Custody* who choose compromise and conformity as their choice of leading their life happily.

Paro hails from the postmodern me-generation who is always on the look out for being number one driven by excessive self-determinism. As Priya says about her in the novel:

Her need to live was so total, greedy and heedless that she would doubtless have exhausted anyone in the sexual fray.  
(*PDP* 136)

She was the free woman, symbol and prototype of emancipation and individuality. (*PDP* 44).

As per the hierarchy of needs of Maslow, although Paro had an excess as far as physiological needs or security were concerned but she too was a 'love-sick animal' (*PDP* 78) as the other protagonists of Gokhale and Desai. She is an educated and economically dependent woman in search of her identity. She endeavours to write her own history in the male-dominated social milieu and wishes to achieve that by reversal of roles, alteration of conventions and defiance of orthodoxy of patriarchal settlements. She is a woman who initiates sexual relationships and participates in casual sexual encounters with varied male partners without any attempt at rationality or constraint. Namita seems to project her idea of sexual freedom which means an end to the dual standard about who should enjoy sex and who shouldn't, and how much, or who can initiate sex and who can't. It means an end to 'nice girls don't' and 'real men must'. Namita Gokhale herself expresses in an interview with Swapan K. Banerjee :

Sexuality and sexual mores are an extremely vulnerable area of human identity. It isn't only the biology and animal instincts that are at work. In the sexual arena, social

conditioning the structure of the family, gender attitudes, all come into operation. (6)

Similarly in *Paro: Dreams of Passion* we find in the role of Paro the image of new woman who wanted to lead her life her own way in every aspect. She is not dependent on anyone not even on her legal husband.

Namita rejects the disparagement and condemnation of female sexual urges. Paro uses sex as a means to establish her superiority as the phallus and to mould the life of others to suit her needs. She can be said to be a psychodynamic woman influencing the life of everyone around her. She lacks any particular devotion for any specific relationship - be it as a wife, mother or friend. The ideological beliefs are a path unknown to her. She observes no constraints- be it of body or articulation. Paro is an atypical woman, 'not meant for the kitchen' (*PDP* 61) but for attention, luxury and adulation, which she took for granted. She was careless about the feelings of others. As soon as she had 'experience of deprivation', of the indignities of need' (*PDP* 66) she decided to end her life shrugging any social impermissibility. Paro is the representation of the erotic new woman who relished spontaneity even if it meant causing inconvenience to the people surrounding her or even to herself in the long run. Her character is an outright rejection of the male symbolic order where sexuality has been exploited as a weapon for some kind of autonomy and fulfillment.

Paro is a protagonist very unique in herself and more liberated than any other woman character of either Desai or Gokhale herself. She makes no compromise of any sort or at any level and this is what makes her distinct and distinguished. Whether or not her actions are justified is wholly left for the readers to decide.

*Gods, Graves and Grandmother* is a story of three women - Ammi, Gudiya and Phoolwati who reclaim their identity by acts of resistance and defiance recognizing their merit as a separate individual. Namita as a



postmodernist thinker, like Desai, is convinced that a woman can reconstruct her identity and has a hope for future. All the three women emerge as self-assertive individuals giving voice to their personal desires and dreams beyond the spaces carved out by the deep-rooted social mindset. Namita, through her novels, favours the transformation of feminine sensibility and is reflective about it just as Anita Desai in her novels. Both assert that this life is meant not for anyone else but is completely our own domain. It is utterly precious and no one should be permitted to play with your life or to dictate its terms.

In this novel Ammi's life is full of transition, from a prostitute to an indulgent saint to a detached spiritual being. Ammi is a lively and enthusiastic lady who has a passion to survive with dominance, defying the supremacy assumed by men. She mocks at them and says with distaste, "I have seen a lot of learned men. . . . Their minds get dizzy from too much - thinking" (*GGG* 15).

Ammi does not project the total overthrow of the dominant traditions- she proposes an early marriage for Gudiya to a respectable man - but speaks of the more humanistic need to gain autonomy in a silently oppressive system. At no point of time she loses her determination and inner strength which helps her dissociate from the monopoly of the patriarchal structures. Her life comes as a platonic sublimation of feminine autonomy.

Phoolwati is another female whose positive attitude towards life leads her towards self-realisation. Phoolwati believes in the legitimacy of marriage but never allows her husband Sundar Pahalwan to oppress her. When he comes drunk at home and tries to beat her, she kicks him back and acts strongly and boldly, which makes a reversal of the norm of wife-beating. Phoolwati is a childhood widow but she does not hesitate to accept the proposal of Sundar. She validates her self-sufficiency by her professional integrity and urge to increase her own earnings from the shop outside Ammi's temple. She has a confrontational approach towards the problems

faced by either her or Gudiya. She stands as a strong support system and a pillar of strength for Gudiya, whom she loves as her own child. Even on being widowed, the second time, by the murder of Sunder, she does not wail, instead she rejoices in her freedom and change in her life and diverts her love completely towards Gudiya. She displays admirable courage and imagination at every point and keeps her identity intact. Seeing her enthusiasm and cleverness Sunder remarks, “If they made my Phoolwati the prime minister of India, she could solve all the problems of this country” (*GGG* 191). Phoolwati’s is a balanced personality who achieves her success and happiness in this competitive world by her unrelenting commitment towards herself.

Gudiya, the main protagonist, achieves a detached mystic height which very few woman are known to have achieved. Gudiya undergoes humiliations and tortures on account of her relationship with Kalki, soon to realise, that he cannot be a permanent or life-strong support for her. Kalki, devoid of human values and compassion beats her and assuming a male-supremacy forces Gudiya to cow down before him. Gudiya carries the fighting spirit of Ammi within her and realizes that this way her life would be wasted in indignities and indifference. She reinterprets her relationship with Kalki and determines, “I resolved to find a way out of the intolerable situation” (*GGG* 217). She summoned courage and set off a new train of thought. She gets ready to accept the challenges of life alone without any male support. Even Phoolwati suggested her to pull herself away from Kalki, “any way, you are probably better off without him” (*GGG* 237). She convinced Gudiya that the role of Kalki was limited up to becoming the legitimate father of her child. Gudiya assumes motherhood and womanhood as her primary postulates and sends Kalki away to Mumbai to follow his ambitions. Overcoming her weaknesses and immaturity she evolves into a strong, confident woman and simulates herself as Pooja Thakur, claiming an entirely new identity. She realised that pain was a general principal of life and decided to forget her past and forge into a new future. With a rush of

optimism she says, “you could say that I’m a free woman now” (*GGG* 218). She decided to celebrate her freedom and with an appreciable adaptability and acceptability towards the past, she optimizes, “Grandmother is dead, Roxana is dead, Sundar is dead. Even Kalki is gone, but the end of the world is nowhere in sight” (*GGG* 240).

Here we are reminded of Maya of Desai's *Cry The Peacock* who also sends her husband away from her in order to find her true identity, the only difference is that in the former case the departure is permanent and more brutal while in the case of Gudiya it is indirect separation, wherein the choice though made by Gudiya is agreed and needed by both the partners. It is in fact a liberation of both - Kalki as well as Gudiya.

In the novel *A Himalayan Love Story*, Parvati emerges as a new woman who differs from the image of an ideal Indian woman, who is expected to observe self-denial, self-effacement, service, sacrifice and subjugation. She is fully conscious of her youthful charms and revels in her beauty. She dynamites the very roots of tradition by her pre-marital relationship with Salman, thereby losing her virginity. She knew that their relationship had no scope of permanence but overrating her biological needs above the social norms, she says overtly, “I had known in our very first meeting that he was only a shadow” (*AHLS* 30) and enjoys the physical experience. She even flirts with Mukul Nainwal, her co-student getting an innate satisfaction from the attention he employed to be with her. Her life gets complicated due to her marriage to Lalit, who is a homo-sexual, thus misplacing her sentiments and expectations. Her otiose hours of isolation and solitariness come to her as a game of pounding and clawing. Her husband is an accurate typification of a victim as well as an exploiter who does not disclose his true self before marriage to anyone. Parvati tries her best to submit taciturnly to the situation to make things easier but faces a strangulating sense of sequestration and helpless reticence which runs through the story. The submission does not palliate her feelings. She is not able to repress them completely. Discarding the prejudiced customs she

fulfils her lust by getting involved with Lalit's cousin and does not feel any regret for the same. On the contrary she roistered in her rebellion, she describes her somatic union with Raju:

We made an uncompromising uncomplicated love.

I decided it best to defy Lalit's orders and continue sleeping in the kitchen. . . . I would sleep alone on the kitchen floor, safe in my rebellion. (AHLS 43)

Neurosis strikes her after Lalit's death and she felt the calamity as a kind of violence against her. She even feels her daughter as a burden. She chooses to retrace herself into a cocoon, hiding behind the security of her own personal world. She finds herself debunked. However even in her stupefaction she is able to talk to Mukul about practical monetary considerations with full confidence and says to him, " Give me the property and go" (AHLS 183).

She is fully aware of her and Irra's needs. Her external as well as internal condition are unfavourable to her but like the other protagonists of Desai and Gokhale she has a spirit not completely consummated by the collective forces of repression and subordination. Being a postmodernist she always tries to invent new methods of assessing and reacting to her mortifying situations. Realizing the bleariness of her future she vociferates her wish to survive by thrusting her own responsibilities on Mukul even if he is unwilling. Her soul is cramped and agonised which wants to get an outlet certainly, with a desire of solace and fulfillment.

Rachita Tiwari in *The Book of Shadows* is another character who asserts her selfhood by seeking freedom from the past memories and in turn from the feelings of fear and guilt. Her aspirations, cravings, conflicts and catastrophes have been portrayed in the course of her journey towards rediscovering herself. Her life is engulfed in darkness by the suicide of her finance Anand. Rachita wishes to overcome the ugliness of the unfortunate

incidence and establish her right to her own body. To escape the grim environment of pain and loss she moves to her old house in the hills. She spends her time in self contemplation and tries to return to normalcy. Namita projects that belief in self is of foremost importance for Rachita to regain her lost confidence. What Betty Friedan's, the renowned feminist, comments in *The Feminine Mystique* :

Man is not the enemy here, but the fellow victim. The real enemy is women's denigration of themselves. (180)

Holds true about Rachita in this novel. Emotionally strangled and her body subjugated by the acid attack, Rachita tries to understand her own silence and hurt. She blames none for whatever happened with her. She questions herself in an attempt to understand the realities of life-its pattern and its design. She confesses bravely, "No, I am not afraid. I am not guilty. It is not my fault that I am me" (*BOS* 32).

She frees herself from the burden of social perception and tries to re-create her image in her own eyes. Her self-assessment is of prime significance to her. She remains content in her loneliness and finds solace in the silence of the house. She involves herself in simple activities like reading stories and children literature which reveal her desire to escape into the world of imagination from the burden of reality that she is living in. She gradually acquires a mature attitude towards life and becomes unconcerned with her lost physical beauty. Tinged with obscurantism she begins to gain satisfaction in her loveless, joyless existence and "felt complete without a care in the world" (*BOS* 23).

She swings between illusion and reality and endeavours to assert a new identity through an acceptance of her own strengths and weaknesses. Namita portrays her skill in capturing the psychological states of a woman haunted by an awareness of self - resulting in pursuit of a productive existence which can validate one's beings. Rachita, being an intellectual

woman, represents a synthesis between emotions and intellect. Namita's fictional world is located in the corridors of human consciousness. She affirms the possibility of the individual's attitudinal change that allows a person to put a different interpretation on the same facts and situations. In her state of withdrawal, Rachita feels lost and lonely initially but eventually finds a perfect way to control her mental condition and says to her students Zenobia and Pashu:

We must make and remake ourselves, possess and repossess our world, cast and recast our lot in every precious moment. Above all, we must know what to hold on to, what to discard. In this radical flux which is life. I felt disquietingly alive. . . . I had acquired, achieved, possessed myself again. (*BOS* 229)

She, thus, attains soulful satisfaction from her psychological metamorphosis.

Namita through the novel *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* gives expression to her postmodernist belief:

We are instinct itself . . . ecstasy. It defies my life and destiny, disengaging it from the wheel of duty and dharma and what should be, throwing it directly into my own hands. (*SPOM* 110)

says Shakuntala, wishing to venture unafraid into the future with a freedom to assert choice and autonomy. The women in Namita Gokhale's and Desai's novels desire not to be mere goddesses or lifeless instruments of domestic use. In fact they pass through a process of transformation which signifies for them a change from bondage to freedom, from indecision to self-assertion and from weakness to strength.

The urge and plight of modern women is portrayed through *Shakuntala* whose life is a tale of longing, hesitant hopes and aspirations.

Shakuntala has to face a phallogentric and discriminatory attitude since childhood. Shakuntala quests for knowledge but she is deterred by her mother to do so. She is never allowed by the tradition bound Indian society to take the free flight of her will to gain whatever she wants. She sees marriage as a means to escape her restrictive environment but her hopes are crushed after a brief marital bliss. She wishes to lead a normal life but her infertility and coming of a second lady in her husband's life lead her to an intense emotional struggle. She feels unwanted and cheated. She sees a glimpse of a renewed autonomy into Nearchus and expects to remake her life with him. She feels the youth will be able to provide her psychological, physical and mental refuge. She, as a typical postmodern character, believes that in the given circumstances her responsibilities lay only to herself. She unhesitatingly rejects and revolts against her insensitive marginalization by Srijan, and elopes with Nearchus. She craves for a due place of a wife in the family but is tormented by Srijan's unfaithfulness. Then too she does not behave like a dormant, suppressed woman of the house. Instead of shedding tears she liberated herself of all the bondages. She changed her name to Yaduri, which symbolizes new identity that she wished to assert. She feels no pangs of guilt. She shrinks from making unwanted compromise with Srijan just for the sake of society or security. A new code of sexual ethics is established by Shakuntala who gives in freely to her sexual instincts without any inhibitions. She displays her courage and decisive power once again when she rejects the affectionless and empty relationship with Nearchus too. She has a strong urge to return to Srijan but her self-esteem keeps her from doing so. She ventures out to find her true self. Her sense of self rises to confront Nearchus and Srijan as mere shadows in her life. She maintains her self-respect with firmness and determination till the end when unfortunately she meets with an accident. Even while she lay dying she says, "I would not waste tears. I had not wasted my life" (*SPOM* 208).

Shakuntala emerges as a woman whose journey can be considered worthwhile because it brought her face to face with her own true self. She is

triumphant though at a dear cost. What is remarkable about her is her continuous search for her true potential and struggle for the fulfillment of her needs in order to keep her self whole and assert it in the midst of all the odds.

Namita wishes to present that a woman can be valiant and unyielding and can protest against the dual moral code of the patriarchal society. Demolishing the myth of the traditional woman, Namita redefines the concept of a virtuous woman. Both Desai and Gokhale assert that idealization can no longer confer happiness and satisfaction in reality to a woman as a being of flesh and blood. They reject the notion which arms men with undue superiority and power.

Priya, in the novel *Priya: in Incredible Indyya*, has an overpowering male domination in her life. She seeks human relations of wifehood and motherhood but at the same time wishes to exercise a degree of control over her own life. She accepts the social identity assigned to her by the code of conduct and manages to maintain an ordered framework, and her social performance wins her a deserved respect. But there runs a parallel undercurrent of a struggle for assertion of her own identity and self-emancipation deep in her psyche. Caught in the zig-zag of life between Suresh, his enticer Poonam Chand, her children Luv and Kush she is entangled in a whirlpool of agonies. Due to the suspected affair between Poonam Chand and Suresh she feels herself at the zenith of neglect and emotional alienation. It brings her on the route to avail her existence and she realises, "Time for me to assert myself. And for him to grow up" (*PIII* 113). She 'felt a part of the crowd and yet alone' (*PIII* 179). She was deeply hurt by Suresh's writing of a poem for Poonam. She becomes aggressive and a cord of self-respect strike her, "I deserve the best now, and I would get it" (*PIII* 182), says Priya in self-assertion.

She is caught between two immanent forces, the conventional worldly reality that is around her and the inner reality that is within her personality.



At this juncture she exhibits a unique determination to put an end to everything that would problematize her marriage and render it vulnerable. As a postmodernist discarding a belief in the set rules, she believes “the end justifies the means” (*PIII* 159).

She accepts the fact that a woman has to face many ups and downs, overcome various obstacles and conflicts. The journey towards self-realization is neither an easy one nor does it always end on a happy and positive note for women. But she takes the journey itself to be worthwhile and becomes the required strong and bold woman to undertake it. She felt dignified to traject the vicissitudes of roles assigned to a woman. With an air of novelty she says, “you would think it’s not enough to simply be born female. One has to work at it, ceaselessly refurbishing and reupholstering oneself. . . . Simply to remain a woman” (*PIII* 182). “An Indian woman is a goddess with many arms” (*PIII* 183). She felt like a mighty warrior defending the integrity of her family from Poonam Chand and emerges successful in her yearning. All her attempts are well organized so that she critically scrutinizes her life, shoulders her responsibilities and makes whatever sacrifices possible for her realistically. She does not lose her mind and heart and does not deter from her view and concept of life remaining within the framework of stable relationships of being a mother and wife.

Thus, Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale belong to what Elaine Showalter, the American literary critic, in *Literature of Their Own* referred to as the third phase in the literary history of women:

First, there is prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of protest against their standards and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. (13)

Both these novelists depict a willingness to delineate the intimate concerns of mind which they successfully and convincingly do. The novels of both Desai and Gokhale delve into the depths of alienation and represent the silent perplexities, anguish and sufferings of the characters. What is striking is the portrayal of emotional and psychological alienation, apart from social alienation. Their fictional canvas represents how society nurtures prejudice against women forcing them to become mindless playthings. However when a woman raises questions about her traditional, parochial roles her life is plunged into randomness due to absence of any understanding or support from the external agents of victimization. This external and internal conflict diminishes and alienates a woman physically and psychologically and imparts a meaninglessness to her way of existence. She fails to decipher any purpose behind her life and the relevance of her existence in this world. Both the novelists delineate this self alienation as a distinctive feature in a woman's life and in some cases of a man's existence struggling to maintain the hypocritical standards of survival.

However Desai and Gokhale, in a feminist stance, redirect this internal and external strife towards redefinition of womanhood. Although the protagonists' alienated state propel them from crisis to crisis, the women of both these writers emerge strong and resilient. In time of crisis they show strength and courage and take their own decision regarding how far to conform and how far to break from the accepted norms to assert their selfhood. Rather than being passive they are spirited and independent and do not hesitate to assert that they are free, independent spirits. The autonomy undertaken by the women characters is relatively more alien to traditional thinking in Gokhale's novels as compared to that of Desai. But in either case the discernment of their responsibility towards themselves and its assertion takes precedence over social cohesion and inhibitions. The novels are filled with various postmodern ailments that try to keep the protagonists away from discovering themselves. Every individual tries to render meaning to his existence by asserting his/ her own individuality through a reprisal of the

self. Setting apart the roles prescribed and predetermined by society and culture, each individual seeks his/ her own route to assert his/her own identity. Even though this journey is bristled with problems, it is meaningful as it gives the feeling of a worthwhile life which cannot be lived by complacency or easy surrender but through a struggle to overcome the illusions playing the social and personal life.

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## Chapter – 6

# NARRATIVE PATTERN

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Narrative pattern or narrative technique is absolutely crucial to the understanding of literary sensibilities of a writer as well as to seize upon the theme which the writer wishes to convey with profundity and perspicacity. Though a novel gets its main sustenance from the story it intends to tell, its success depends largely on how effectively it is narrated. The desirability and readability of a novel and its literary significance can be achieved only when there is a compatibility between the theme and the narrative technique. A study of narrative pattern denotes an analysis of the diverse elements of the story such as the underlying theme, plot, character, setting, mood, symbolism, language and style. The word narrative derives from the Latin word 'narrare' which means 'to tell' and the word 'technique' means 'art'. Thus the art embodied by the author to relay connected sequence of events which enables him to express the themes incorporated in the literary work is the narrative technique. The narrative pattern includes the manner in which the various events and actions are organised and the time and place incorporated with them. These actions include both external as well as internal or psychological, real as well as fantastic ones. It is the technique which decides how the information or perspective of the writer will be delivered and the resultant effect it would have on the reader. Narrative pattern, in other words, may be said to be the structuring element which provides identity to a piece of writing. The importance of this pattern is that it leads to a deeper understanding of the literary work and illuminates the way of writing of the author. It helps us to examine in detail the principal elements of a writing, that is, the atmosphere created for the action, the principal characters and the minor ones, the motivation of the characters, their positioning in the world of the novel, the mood built by reading the story and its relation to its meaning, the symbolic significance of people or

objects in the story, the nature of the vision shaped by it, the sentence structure and vocabulary employed to evoke the message and the theme marked out in the work. Thus focusing on narrative technique is vital to understand the ideas, concepts and attitudes of the writer and the literary work.

The technique used by a writer is highly influenced by the contemporary movements and their sensitivity towards them. Both Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale are drawn to literary postmodernism concerning both theme and style of writing. Their novels can be said to be fictionalised representations of postmodernist dimension of writing, smoothly juxtaposed with the influence of stream of consciousness and flashback techniques characteristic of D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf, and the experimental and highly emotional ambiguous style of Henry James. It will be interesting to note how their fiction is largely bound by the postmodern framework suggested by thinkers like Jean-Francois-Lyotard and Linda Hutcheon denying any predictability, transparency or adherence to realism, rather they convey chaos with remarkable seriousness and fidelity. For Lyotard narrative has been the pre-eminent form of representation, allowing the world to be apprehended in a specific form by humans, recording details of a culture. Lyotard's interpretation about narration in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* is remarkable in building an idea of the narrative style and objective of Desai and Gokhale:

Narration is quintessential form of customary knowledge, in more ways than one. . . . The narratives allow the society in which they are told, on one hand, to define the criteria of competence and, on the other, to evaluate according to those criteria what is performed or can be performed within it. . . . Narratives as we have seen, determine criteria of competence and/or illustrates how they are to be applied. Thus they define what has the right to be said and done in that culture in question, and since they are themselves part of that culture,

they are legitimate by the fact that they do what they do. (19-23)

Thus we can characterize the postmodern narrative pattern as being free from any fixed rules. Their narratives being free from any question of legitimization claiming to competence only by the fact that the writer wishes to state it the way it is stated, modifying the length or amplitude or style according to his own pragmatic concerns, not by the brand of 'reality' or 'truth' or 'logic'.

Postmodernism serves to make representations more accessible as it is in favour of flexible specialization, a sovereignty of expression, dissolution of traditional politics of power and an emphasis on consumption and personal fulfillment. Linda Hutcheon comments about postmodernist narrative:

In addition to being 'borderline' inquiries, most of these postmodernist contradictory texts are also specifically parodic in their intertextual relation to the traditions and conventions of the genres involved. When Eliot recalled Dante or Virgil in *The Waste Land*, one sensed a kind of wishful call to continuity beneath the fragmented echoing. It is precisely this that is contested in postmodern parody where it is often ironic discontinuity at the heart of similarity. Parody is a perfect postmodern form, in some senses, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies. (11)

Hutcheon, thus, clearly emphasises that the structure of postmodern texts is to be based on intertextuality, irony and parody.

Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale, being postmodernists, manage to get rid of the aesthetic burden in terms of strict rules and codes of conduct followed by either speculative or realist narratives. The following analysis will discuss how their novels represent a radical disruption of linear flow of

narratives, frustration of conventional expectations, opposition of inward consciousness to rational, objective discourse, inclination towards distortion, emphasis on a conversational pattern marked by highly individual narratives. In the novels of both these writers there is a close correspondence between the theme and the technique. The technique does not seem to be juxtaposed on the plot but is instinctual. Form and content have been fused to impart a unified impression. Technique to them is not an after-thought or a mechanical synthesis but is functional and integral to the fabric of their vision. Landscape is not just a backdrop but an important manifestation of the isolation and nostalgia of the alienated characters. How memory has been used in a series of interior monologues to give us an access to the inner recesses of the character's mind is interesting to observe. Exploration of sensibility is their forte. Pursuing the goal, the existential tensions are revealed by the apt use of stream of consciousness technique, diary, symbolism, flashbacks, interior monologues. Deterring from complexity simple plot elements have been used to propel plot development. There is an organic relationship between the setting, the character and the point of view in the novels. Both Desai and Gokhale successfully bear the artistic challenge of externalising the inscape of a character by resorting to different literary techniques.

Stream of consciousness technique has been employed by Desai and Gokhale to reveal the inner recesses of the protagonists' mind. The stream of consciousness connotes an unceasing, tumultuous flow of the consciousness of the characters which is unearthed through words, images and symbols analogous to their inner life. Each work of Desai is an accelerating exploration of the psychic self. She depicts the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind of the characters with a complete wholeness. By the employment of various images and symbols the inner psyche of the characters is revealed emphasizing the obscure and weird atmosphere of the novels. As Neeru Tandon, a critique of Desai, comments about her style in *Anita Desai's In Custody: A Critical Appraisal* :



Mrs. Desai is no doubt a great artist with a remarkable and astounding technical efficacy. It is not in the use of subject matter, characterization and in presenting the atmosphere of minds but also in the use of narrative technique, symbols, images, flashbacks, and the method of objective co-relation and stream-of-consciousness etc. that Desai has achieved high recognition. . . . The credit goes to her technique as it enriches the novel by lifting it above the mere narration of a story or depiction of a character and provides it the very life, blood and the soul. (82)

For Anita every thought is a part of personal consciousness in the novels. She is often considered by critics as the innovator of psychological study of alienated women in India. Personal consciousness is an amalgamated representation of certain thoughts, feelings and ideas in the human mind which are interrelated and inseparable. Those thoughts and feelings tell a reader who the characters are and why are they like they are. They also determine their past, present and future. Desai represents an introspective, analytical and reflective point of view in her writing. The chronological order of events is averse as thoughts cannot be sequestered into water tight compartments. They keep on fluctuating crossing the boundaries of linear time. She employs the devices of interior monologues and free indirect speech in her novels to give an insight into the life of the characters. Thus, the characters constantly speak to themselves as 'I' as well as the writer uses phrases as 'she wondered, 'she thought', 'she asked herself' etc. ending thoughts as reported speech. Both the styles are in harmony with each other in her novels. The desperate struggle of the protagonist to realize their true self and make their life meaningful is significantly portrayed by the use of interior monologues. The hopes, frustrations, negations, rejections and chaotic flow of events are given shape with a sensuous richness and deft handling of language. With great subtlety and finesse she unravels the changing aspects of nature harmonious

with human moods.

Desai's very first novel *Cry, The Peacock* shows her interest in the psychology of her characters. It is a poetic novel with dense imagery. The imagistic chaos represents the chaos of Maya's psyche. Through the stream of consciousness technique the causes and growth of her despair have been revealed. The neurotic defense mechanism such as sleep rituals, hallucinatory visions and nightmares, experiences of split personality, adverse somatic symptoms are described through a vision:

Wild horse, white horse galloping up paths of stone, flying away into the distance, the wild hills. The heights, the dizzying heights of my mountains, towering, tapering, edged with cliff-edges, founded on rock. Fall, fall, gloriously fall to bed of racing rivers, foaming seas. Horrid arms, legs tentacles thrashing, blood flowing, eyes glazing. Storm-storm at sea, at land! Fury, whip. Lash, Fly furiously. Danger! Danger! The warming rings and echoes, from far, far, far. Run and hide, run and hide, run and hide - if you can, miserable fool! Ha, Ha, fool, fool. (CTP 150)

Through the description of wild horses the inscape of Maya is revealed. She is full of rage and excitement like the untamed horses lacking in any restraint and is unbridled in her desires. Her hypersensitivity finds expression in the elaborate description of the motion of the horses.

Maya's disjointed consciousness is seized and portrayed through many images and interior monologues. She is constantly aware and tries to analyse and question her place in her family and also her worth to herself. Whenever spring season came and Maya heard the call of the brain fever bird at twilight, as soon as she woke up, she felt as if the bird was asking her, ". . . it begged, "Who are you? Who are you?" (CTP 33). Looking at the moon thoughts emanate in her mind, "I began to dream-of my little dead dog

that I had loved, of Arjun going away in secrecy, of the pink blossoms over the wall - and long metifluous Sundays, white oleanders, where are you now?" (*CTP* 143), thus reflecting her nostalgia. Maya believed the spring to be an 'untidy' (*CTP* 33) season as there was no stability in it, only quickened passion to grow and "the atmosphere was charged with restlessness" (*CTP* 34) which represents her own disturbed state of mind. Even the Rangoon creeper appears to her like a snake, she feels the shadows of trees moving towards her with a terrible speed and is reminded of coiling snakes.

The actions of protagonists are also not objectively represented as was done in the traditional pattern of fiction writing, but every action corresponds with their inner state. For instance in the opening of the novel Maya is presented as washing her eyes thoroughly as it hints at her desperation and her obsessive compulsive neurosis with the dead body of her pet dog, Toto which she wishes to rub off from her memory but is unable to do so. She finds the time endlessly stretching and the climax of her life to be like a shadow following her suspiciously and says, "Will the summer never end? Will the monsoon never come". "It is only May yet, Maya. Only May!" (*CTP* 143-144). She spent sleepless nights in the agony of the consciousness of the albino prophecy and stared at the moonlit nights. The terrifying words of the astrologer beat into her mind like beats of a drum. However hard she tries to break the 'hypnotic spell' (*CTP* 147) she fails to do so. She loved irrationality and felt any logical words of Gautama like dead leaves. She says to Gautama, "No, No, whoever spoke of logic?" (*CTP* 145). The grim horror of Maya's mind is mirrored in the frenzied cries of birds and the hunting of prey by the lizard she fails to do so. The dark birds are noticed by Maya as 'flock of problems rising from ominous trees' (*CTP* 49). Towards the end Maya afraid of her own ideas but determined not to die says in an interior monologue, "I am in a fever. Stop me! Silence me! Or I will fly on, fly up, at you, through you, past you and away. For I am ill. I am in a fever, God, in a fever." (*CTP* 150). The perception of life of Maya and Gautama and Maya's incertitude are depicted by an associative use of landscape and

images which supplement Desai's artistic excellence.

In *Voice In The City* the characters seek loneliness and privacy in order to be their own self. The agony of their sensitive souls is portrayed by externalising their feelings and mental state. The psyche of four characters - Nirode, Monisha, Amla and their mother is unravelled through the brutal voices of the city of Calcutta. The visible world is used to present the invisible traumas of its inhabitants. The frustrations, grievances and nullity of life are delineated through the use of images, interior monologues, dreams and visions. There is a unique mixture of urban consciousness and individual consciousness in the novel. Since the beginning chaotic atmosphere of Calcutta is portrayed:

The train began to pant, as though in preparation for a battle, sending jets of white steam violently into the night sky and on the platform people loitered in various attitudes of nervousness, impatience and regret, turning now and then to the lights at the head of the platform, waiting for them to change. No one ever betrayed reluctance for them to do so except, perhaps the latecomers pounding along with baggage wobbling and disintegrating in the seemingly hopeless search for the right carriage. (*VIC* 7)

Thus, reflecting on the ceaseless waiting of the characters, their insecurities and longing for a continuation of journey. Lampshades have been repeatedly referred as 'dirty' and 'ominous' (*VIC* 72-73), which should on the contrary be symbols of dispelling dark.

The imagery of the mechanical life of Nirode and the other editors is drawn as:

Editors are born without eyes, without pupils or corneas or irises. They have two sets of shutters instead - just like they have in cameras. And these built in cameras are at work,

clicking, clicking and putting down on a long sticky black film everything they have clicked . . . they actually have no hands - they are born with iron claws, the kind they make for men who lose their hands in the war or get them rotted away with leprosy. Clack, clack, the claws pick other people's brains, as butchers do with sheep. (*VIC 31*)

Which presents the lack of feelings of the postmodern man and the inclination towards violence as that of a butcher.

The consciousness of Nirode is clearly reflected throughout the novel by his monologues like, "It is the I that interests me now" (*VIC 33*). "Indeed, there is little company for me besides the gay figures of the embroidery you scorn, my books and my letters" (*VIC 37*), says Nirode while reading his mother's letter which he found like a 'bright-winged butterfly' (*VIC 37*) amidst all the greyness of his life struck with loneliness and boredom. Desai exposes the characteristics of Nirode by expressions like, "It is hard for cynics to believe it, but Nirode quite honestly didn't want success" (*VIC 61*).

The incidence of Monisha ablazing herself is skillfully described, "Through this smoke they saw the hazy figures of the curious who had gathered outside the house waiting for story whiffs of scandal and sensation to seep out to them" (*VIC 242*). The huts and cups are cracked and chipped signifying the fragmented human personality. Filth and squalor is profusely spread everywhere. Monisha asks herself in a stream of consciousness, "What does it all mean? Why are lives such as these lived? At their conclusion, what solution what truth falls into the waiting palms of one's hands, the still pit of one's hands?" (*VIC 120*). Her humiliation and desolation is presented through her thoughts and her approach towards finality.

Amla has visions of Monisha's death and of herself being sentenced

to death. She hears death approaching her and watching her all the time. She feels death sweeping into her 'like night turning my blood black' (VIC 253).

Simple plot elements lead to complex situations in the novel. Desai is able to achieve remarkable depth and intensity. Although there is absence of much action but it is compensated by her tremendous depth in the expression of human spectacle.

*Where Shall We Go This Summer* again presents the psychological problem of Sita resulting from her unfulfilled wishes. The consciousness of Sita flows through the three successive stages of perception, memory and dream. It is characterised by perception of her troubled present, rejection of the past existential dilemma, and vision of plurality of future possibilities. Regarding her life as strange and shadowy, Sita withdraws into the protective chrysalis of childhood and pendulates between illusion and reality. The novel presents the inner drama of human psyche surfacing the inner conflict, through an aesthetic objectivity. The novel is divided into three sections-monsoon'67, winter'47 and monsoon'67 representing the phases of Sita's life like clouds, "now thin, now dense; now slow now fast; now whispering, now drumming; then gushing" (WSWGTS 95). Just like *Voice In The City* the novel opens with a note of waiting and patience, "The monsoon had temporarily withdrawn to the horizon, there to lie, visibly panting, collecting itself for another, stronger return, while on the land everyone waited - with some patience, some without - for the rain to begin . . ." (WSWGTS 7). Thus hinting at the decadent, dry present and hopefulness of a better future. For the purpose of portrayal of the psychology of Sita, multiple associations with nature have been drawn. Describing her state of mind Anita says:

The palms reared up in their path, hissing and clattering their dry leaves together harshly, like some disturbed, vigilant animals - stiff bats, sharp cranes or dire geese rather than trees, mere vegetables. There was menace in their warnings,

and vigilance also a certain promise. (WSWGTS 23-24)

The frustration as well as hope of modern man are thus aptly portrayed. Alienation has been referred in the novel as a kind of 'paralysis' (WSWGTS 28) where a person loses control over his own actions. This paralysis may be mental or physical. However paralysis is presented as melting away slowly and giving way to a renewed passion to live at one's own terms. Sita's feminine sensibility has been likened to a fish in a fisherman's net who though being caught "had torn a hole in the net and escaped into the dark depths of the ocean" (WSWGTS 90). Making it clear that the everyday world had grown so stifling and insufferable to her that escapism was her only alternative. Towards the end when she is both exhausted and relieved Sita finds her life like a spiral path swirling round and round 'leading nowhere' (WSWGTS 140).

The realistic truths of psychological interest are brought out by Desai in her other novels too like *Fire On The Mountain*, *In Custody*, *Clear Light of Day and Fasting*, *Feasting* but in these novels there is a shift from the stream of consciousness to the new technique of montage. Montage is the style of writing characterized by the juxtaposition of opposites just as involvement and detachment, conformity to the social order and rebellion, maintaining the social institutions and quest for individual identity. By drawing contrasts the psychology of the characters is traced.

The inner emotional world of two contrasting characters Nanda Kaul and Raka have been explored in *Fire On The Mountain* who want to escape the harsh facts of human life with a unique spontaneity. Each defines the other by their knack for escapism and destruction, though varying in intensity. Nanda quest for stillness contrasts with her wish to participate in the movements. When Raka came to Nanda's house, the latter wanted to be with her and away from her at the same time:

Nanda could not help finding the child's long absences as

perturbing as her presence was irksome. Occasionally she found herself walking restlessly from room to room or from one end of the garden to the other, not in search - it was not in her to search out another - but because the child's arrival and disappearance were so disquieting. (*FOM* 51)

Both lived together yet did their best to avoid each other. Nanda found Raka "no more than a particularly dark and irksome spot on the hazy landscape - a mosquito, a cricket, or a grain of sand in the eye" (*FOM* 38). Nanda tried to ignore Raka but felt responsible for her all the more. She rejected and accepted her duties after fulfilling them for her whole life. Her virtue of caring for everyone became her shackle keeping her entangled unwillingly and willingly till the end. However she eventually found that it was not so easy to exist and appear not to exist at the same time.

Through various interior monologues and imagery Nanda's conscious yearning to escape and search for a solitary life is reflected with a unique sensitiveness. Nanda feels herself like a fly caught in a web and like a lizard imitating death. Her cane chair where she sat in her husband's house symbolised her long duration of slavery to familial obligations like sewing, mending or holding a child and others. In her private moments she groaned to be alone and said, "Discharge me. I've discharged all my duties. Discharge" (*FOM* 33). She found her life 'drought-struck' (*FOM* 33) and 'life-spring' (*FOM* 33) dried up.

*In Custody* also presents the oscillations of the protagonist, Deven, between the tension to reconcile or deviate, remain bound to the narrow confines of the family or to stray, to accept his failures or feel victorious - through various suggestions, visions, imagery and trail of thoughts. Desai uses the technique of contrast as well as stream of consciousness technique here to seize upon the theme of existentialism and portray the shapelessness and meaninglessness of life. She has contrasted various settings, characters, stages of a character and situations in this novel. Sarla and Deven are



contrasted to each other in the malice they share for one another. Deven feels Sarla to be like 'the nylon shirt that responded with an electric shackle, as if it were an embodiment of Sarla's malice and mockery' (*IC* 26). Faces of both were marked by dark furrows of dissatisfaction and that realization was what bound as well as repelled them. Deven's journey away from Mirpore and back symbolically explore his growing sensibility against his dismal and morbid state. Contrast between situations is presented by comparing the condition of Deven and the celebrated poet Nur, not being very different. Nur is presented as leading a life of a moving corpse. Deven's imagination is very fertile - sometimes he views himself moving towards the horizon on a clear road, sometimes finds himself in the midst of a maze and at last envisions the darkness of night dissolving, the whirlpool of water opening and the sky being filled with grey light. These imaginative and associative expressions speak of Desai's chiseled and skillful narration.

*Clear Light Of Day* presents the journey of the characters from childhood to youth and back and forth. The innermost urges of characters are portrayed by montage style and by complex interaction of self and society. There are historical references to partition and assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. Through montage, consciousness of characters is evoked. Tara is a character highly contrasted and contradictory to Bim. While Tara is meek and an escapist Bim is both a fighter and a victim as is presented in the symbolic incidence of the attack by a swarm of bees. While strolling in the Lodi garden when Tara sees Bim in the midst of bees, she runs away and Bim like a 'chosen queen made prisoner' (*CLD* 207). "It was a bees' festival, a celebration, Bim their appointed victim, the sacrificial victim on whom they had draped the ceremonial shawl, drawing it close about her neck as she stood drooping, shivering under the weight of her gauzy wings, their blue black humming" (*CLD* 207). The situation and the contrasted reaction to it clearly indicate the divergent state and the attitude of the two siblings. The starkness of Bim's situation becomes even more striking as it is also contrasted to Raja who also runs away like Tara. Bim in a series of self-

analysis is made to realise her choice and willingness to struggle and shoulder all her responsibilities. Slowly she dispels her grudges like old papers and pleasure and confidence exuded from her rock strong personality like music nourishing everyone's mind and heart. The novel ends with a hope of freshness and rejuvenation suggested by the subsiding storm and emanating sunlight.

In *Fasting, Feasting* the atmosphere of the mind is presented by montage technique intermingled with the symbolic background and imagery. Whatever action is there in the novel, is integral to the presentation of the human psyche, the inner agonised soul. Uma, Arun and Aruna are highly contrasting characters and so are their situations. By the juxtaposition of opposites the morbidity of existence is presented in expressions as about Arun, Desai says:

No he had not escaped. He had travelled and he had stumbled into what was like a plastic representation of what he had known at home; not the real thing - which was plain, unbeautiful, misshapen, fraught and compromised - but the unreal thing - clean, bright, gleaming, without taste, savor or nourishment. (*FF* 189)

Illusion and reality has been differentiated by drawing a contrast in lucid terms. Foregrounded in feminist concerns the novel mirrors the psychological attitudes and experiences of the female self opening up a new site in postmodernistic approach.

Thus, Desai does not deal only with female psyche but as a psychological novelist her interest is in human psychology. The plot is laid bare in her novels in the most simple and lucid manner without any trace of complexity. The plot is inspired not by any sociological or philosophical theories but by an attempt to assimilate the existential postulates. Her novels are modelled on and inspired by the pattern of life. She represents the

psychological pulls and pressures of human life itself in a realistic style. There is a knotting and knitting of narrative threads and her artistic vision, presenting the growth and maturity of individual consciousness from a cynical sense of loss of identity to the mystical realisation of the meaning of existence as well of their destiny.

The delicate vibrations of thoughts of characters are presented by Namita Gokhale in the process of telescoping self and world. The emanations of protagonists' consciousness have been described by the stream of consciousness and montage technique just like Desai. The objects, scenes, characters and symbols all exist in the novel as image figures to objectify and dramatize the protagonists' point of view. Her bold portrayal of the new woman daring to spread her wings and fly bestow excellence on Namita's fiction and leave an undiminished mark on the reader. As G.A. Ghanashyam and Manishrai L. Mukta, critical writers of Indian English authors, write about her style in *Women Relationships and Rebellion: A Study of Namita Gokhale's Fiction*:

The way in which Gokhale uses the words in her novels like a juggler, makes her the writer of the present era. The language in her books is similar to the cadence, style and shadows of everyday speech in the sub-continent. Gokhale like many of her contemporaries seems to be determined to shift the focus onto Indian Literature, specially onto the world and vision of the Indian woman. (Preface vi)

Dilemmas and doubts of women who struggle for what they do not have for example love, affection, acceptance, recognition, acceptance, security, have been portrayed by focus on climate of sensitivity. The interplay of thoughts, feelings and emotions is reflected in apt language, syntax and imagery. Aspects of existentialism are in evidence in the total framework of her novels. Emotions are abstract but she transcribes them in a comprehensive manner with a unique rhetoric skill. In *Paro: Dreams of*

*Passion*, aggressiveness of Paro and the compromises of Priya are central to the theme and structure of the novel. With a first person narration deep understanding and observation of life give authenticity to her work. Her style is the lifeblood of her ideas, well released through language. Gokhale is able to catch the colour of different emotions, as Priya says about her flashes of emotions, "Jealousy and love were darting through the weeds in my mind" (*PDP* 38). By the use of montage technique, the characters of Paro and Priya are contrasted. Paro and Priya in the novel symbolise a paradoxical fusion between eroticism and social conformity. Paro and Priya have an intense competitiveness amongst them and both project sexual transgression though varying in approach and intensity. As Paro says to Priya in anger, "You little bitch. I do have something you can never touch. I have my art" (*PDP* 44). The practicality of the urban people is projected in lucid terms and relations are also imparted a commercial tone "I realised that my only weapon in an indifferent world was Suresh, and I decided to groom him patiently until my ministrations bore dividends" (*PDP* 22). The consciousness of Priya's forlorned state is presented in words as "That left me in the dark as before" (*PDP* 134) when Suresh and Paro both ditched her. Thus her novel becomes a literary construct expressing an aggressive sexual philosophy and psychotic fragmentation as well as assertion of the characters' identity.

Namita's preoccupation is with psychic inwardness which finds multitudinous manifestations in her world of fiction. Myth and mystery surround her characters. Her characters are the very embodiments of the emotions they project. In *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* through stream of consciousness technique, the constant journey of Gudiya away from her overshadowing past towards a real life is visualised. The journey is one's quest within oneself. Deep psychological insight is given into the characters. Namita does not adopt a sentimental approach to unfold the female characters but simply presents the pathetic human situation in most simple words establishing her credibility as a contemporary writer of substance.

Through her interior monologues Gudiya constantly questions her

place in the barbaric world and analyses her situation as:

My life had always possessed a haphazard and unreal quality, and now when I contemplated my grandmother, contorted into an extraordinary death-pose by the indefatigable pandit, my last link with reality snapped. This was not my Ammi; in fact she had not been my Ammi for quite some time now. Yet whatever continuity and cohesion my life had ever contained had been gifted by her. What was to become of me? (*GGG* 76)

Thus depicting the signs of disappointment and sadness as well the spirit of inquiry of Gudiya. She is portrayed as growing insensitive with time and mature in her outlook and reinforcing her 'ingrained feeling of superiority' (*GGG* 123).

The tools of visions and dreams have also been employed to reflect upon her psychological state. As Gudiya approached her final stage of transformation she had a suggestive dream:

I had a vivid dream about my childhood, the first I ever carried into my waking hours. I dreamt I was a baby again in a room with soft light and chandeliers. I was in the arms of a very tall man. . . . The man smiles and I feel reassured by the flash of his teeth above the cream achkan and his dark beard. . . . My baby body is still secure in this man's arms, in this room with soft lights and chandeliers. I am content to simply wiggle my toes or clench and unclench my fingers. And then there is a feeling of damp; my bottom is wet, as are my toes. The man is angry. . . . He is shouting and swearing and he throws me on the floor, or so I think, but I land on a soft pillow. . . . The woman comes towards me . . . as she picks me up and holds to her bosom . . . and I know this is Roxanne. The man has lapsed from anger into indifference, but he is still sulking. I

can see his face now, and I can recognize it. It is Kalki. (*GGG* 225-226)

For weeks this dream persisted with her. The dream very clearly voices the victimized and helpless condition of Gudiya at the hands of Kalki, the symbolic bearer of patriarchal honour and monopoly. She feels herself as an innocent child who is ill-treated and is left uncared. But the coming of Roxanne indicates the community feeling of women with each other which comes to the rescue of the identical sex. Thus Gudiya finds a way to deal with her psycho-emotional problems with the help of her women associates.

*In A Himalayan Love Story* Gokhale strikingly gives the characters' nomenclature as 'Mohan Mischief, Sohan Selfish and Jeewan Jaundice' (*AHLS* 123) indicating an internal perspective by referring to their internal traits. Here also she uses the stream of consciousness technique to unfold the ensuing struggle of the characters in the midst of crisis. Every individual Parvati, Lalit and Mukul are prisoners of an inner conflict that renders them wounded, lost and hurt. Mukul who is the narrator, through the description of a number of incidents and by means of introspection and interior monologues reveals his own character and of all others in the novel. Lending a philosophical note to the novel Namita admits in the voice of Mukul, "It is not easy to tell the truth. Every life has its reluctant secrets" (*AHLS* 155). Making it clear that her aim is not to retell any truth but just to tell a story as it comes to her instinctually. The contradiction in Mukul's heart have been skillfully presented as, "I tried not to think of Parvati, for her remembrance was now verging on obsessive" (*AHLS* 151). He attempted to forget Parvati but the more did he try the more her thoughts gripped him tightly. He became feverish and restless when the time to meet her finally came and decided that "This unpleasant and unnecessary complication would have to be dealt with firmly, and I saw a tiresome time ahead." (*AHLS* 177), thus hinting at his inner consciousness of the approaching inner discomfort.

Parvati's interior monologues and nature associations also contribute

fairly towards the understanding of her insanity as well as self-consciousness. Parvati describing her own state of resignation to her fate of being married to a homosexual says:

Sometimes the gajra of fresh chameli flowers in my hair, the warm summer smells of earth and water and night, aroused me to a fever of expectations and desire, but I did not give in, I cooked and smiled and wore my new frozen face to such perfection that I understood resignedly that it had been made to measure and that I was condemned to wear it for a very long time, perhaps forever. (*AHLS* 38)

Thus Parvati realized that she was doomed and the above lines also suggestively hint at the patriarchal role of a woman to cook and maintain the outer semblance of happiness even if she is unhappy inside. However, in a strange progress, by getting associated herself to Raju she is shown slowly learning to dissemble and to love Lalit.

Even the gothic atmosphere in *The Book of Shadows* is drawn to register the sentimentality of Rachita and her emotional reverberations. It echoes her despair and dislocation. The world haunted by ghosts presents dissociation as well as association. As Rachita retreats into her house at Ranikhet she is claimed by a different dimension and through the ghosts of Dona Rosa, Wolcott, Marcus, Munro, Father Benedictus and others the signs of collapse of her sanity are given on one hand while on the other she is presented as keeping a watch over her sanity all the time and self-scrutinizing herself. Amidst the spirits she realizes that, ". . . - most of what is real within us is not conscious, and most of what is conscious is not real" (*BOS* 63). The presence of gothic and of self-consciousness at the same time lend a unique mystery to the novel. As Rachita says:

The nights are unbearable. This house is crowded. The procession of horror that invades my consciousness with

monotonous regularity is wearing me down. . . . I am turned into something I don't understand. I keep trying to trip myself up, to break into the rationale of these hallucinations, but I swear I do actually see them, they materialize and 'derealize' like something out of a science fiction film. (*BOS* 67)

Thus, through the visions of ghosts, Namita delieneates Rachita's consciousness that nothing in this world is as it seems to be. We all remain suspended in a world pendulating between unreal and real. Everything goes, only pain remains unvanquished. Reality to Rachita has been described as an alien paradox. There is a picturisation of gothic scenes which have the quality of a horror film - like a chair flying in the air and hanging in the middle of the room or:

A glass of milk, which Lohaniju's daughter had left on the wooden mantelpiece above the fireplace, suddenly levitated a few inches from the surface of the wood, as though lifted by an invisible hand. It hovered uncertainly for a moment, and then, overcome by the forces of gravity, came crashing down to the floor. The glass lay shattered as a river of milk flowed like an oblation into the disused fireplace. (*BOS* 222)

Thus, the novel is partly a ghost story and partly a tragic romance. Spirits are also symbolic of the world which is never ending and which we 'possess and repossess', 'cast and recast our lot' (*BOS* 229).

The sure metrical flow of novels in *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory*, *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* and *Priya: In Incredible Indyya* are interwoven with the characters' inner state. They are vigorously in agreement with the author's vision of life. Abounding in interior monologues all the novels draw the reader to the consciousness of the protagonists torn by internal conflict and yearning for peace and solace.

In *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* also both montage and stream of



consciousness technique have been employed to give expression to the different dimensions of the inner growth of Shakuntala by her soliloques, use of imagery and symbols and psycho-analysis of her thought process. She uses interior monologues, dreams and visions to present the inner conflict of Shakuntala and imparts her an inexplicability and mystery, rather than giving a fixed profile. There is a simultaneous connection between the inner and the outer world in the novel. Thus when Srijan brought Kamalini home, in an interior monologue Shakuntala's feelings are expressed:

But the hurt and betrayal, the prickling of thorns under the sheath of my skin – I had never known or anticipated these feelings, . . . I had known rage before, and anger . . . But this was worse, . . . I screamed and sobbed aloud, beating my head against the stone walls of the temple like the kind of woman I had not imagined I would ever become. (*SPOM* 58)

Her inner and outer reactions clearly find expression here. The symbol of thorn prickling her has been used to express her pain and hurt deep inside her heart. Even later in a series of interior monologues Shakuntala's dilemma and conflicting consciousness is voiced. She says to herself in one such moment of inner conflict unable to decide, whether she is wife of Nearchus or Srijan, "I cannot be his wife; I am the wife of another. But what can I say? (*SPOM* 163). And later says, "I feel I cannot go back to where I have come from" (*SPOM* 166).

The philosophical tone of the early novels continues in this novel too as Shakuntala says, ". . . we would all one day leave this world and move on to the ones beyond" (*SPOM* 83-84), or she asks Kundan, "What is death?" (*SPOM* 84). She talks of the laws of karma and of the certainty of death.

Both Desai and Gokhale use stream of consciousness and montage techniques with a remarkable freshness and skill intertwined with the thematic nexus. They enable the readers to comprehend the perplexities and

unsettlement of the characters and their journey towards self-realization. The difference is that the use of imagery and symbols to unfold the psychic state of the characters is more vivid and abundant in Desai as compared to Gokhale. The element of Gothic is similarly missing in Desai's novels.

Through their novels both Anita and Namita try to catch the vital experience of living itself or rather the sense of the experience of living. They deal more with emotional than intellectual communication. Both of them use diary technique in certain novels which lends a note of anguish and immediacy to the account of the barren and suffocated life of the protagonists. The diary serves as a means of recording the ruminations of the characters and lays bare the unknown territory of an individual's psyche and his/ her perception of the happenings around. It is a tool to reduce one's sense of strangeness to one's own feelings and yearnings.

Anita Desai uses the diary technique to signify the tragedy of Monisha in the second section of the *Voices In The City*. The diary serves as Monisha's only means of personal communication in an atmosphere devoid of true concern or any sort of privacy. It records her loveless and unproductive conjugal life with Jiban, her self-alienation, loneliness, fragmentation, her crumbling insensitive immediate environment and helps us to understand why she commits suicide.

Namita also uses the diary technique in her novels *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and *Priya: In Incredible Indyya* where Priya is the diarist and is adamant about writing it inspite of the opposition and anger vented by her husband, Suresh and her motivational figure Paro. Through the diary she is able to realize and accept her true self and it is her way to take a sort of revenge against the people who have been unsympathetic towards her. The clatter of the typewriter while she puts her experiences on paper helps her to be inattentive towards her husband and his indifference. She says, "But I started a sort of confessional, a diary, which eventually became this thing, this novel" (*PII* 10). The diary becomes an apt vehicle of graphing her

untold expressions.

The memories of the past are used by Desai and Gokhale as a method of evaluating the individual's relationships in the present. The journey backwards is both a medium of self-knowledge and a mechanism to confront harsh reality. The past and present worlds are constantly juxtaposed in their novels. The past is brought to the forefront and it gives a peep into the present discomfiture of the characters. Human beings are presented as being caught in the terrors of facing existence with all its sickening reality, with past always hovering around. Through the flashback technique progressive stages of psychic disintegration of characters are traced.

In *Cry, The Peacock*, Maya's entire life is disrupted by reminiscences. Memories of the albino astrologer make her emotionally vulnerable and inconsolable. She is still her daddy's darling in her subconscious state. Her frequent broodings about her past gives a glimpse of her obsessive compulsive disorder. Maya's constant wish to remain ensconced in the past makes her feel disappointed with her present and gives her a sense of insecurity. Her sulking for the past happiness and over-protection which her father gave alienates her from her present relations. It does not allow her to gain maturity in her thought process resultingly destroying her present. She always keeps comparing Gautama with her father thus widening the abyss between them that was already present due to their temperamental difference. Lost in nostalgia Maya says, "No one, no one else, loves me as my father does" (CTP 43). This remembrance of her 'princess-like' (CTP 41) life at her father's home, summer vacations spent in hill stations like Darjeeling compared with Gautama unable to take her for vacations, of getting all her wishes fulfilled at one call, being her 'father's daughter' (CTP 41), lead Maya to be lost in dreams and hallucinations. All this and the memory of Toto and of the death prophecy make her lose her sanity and she begins day-dreaming and hallucinating. Being conscious of her pitiful state she confesses:

Wherever I laid myself, I could think only of the albino, the magician, his dull, opaque eyes, the hand twitching the hold of the cloth between the swallowing thighs. It seemed real, I could recall each detail, and yet-God, Gautama, father, surely it is nothing but an hallucination. Surely not, I sobbed. And once the night of oneirodynia was over, I should be sane again, and in the daylight I should know all this to be nothing but a fulgrant nightmare. Should I not? (*CTP* 57).

The past keeps levitating about her and makes her life full of misery and depression. She is unable to come out of this tunnel of memory and her consciousness fluctuates between past and present. Caught in the chasm of nostalgia Desai describes Maya's condition perfectly in the following words, "The years had caught up, and now the final, the decisive one held me in its perspiring clasp from which release seemed impossible" (*CTP* 82). Thus, by using the flashback technique Desai explains the fall of Maya's sensitive mind into insanity. The peep into the past gives relevance to the present actions of the characters.

In *Voices In The City* too the images of the past haunt Nirode, Amla and Monisha which lay bare their morbid fear and tormented psyche. The memories explain the eccentricity and agony of the characters. The use of flashback is different from *Cry, The Peacock* as neither Nirode nor Amla or Monisha wish to return back to their childhood days unlike Maya which were devoid of any true attachment or love like a 'dark pandemonium' (*VIC* 9). They ardently wished to cross that time and fly into openness. The writer by digging into their past portrays the cause of the insecurities and feelings of alienation of the characters.

Nirode had erected 'a barbed wire fence' (*VIC* 28) between him and his past finding it vicious. He had visions of the apparition of his dead father and shrank away from it. Nirode had a feeling of disgust for his mother and for all relations. He felt the past to be a 'haunting ghost' (*VIC* 43) as he did

not wish to be involved with any of the past associations. Through the use of memories Desai also lays bare another perspective of Nirode's character, that was, envy for his more successful and efficient brother, Arun. Nirode thus very strongly rebukes his friend Sonny and says, "Look do me a favour. Don't keep bringing my family in, Sonny boy . . . I neither inherited nor do I do I borrow a single damn thing from *my* family. May they rot, may they flourish - as long as they leave me alone . . ." (VIC 56) which clearly shows that he wished to snap all the ties with his past.

Similarly Monisha and Amla are presented as feeling uneasy with the reference of the past. What Monisha could think of good childhood memories is only a remembrance of her mother playing Chinese Checkers (VIC 127) with them or telling the bed time story of *Mahabharata* (VIC 127). Her suicide in the end can also be traced back to her meaningless existence of her early days. As a daughter and sister she is so disregarded by everyone that she lost confidence that anyone would support her in her distress. She voices her feelings in her diary as, "Sometimes I wonder, would mother take back this shrunken, violated, wasted thing into her house if I begged her to?" (VIC 138). Due to the lack of any anchor her ship of life sinks tragically. Even Amla refers to the 'inner coldness' and 'outward impulsiveness' (VIC 206) of her mother. Thus, the reference to the past intermittently bereft of any true understanding between mother and children and between the siblings helps us to understand the interior volcano and panicked search of feelings of the characters.

*Where Shall We Go This Summer* is also structurally akin to these novels. It traces the flux of the protagonist's consciousness through stages of perception, memory and illusion. Sita is heartbroken and jolted on the ground of loss of true companionship in her wedlock. She feels her past as filled with all-pervasive violence and meaninglessness and wishes to escape it like Nirode and Monisha. In the second half of the novel the readers are given a flashback of Sita's life twenty years back, ". . . she had lived a strange life, an unusual life, that had the effect of making her withdraw into

the protective chrysalis of childhood for longer than is usual for the most" (WSWGTS 58-59). With her father working magic of certain kinds and he being worshipped by the dwellers of Manori island, she is led to the belief in false hopes of finding some miracle happen in the island, where the legend of his father still lived. Against the towering personality of her father she finds it difficult to accept her husband, Raman's vegetable existence. Her past intruded strangely on her consciousness and is self explanatory of her way of responding to her present dilemmas and problems.

*Fire On The Mountain* has the mosaic of the past and the present, the personal and the social portrayed with great power and poignancy. It presents the contrasted condition of human consciousness either in authorial voice or in the musings of the characters themselves. The masterful use of memory and flashback makes it possible. The retrospective narration unfolds the entire panorama of the life of Nanda Kaul and depicts the change in her attitude to Raka from sheer hostility to indifference to acceptance to admiration. The novel begins with Nanda at Carignano, her place of refuge, and the reason of her being there is pictured in a flashback. She remembers her past family and social life as:

Looking down, over all these years she had survived and borne, she saw them, not bare and shining as the plains below, but like the gorge, cluttered, choked and blackened with the heads of children and grandchildren, servants and guests, all restlessly surging, clamouring about her. (FOM 19)

Through the technique of reminiscence and memory Nanda's psychological distress and agitation is explored and her contradictory inclination towards as well as away from involvement is delineated.

The movement of a family moving backwards and forwards is dealt with in *Clear Light of Day*. The masterful use of the technique of retrospective narration is praiseworthy in this novel. The past illumines the

present consciousness of the characters and the present in turn leads to the recreation of the past incidents characters and explains the subconscious construction of the characters. The past and present are seamlessly woven into a complete web of emotions. Dullness and boredom of childhood enable the reader to understand the psychic development of the characters. The past is unmistakably linked to the present consciousness of the character. Shifts from present to the past and back help to create an appropriate mood of nostalgia necessary for illuminating the subconscious drives of the characters. Repetition, memory, retrospection have been used in the novel with an amazing ease.

The novel begins with Tara returning to her childhood home and with this the two sisters Bim and Tara are drawn once again into the 'dullness, boredom and waiting' (*CLD* 6) of their childhood days, never wanting to return to that time again. The 'love starved spinsters' (*CLD* 10) remember their childhood experiences, narrating them vividly. There is a frequent shift of the narration back and forth which is essential to the stream of consciousness technique used by Desai so deftly as it unfolds every thread of the spider-web of consciousness of the characters. It links the present reactions with the past happenings and feelings. The past, present and future thus become inseparable in the novel. Time in this sense is an important narrative device in this novel as it is polytemporal and cyclical. Time does not move in a chronological order but to and fro. Bim and Tara are constantly tortured by the past recollections of betrayal, sibling rivalry and inconveniences. Their memories move from their childhood and take us further to their youth bringing us to their present middle age. About Bim remembering Raja, Anita Desai says, "Her eyes gleamed as much with malice as with remembrance" (*CLD* 38). It was painful for Bim to realize how everyone except herself in her family had run away from their responsibilities. The marriage of Tara and Bakul, running away of Raja, the school days of the siblings are all presented in a flashback. There are flashbacks within flashbacks. However, with time the perspective of the

characters changes and gives way to a new dimension in their life. Bim, who blamed others for her loneliness in the house ultimately decides that she must stick to her willing decisions. As she rustled the leaves of her mind she realized that all of them were her family and she loved them unconditionally. Similarly Tara also could purge herself of her guilt only by her reflections about her past decisions and their discussion with her sister Bim. Thus the present and future are radically related to the past.

The recreation of past incidents and scenes is as effortless in *Fasting, Feasting* as in her earlier novels. They pave the way for re-examining the present conduct in the light of the past episodes. The loss of enchantment of the present can be traced back to the framework of the past. The past occurrences reveal the submerged self of the characters. In this novel also Uma's mind revolves around the bitter memories of childhood and youth and brings a sense of nullity in her life. For instance, Uma was awe-struck when she saw her father's reaction when a son was born to him, he jumped and leapt like a 'boy playing leap-frog' (*FF* 17) as Desai says, "Uma never overcame her awe of that extraordinary event, really far more memorable than birth itself. As for Aruna, it could be said to have started a lifetime of bridling of determined self-assertion" (*FF* 17). This clearly states how childhood is not only a background setting in the novel but forms a permanent part of consciousness of Aruna and Uma who feel trivialized by the conventional thought pattern of their parents, since an early age. Uma remembers her school days - its joys and her failures in her flashback and connects them to her present incarcerated existence. Uma also misses the evening visits with Mira aunty to the temple for prayer as they gave her a chance to escape temporarily the boredom of her life at home. The impact of coexistence of mamapapa has also been created by partially narrating the past submission of mother to her father's whims and partially by depiction of the present incidences, thus giving an idea of their life as a whole. The ripples created in the life span of Uma and Arun are thus masterfully presented by the alternation of the past and the present.



The mosaic of memories, to reveal the psyche of the characters, has been skillfully used by Namita Gokhale too in her novels. She, like Desai, is not interested in mere chronology of the events. She moves her stories back and forth to recapture the feelings of the characters. Memories of the past impinge on the characters' consciousness and the reader is made to grasp the missing links about the characters. The dark recesses of the mind are laid bare by the use of flashback technique as Desai does in her novels. The complexities of the past are unknotted to give an impression of a complete whole to the readers, so that the present does not crash upon their understanding all of a sudden unexplainably. Both the novelists portray present as an offspring of the past. Recollection and repetition are employed by Namita as powerful narrative devices.

Priya in *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, the first novel by Gokhale, begins with a flashback as, "I am writing about them because I saw myself in her" (*PDP* 1). The use of the past tense in the very first sentence indicates that the novel is going to be a journey down the memory lane - a flashback within a flashback just like Desai's *Clear Light of Day* or *Voices In the City*. It is through overlapping of the past with the present that Priya relates her obstinacy and insecurities with her childhood experiences. Priya narrates how she, being fatherless, was disliked by her mother. She was full of 'venom' (*PDP* 7) for her daughter and mocked at her with a 'gloomy relish' (*PDP* 7). There is a grudge and dissatisfaction in Priya's mind as she is overloaded with responsibilities at a very early age. This made her envy Paro for her easily acquired luxury and position of importance. She wishes for a heaven of fulfillment and aggrandization like Paro. Later when she broke up with B.R. she is lost in reveries of the moments spent with him which affect her present life with Suresh. She wishes to return to those celestial past moments and could never forget the 'momentous night that B.R. took me home" (*PDP* 9). Thus Priya partly lived in her present and partly in her past. Towards the end of the novel too when Paro commits suicide Priya is shown remembering Paro's earlier attempts at committing suicide and surviving

them and the massive accident that she had made:

I remembered her, propped up in the hospital bed. She was having quite a grand time, really. Death seemed to have grazed her. It was nowhere lurking in that festive hospital room, overflowing as it was with cards and flowers and celebrity visitors. (*PDP* 147)

Through the flashback Paro's nature is echoed again and again till the end even after her death. The tensions and jealousies of Priya as well as Paro in the present are coloured by their past.

Even Paro's past is presented by her recollections. She describes in detail her first sexual scandal as a student, with a school teacher - the art master - and its aftermath. Paro says:

All hell broke loose. I was expelled. The shit really hit the ceiling. It was in the papers and all. Head girl raped. Public school morality. Letters to the editor and all that. My parents went out of their minds. My father retired early because he said he couldn't bear the scandal. We shifted to Delhi. (*PDP* 28-29)

Paro narrated all this to Priya with a shamelessness in a mocking tone, thus a glimpse of her past helps the reader to assess her present reckless and transgressing nature. Such encounters in her childhood may be said to have scarred her sensitivity subconsciously and lead to her future sexual violation voluntarily or involuntarily. Flashback technique thus acts complementarily to the stream of consciousness technique in Namita's novels as that of Desai.

In *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, Gudiya throughout her novel remembers her mother and there is a frequent shift in perspective from the past to the present and vice versa. The horror of her mother eloping leaves a

permanent tinge on the psychology of innocent Gudiya. She also misses her grandmother after her death. It is a novel read in an existential framework where past is a force both life-giving and life-destroying. On one hand Gudiya gets inspired by her grandmother's knack of struggling and surviving every phase of life, on the other she feels disheartened at the thought of being forlorned at a tender age by everyone so close to her. There is a fine blending of past and present in the novel with a spontaneous flow of words. Chapter two of the novel describes Gudiya's earlier days spent in luxury with her parents and then the turn of events which led her and grandmother to leave the city and move to Delhi. Thus, it links her past life with her present and also arouses the curiosity of the readers as to what would happen in future in Gudiya's constantly changing circumstances. Throughout the novel the past keeps creeping into the present or we may say that the present events keep revealing the incidents which preceded them. In Gudiya's mind the memory of her grandmother after her death occupies a dominant place and that keeps effecting her actions and decisions. Contemplating her grandmother Gudiya says, ". . . whatever continuity and cohesion my life had ever contained had been gifted by her" (*GGG* 76). Lost in nostalgia she says, "It was strange to sleep without grandmother, to be without sounds and smells of the temple, away from the presence of the peepul tree. I tossed and turned all night, missing its comforting whisper as I knew my familiars missed me" (*GGG* 80). Thus, Gudiya's life revolved around her Ammi's absence.

Memory plays a significant role in the novel as the past is intermingled with the tensions and anxieties and even with the final self-assertion of the protagonist. Towards the end also Gudiya gets her inner strength by repeatedly remembering the turmoil of the time spent with Kalki. The memory is a mixture of nostalgia for physical fulfillment overpowered by a wish for liberation from the torture she had to undergo:

I was already beginning to forget how exactly he had looked.  
Sometimes I could remember the cut of his face but not the

exact colour of his eyes. Then, in memory again, his smile would appear before me, his mocking victorious smile, and I would tremble with remembered love, my insides leaping with the memory of sexual desire, my lips aching for the touch of his. The tricks of memory mingled with that of desire, and perhaps these longings were sweet precisely because Kalki was not there to harass me in person.

I missed him but I sensed in his absence an opportunity for growth, for escape, which I was determined not to miss. (*GGG* 224)

By the technique of flashback and repetition the conflict and the final decisiveness of the protagonist's mind have been portrayed with a rare skill.

In *A Himalayan Love Story* Parvati's past becomes a threat to her and to Mukul in the present. She, due to her passionate past relationship with Salman, visualizes the same association with her husband but fails to achieve it. This leads to her frustration. Even Mukul due to her past infatuation with Parvati is unable to purge himself out of the rejection he had to face on her account and nurtures a negative bent of mind throughout his life. The novel begins with a narration by Parvati in flashback. Just as *Clear Light of Day* and *Voices In the City* by Desai present the childhood of the protagonists by a technique of memory and reminiscences similarly Parvati's childhood is picturised by a flow of memories. The agony as well as the episodic happiness of the past days of Parvati find outlet in her recalling of the days gone far back. It is these impressions of fear, horror, and of isolation which Parvati instigates in her early days which are expanded in the later part of her life in the novel. They assist in the sequential development of the plot. The shadows of the past keep lurking throughout the novel and entangle the protagonists with no hope of release.

The mist of the past covers the life of Mukul all the more and deters

him from coming out of the maze of memories of Parvati. The hovering past keeps him away from enjoying a conjugal bliss with Adeleine and he mysteriously falls in the whirlpool of taking care of Parvati and her daughter who were dejected by the society. He is portrayed as remembering clearly every moment of 'the indescribable ecstasies of first love' (AHLS 130). Although he returns to his hometown after decades of years he becomes nostalgic while expressing, "The first time I met Parvati was when she had opened the door for me at Wee Nooke" (AHLS 129). Obsessed with Parvati he still found her to be one of the five most beautiful women in the world and felt this to be one the 'reluctant secrets' (AHLS 155) of his life. It is interesting to note how past assumes a formal, discernable shape in Namita's novels.

Flashback plays an important role in *The Book Of Shadows* where Rachita's peace of mind is completely destroyed by the suicide of Anand and the acid attack. Rachita feels futile and helpless and says, "Unreality gets compounded by confusion" (BOS). The death leaves behind memories of unbearable pain. The incidence shatters her completely and scars her emotionally and psychologically. In this novel the flashback becomes a mechanism to face the past agonies and the present feeling of guilt. Rachita makes a conscious effort to forget her painful past and even succeeds to a certain extent. As she says, "I had been happy as a child, and I am determined to be that again; to forget Anand's indulgent and wanton act of self-destruction, ignore his stupidity, and restore my life to its own course once again" (BOS 7). She decides not to regret her past actions rather enjoy the moments which she spent with her friend's husband and feel elated. So much so that even her own face gets banished from her memory and she accepts her presently distorted looks. Time has been used an important narrative device in this novel. This time is not linear, clock time but psychological time which continuously moves back and forth and then finally carries Rachita's consciousness to a new level of transgression. The suggestion of exhaustion with past time and the contrasted reflection of the

continuation of life with the ongoing time is as strong in this novel as in Desai's *Clear Light of Day* as in both the novels the characters strongly feel the hold of the past memories as well as try to flip those past years and proceed with the temporal time.

In *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory*, Namita's expressions about the importance of past happenings and memory enter an altogether new stage of maturity and philosophy. She accepts the value of past karmas in formulating our present and determining our future when Shakuntala perturbed by the memories of the past asks a priest in the beginning of the novel:

Shakuntala: . . . why these memories persist? (*SPOM* 3)

Priest: Our past lives on. Each one of us carries a residue of unresolved karmas, the burden of debts we have to repay. Sister you cannot run away. Confront this life. Only in acceptance will you find release. (*SPOM* 4)

The memories of the past keep echoing like the resounding of bells in Shakuntala's heart and she feels 'feasted' (*SPOM* 4) by them. However, Namita conveys the lurking of the past as inevitable and the only way of survival being their acceptance.

Just as Desai's *Fire On The Mountain* presents the married life of Nanda Kaul, before her present escape, by the technique of retrospective narration similarly the whole picture of Shakuntala's neglected childhood is given in a flashback. Since her childhood she experiences a clash of tradition and modernity. The gender biased attitude of her mother make her feel hapless and she finds the world disingenuous. The initial chapters of the novel describe how Shakuntala vividly remembers her father's death and how "his absence remained a stark presence in our unsheltered life" (*SPOM* 7), her mother collecting herbs and having a bad odour, her mother taking her to a fair and buying her a doll, the oppression by the snake charmer, the

'uneasy truce' (*SPOM* 27) with her mother, the going of Guresvara - her brother - for further studies and other such exquisite details. The more she tries to recoil from the memories, the more they entangle her. These memories beleaguer her consciousness and keep manifesting in the form of aggressiveness against everyone and her decisions in future are highly effected by them. Namita portrays Shakuntala's obsession with the past and her restlessness to escape it by the technique of repetition. Shakuntala in the first as well as third chapter is shown repeating the words of a Buddhist monk, "Arise, Commence a new life" (*SPOM* 15). By the technique of flashback within flashback and repetition she again and again says, "I had been abandoned" (*SPOM* 31). This feeling of alienation since her tender age colours her whole life with defensiveness.

The primal habit of sticking to the past does not leave Shakuntala even after marriage. When dissatisfied with her conjugal relationship she leaves Srijan and gets gluttonously involved with Nearchus, she is not able to ignore the dross of her past and present. Shakuntala expresses her sorrow as, "I wondered if Srijan had forgotten me. My past came back to me in an unrelenting stream" (*SPOM* 150). She could not forget Kamalini and was troubled by her thoughts. Feeling nostalgic for her home she says, "One might travel for many nights and days, but the place where one began was perhaps the only place where one belonged" (*SPOM* 172). Burning in the flames of the past, Shakuntala relects, "I did not seek release; it was just that I could not forget" (*SPOM* 197). Her past is inseparable from her personality and she keeps venturing up and down the memory lane on a path beset with thorns.

Memory occupies a central position in the narrative design of the novel, *Priya: In Incredible Indyya*. The historical past is linked with the personal past since the beginning of novel when Priya, now a mother of two young sons, remembers, "That India. Those days" (*PII* 5). She says, "I had a flashback moment. I was twelve years old, in that older India of the late sixties, of social austerity and a ration economy" (*PII* 5). Thus a picture of

India of sixteenth century is drawn. Namita presents her characters memorising their past with vivid details as Priya remembers, "My mother was cooking dinner. The pressure cooker was hissing on the kerosene stove. (We had applied for a gas connection, but it took the intervention of a well-connected uncle and two years of waiting to finally get it.) One of our neighbours, whose balcony adjoined ours, had bought a new transistor radio. Mukesh drowned out the hiss of the cooker. 'Mera joota hai Japaani, yeh patloon Inglistani. . . . We have brought for you imported cheese, my aunt announced. One each for me, my mother, my aunt. Two for my brother, when he returned; he was a boy, the man of the house" (*PII* 5). Namita traces the consciousness of Priya about being neglected as she was a girl child and given a secondary treatment as compared to her brother. Partiality was shown by her parents and relatives even regarding the items of food which made a long lasting impression on her psychology, which is clear from the details embedded in her memory, fresh after so many years. The memory of Paro and of her own affair with B.R. too is felt as a permanent feature of Priya's life. Many a times Priya confronts life's challenges imagining how Paro would handle the same situation. When Suresh enters into a relationship with Poonam Chand, Priya feels guilty by remembering her extra-marital association with B.R. and feels that she has been payed back for her betrayal. Priya says, "I remembered the dreary journey to B.R.'s office in South Bombay. I could recall every stop and station along the way (*PII* 65), thus Namita effectively portrays the growth of Priya's consciousness and her move towards adjustment and maturity by her close scrutiny of the past and the present. Priya herself says, " I contemplate the past and the present" (*PII* 9).

The hold of the past on the psyche of the characters is strongly visible in the novels of both Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale. The retreat into the past either by way of nostalgia or due to an attempt to escape it, sometimes has a degenerative or declining effect on the consciousness of the characters while at other times helps them to preserve and protect their present and



future. We may say that time sometimes acts as a consoling agent providing solace to the characters and sometimes makes them all the more conscious of the grim existentialist realities. In the novels time as a narrative device suggests a continuous flux in the vision of life and depicts a change in the outlook of the characters towards the same happenings. There is a continuous interaction between the past and present of the protagonists thus lending a continuity and unique intensity to the whole life time experiences of the characters. Both the novelists have used past memories as effective narrative device for character delineation too. Because they not only present what the characters think about their past but also what others think about them and the incidents happened to them. The felicitous use of memory has helped to evoke multiple points of view regarding the same event or emotion. The reference to the past has suggested the totality of the experiences of the protagonists and has strengthened the existentialist tone of the novels of Desai and Gokhale.

Image may be an epithet, a metaphor, a symbol or a simile in the form of a mental picture. It derives its origin from the word 'imago' which means an artificial imitation of the external form of any object, while symbol means something which represents or denotes something else by some conventional or accidental relation.

Anita Desai is remarkable for her use of images and symbols in congruence with her themes. Namita Gokhale also aptly uses images and symbols to project the vision of the life presented in the novels but their use is much lesser as compared to the former writer and thus does not form the major part of the narrative as in the case of Desai. However wherever she uses them they, like Desai, establish the premises of understanding the characters and their situations psychologically as they appropriately externalise the inner workings of the mind of the characters.

Imagery in Desai can be considered to constitute the pole or an axis on which her fictional world revolves. Certain images are recurrent like the

predator and prey imagery, garden imagery, storm imagery etc. to emphasize the disintegration of human identity. The physical and psychic states of her characters are delineated through objective correlatives.

The various psychic states of Maya, chaotic and disordered as they are, have been unified into a pattern through a series of repetitive motifs and symbols in *Cry, The Peacock*. Animal world is juxtaposed with the human world by the use of zoological images. Tormented by the fear of death, Maya finds violence in every aspect of nature and feels nature mocking at her asking her to emerge victorious in the battle of life and death. Anita portrays how Maya finds everything - the horses, the hills, the rivers - wild and uncivilized as she herself was filled with rage and conflict.

The image of the peacock and its anguished shriek has been well appreciated by critics as it projects Maya's longings and Gautama's listlessness. The peacock's cry indicates her submerged instinctive drives. The peacocks cry for mating, "Pia, Pia" (*CTP* 83). Maya responds woefully:

Do you hear the peacocks call in the wilds? . . . they dance, knowing that they and their lovers are all to die, . . . Is it not agony for them? How they stamp their feet, and bet their beaks against the rocks! Dying they are in love with life. 'Lover, lover,' you will hear them cry in the forests, when the rain-clouds come, 'Lover, I die' . . . (*CTP* 83-84)

Hear what? says Gautama (*CTP* 84), who is isolated from her emotions and needs.

The novel is densely packed with nature images which represent the mounting tensions of Maya. Maya felt :

The atmosphere was charged with restlessness, . . . The rolling cotton balls, the flying yellow leaves, the surging clouds of dust, all seemed to flee, flee, flee, and yet could not, for they

were bound to the season, and returned to continue their struggle for escape. Something similar heaved inside me - a longing, a dread, a search for solution, a despair, . . . (*CTP 34*)

Here it is really remarkable how Desai makes the images and their association with the psyche of the protagonist self-explanatory, in the sense that Maya herself details the readers how she finds the various aspects of nature in harmony with her strife and will to escape.

Rats and lizards are projected as images of Maya's alienated self in the novel. There is the image of a monkey boisterously struggling inside the cage for liberation and release which reminds Maya of her own alienation and estrangement.

There has been profuse use of botanical images like that of the petunias and lemon blossoms which express the temperamental difference between Maya and Gautama as Maya is able to differentiate between the smell of the two, while Gautama is quite indifferent to their beauty and smell, suggesting his insensitivity. There is also the imagery of 'the female papaya tree' (*CTP 80*) supporting the streamers of bridal flowers as against the 'solid trunk of the male' (*CTP 80*) on which leap the firm, wax-petalled blossoms. This indicates that a male counterpart is always considered by the society as stronger than the female and this view point is strongly ingrained in the psyche of the masses, even in the vegetable world.

The image of a 'demon in a Kathakali dance drama' (*CTP 29*) which Maya considers to be the shadow of Fate also helps Desai to paint the complete picture of morbidity and terror central to Maya's heart. Lunar and stellar images are also interspersed in the novel till the climax, where Maya hates any source of light and loves to be immersed in her darkened consciousness. As she says, "Where is the moon? Is it to be dark tonight? Then tonight I might sleep, untormented by that vast luminosity, so revealing" (*CTP 150*). The waiting silence of night conveys her hopeless

predicament.

Maya's thought-current transforms itself into a swift flux of images frothing to the surface thus adding to the intensity of the novel and enlarging the exegetical horizon of her art.

In *Voices In The City*, the prey-and-predator image is dominant, presented through the race-course scene in which a horse while running fast, falls on the ground, hurts himself and then a flock of hungry birds swoops down. It is similar to the abandoned corpse of Toto, encircled by crows and rotting in the sun. They present Anita's preoccupation with death. The characters live a corpse-like life isolated from the general current, be it Nirode, Amla or Monisha. Amla's longing to run is also projected through a horse waiting to be released, feeling tormented and cloistered by the callousness surrounding her.

Nirode's confined existence is symbolised by a room without windows, 'But the storm heaved and blew and howled and the little room cowered beneath it, groveled and complained. It had no window . . .'" (*VIC* 54). Nirode's inner tumult is represented by the storm as Maya's conflict in *Cry, The Peacock* has also been manifested in the form of an approaching storm and the scope of Nirode's escape has been constricted by the absence of any outlet in the form of windows.

Lunar and stellar images intermingled with colour imagery have been used by Desai in this novel too to import the universal frame of darkness. Nirode feels that there is unending vacuum between him and his mother and says, "I do not touch her nor does she touch me - there is this darkness in between. They will never reach through it to me" (*VIC* 138). The darkness outside communicates the inner darkness of the characters as Amla too says darkness is "turning my blood black" (*VIC* 253).

Zoological images of insects, birds, butterflies have been used to convey the similarity in their mannerism and that of the characters. Dharma

likened Amla with a butterfly:

How does a butterfly, sitting on a leaf, know when a nasty boy creeps up with his fingers flexed to grasp his wings? Somehow it knows and flies laughingly away the split second before the fingers close cross over it. You have the insect's instincts yourself, you know when you must fly, when you can rest, where you are going and how to return. (VIC 222)

Amla had the skill of survival and of saving herself at the right time just like a butterfly which is able to save itself at the last hour.

The amalgamation of life and death is symbolised by the image of 'Kali', who is 'good and evil' (VIC 253), reality and illusion, knowledge and ignorance, attachment and detachment, thus encompassing the contradictory nature of human existence and emphasizing the inevitability of the final truth, that is, death.

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer* the striking image of Jelly fish highlights Sita's entanglement and consequent alienation. "Perhaps I am only like a Jelly fish washed up by the waves, stranded there on the sand bar" (WSWGTS 135). The image continues for many pages which conveys Sita's sense of being isolated and deserted by the other members of the family. She feels that her escape to the island was perhaps not voluntary as it bore no success. Perhaps like some jelly fish which is brought to the shore by the waves of the sea unwillingly, she had been brought to Manori by some unknown forces. As she reflects about the jelly fish:

Tossed up and thrown onto the sand bar by the discarding waves, it now lay quite still again as it had inside the skull of that mostly passive and unadventurous sea creature . . . she was startled by the similarity of what floated inside her, mindless and helpless, to this poor washed thing onto the beach, opaque and wet and sad. (WSWGTS 115)

The image reflects her helplessness, her submission to the external agents at work and readiness to make compromise.

The imagery of the external storm symbolising the internal dilemma and anguish is there in this novel too as the previous two novels. The 'storm ended' (WSWGTS 138) towards the end with the resolution of the conflict.

Just as Nirode has been pictured as having drawn a barbed wire fence around in *Voices In The City* similarly, Menaka, daughter of Sita, felt the home on the empty island as a 'jail surrounded by the barbed wire of ceaseless raindrops' (WSWGTS 109) from which she longed to escape. Thus Desai does not hesitate to repeat her images if it suits her purpose of psychological presentation of the characters.

The incidence of crowd of crows attacking an injured eagle - 'A group of three fell on the eagle together' (WSWGTS 35) also acts as an objective correlative for Sita's alienation from her husband. She calls these crows as 'witches' (WSWGTS 35) who commit 'murder, infanticide, incest, theft, and robbery,' (WSWGTS 34) and after this 'exceptionally cruel drama' (WSWGTS 34) the crows whistle in ecstasy and laugh. Sita is deeply troubled to see this crow theatre as it reminded her of the internal violence done to her by her family.

Besides these there are a number of stray images in Desai's novels. Sita feels her condition akin to an empty 'suitcase' (WSWGTS 138) - completely vacant. Or to a 'player at the end of the performance' (WSWGTS 138) tired, dishevelled - as her time on the island had also been like an episode on the stage and instead of continuing playing the hypocritical part of an actress in a theatrical performance, she had now to return to a life of retirement, go back to her home off-stage.

In *Fire On The Mountain* also Desai uses the images of a 'lizard' (FOM 42) like in *Cry, The Peacock* or 'a mosquito, minute and fine' (FOM

43) as in *Voices In The City* or a “soundless moth” (*FOM* 39) to represent Raka who liked to remain isolated and secluded from all company, even that of her grandmother. Nanda Kaul who wishes to live undisturbed views Raka as an 'uninvited mouse or cricket' (*FOM* xi) who had come to disturb her composure, her quiet life. Pining for a secluded life, even Nanda is described as lying down motionless at day time like 'a lizard on a stone wall' (*FOM* 25) to cut herself away from any disturbing call.

Desai has the skill of using the same motif from different perspectives suiting the psychological image of the character she wants to draw. Desai has used the symbol of eagle in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* as a helpless being attacked cruelly by a group of crows, the same bird becomes a symbol of free flight, independence, balance and tranquility in this novel to manifest the inner yearning of Nanda to free herself from her tiresome 'domestic tone' (*FOM* 21) :

An eagle swept over it, far below her, a thousand feet below, its wings outspread, gliding on currents of air without once moving its muscular wings which remained in repose, in control. She had wished, it occurred to her, to imitate that eagle-gliding, with eyes closed. (*FOM* 21)

The image aptly conveys Nanda's wish for passivity as she was exhausted with her 'ironic bow to duty' (*FOM* 20). Without much hustle in her life she craved for silence and liberty. Intermingling this image with that of a fly, Desai co-relates Nanda's plight with that of a fly 'too lazy for flight, . . . caught in its midday web' (*FOM* 24). Both the images together effectively resonate Nanda's wish to be indolent and non-aligned from her duties. Continuing this reflection of the protagonist Nanda is portrayed feeling her life to be a 'heavy, difficult book that she had read through and was not required to read it again' (*FOM* 32). The island becomes a connecting and communicating image which indicates through its bareness the subconscious sufferings and the life of drudgery of the protagonist,

throughout the novel. On that island she constantly views flowers that 'succeed outdoors, not one that might retain its shape or colour inside,' (*FOM* 36) expressive of the inner hollowness of her oppressed life.

Desai's mastery of revealing the psychic functioning of the characters is very well exemplified as she compares Raka to a 'rabbit conjured up by a magician-drawn unwillingly out of the magic hat, flashing past Nanda Kaul, then vanishing in the dark of a bagful of tricks' (*FOM* 51), thus presenting Raka's psychology of finding any company irksome and her habit of disappearing any time without caring for her grandmother, who remained astonished by her nature and activities.

The image of fire is also all pervasive in the novel. Fire has been used as a symbol of destruction as well as purification. Raka sets 'the forest on fire' (*FOM* 158) suggesting the end of all possible communication as well as contradiction. It also suggests the emergence of a new order by the end of everything existent presently.

Desai images, though simple, are dramatically powerful and inter-related. They contribute to the theme by evoking the stark sense of isolation of the characters and their desperation for self-identification. The images have a sense of continuity not only within one novel but also from one novel to another by their repetition to convey almost the same sense. The image of a mosquito employed in the previous novels, is used in *Clear Light of Day* also, where the despair and isolation of Bim is projected through the insect:

They had come like mosquitoes -Tara and Bakul and behind them the Misras and somewhere in the distance Raja and Benazir - only to torment her and mosquito - like sip her blood. All of them fed on her blood - Now when they were full, they rose in swarms, humming away, their backs upon her. (*CLD* 153)

The image signifies Bim being deserted by all the other family



members and troubling her instead of providing any support. The image of fire is also repetitive where the inner entanglement and rage of Bim has been likened to 'fire smouldering under a pot' (*CLD* 145). The image of the horse has been used to compare the Misra girls who were being scrutinised by the Misra boys for marriage prospect. The girls' conscious of being so closely watched shivered as 'horses do when flies settle' (*CLD* 96). This wonderfully expresses the state of mind of the poor girls and satirises the practice of one sided analysis of girls by the male counterparts.

The most notable image in the novel is that of a 'bridle-like cow' (*CLD* 150) that had once drowned into a well but was never taken out. The green scum over the water of the well did not show even a single ripple since the cow had drowned in it nor did anyone jump to save the creature, which symbolises the lack of apathy towards each other even in such stark circumstances. The incidence had become nauseating for Bim and Aunt Mira.

The use of images by Desai has been done not merely for ornamentation but to present a prismatic view of life of the characters. The symbols lend perspicuity to her vision and theme. They serve the purpose of character delineation as well as convey the experiences of the alienated victims leading them towards as well as away from the fragmentation and disintegration.

The images of captivity are ironically drawn in *In Custody* where Deven is pictured feeling like a caged animal. Exploration of the interior world is Desai's forte. She fulfills her aim of lighting up the unexplored recesses of a man's heart by the use of auditory and visual images. She refers to Deven's home as 'temple of domesticity' (*IC* 49). Deven feels it was, ' . . . just a cage in a row of cages. Cage, cage trap, trap' (*IC* 152). The image of entrapment evokes the protagonist's world of loneliness and his agonised soul.

Images of death and decadence have been used pervasively. There is the image of a 'dead fly floating' (*IC* 30) in a cup of tea, a group of crows troubling a dead dog:

He turned out and peered out of the window to see if the dog lay on the road, broken, bleeding, or dead. He saw a flock of crows alight on the yellow grass that grew beside the ditch, their wings flickered across the view like agitated eyelashes. (*IC* 26)

Here the tormented dog stands for the crushed literary yearnings of Deven and the crows identify with his meaningless life and the mean physical existence which aimed to curb his literary ambitions.

There is reiterated use of the image of a rushing and whistling train in *Cry*, *The Peacock* as well as *In Custody* where, in the latter the train reminds Deven of "Prisoners in their bars, mocked them in their cells" (*IC* 153). It relates the exhaustion of the protagonist and the frustration at not being able to escape. Deven is portrayed as a 'stray dog' uncertain of 'whether to expect a blow or a bone' (*IC* 155).

The solar image has been wonderfully used here to depict the realisation of reality. On the last day when Deven was to record Nur's interview the Sun rose bright in a clear, cloudless environment which notifies Deven's dawn of a new consciousness of being the true custodian of the legendary poet's works.

In *Fasting, Feasting* the use of imagery is less profuse as compared to Desai's earlier novels but wherever they are used, they are different from her recurrent images and synchronise with the theme and character portrayal. For instance, the father, being a male, held the most privileged position in the family and this is reflected by him, "being the only one in the family who is given a napkin and a finger bowl; they are emblems of his status" (*FF* 24), as Uma describes it.

The subdued selves of Uma and Arun are symbolically presented through the image of “woods and meadows that had shimmered in its heat, now shiver and turn grey, subdued” (*FF* 228). This pictures the psychology of the females in the family permanently scarred by the flag bearers of power.

Quite uniquely 'Jogging' becomes a vehicle of expression for Desai to challenge the closed spaces and desolation. It represents Arun's struggle to free himself and find, through endeavour and suffering, an 'open space', 'an unfettered vacuum' (*FF* 204) where he can feel free and triumphant.

Imagery plays a significant role in the narrative design of the novels of Namita Gokhale too. In correspondence with the personality and temperament of the characters, imagery works quite effectively in bringing out their attitudes and unfold their inner world. Her images are functional and demonstrative in nature like that of Desai. They set up a fundamental unity between the form and context and help to maintain the dominant theme of the novel. The imagery lends vividness to Desai's and Gokhale's narratives and helps them to give concreteness to their vision.

In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, Namita projects the idea of femininity through ornaments, which enhance a woman's physical beauty and are considered to be female specific as Priya says, ". . . in confident affirmation of my femininity - two gold, six red glass, and then two gold again" (*PDP* 8). All this made Priya feel special and confident as these are considered to be emblems of femininity and delicacy.

In an unusual imagery B.R. has been described as 'a hunter displaying an unusually fine skill' (*PDP* 10), when he chose Paro as his bride. This describes the ability of B.R. to charm women and ensnare them easily and even the image of Paro who was considered as the best possible match for a man by Priya. Through this condensed image the psychology of Priya is also manifested, who seems to be deeply impressed and influenced by Paro's

personality. It clarifies since the beginning of the novel the awe and admiration which the narrator has for Paro.

Like Desai, Namita uses zoological images to create a cumulative impression of the psychological make-up of the characters. For instance, Paro's confidence and self-obsession is portrayed through the image of a cat, "She looked like a cat that has had all the cream" (*PDP* 17). The image reflects Paro's tendency to consume and use everything to fulfill her own ends, without any concern for others. It also reflects Priya's jealousy for Paro, who feels left out and cheated when B.R. chose Paro instead of her as a marriage partner.

Paro's infectious presence and influence on everyone and everything around her is projected through the uncontrolled vitality of a money plant which Priya planted, ". . . by the time a year was out our bedroom, all the bathrooms and the balcony were full of money plants creeping energetically. (*PDP* 139)

Just like Desai in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, Gokhale also uses the image of Jelly fish in this novel to externalise the death wish of Priya who considers the sting of Jelly fish to be one of the options of committing suicide.

A number of scattered images are there in the novel like 'fence' (*PDP* 46) used to denote the estrangement between Priya and Paro, B.R. exhausted with activity is described as a 'caveman trying to revive a dying fire' (*PDP* 38), his voice to Priya has been compared to 'a rhythmic sea' (*PDP* 5), 'kitchen' (*PDP* 61) has been referred to as the symbol of female specific monotony and unwilling and undignified drudgery as Paro is considered by Priya as a special woman - not meant for the kitchen work. In this sense Gokhale's narrative style is akin to Desai as she also uses a number of interspersed images in her novels like *Where Shall We Go This Summer*.

Namita has the talent of varying her images as it suits the

development or degradation of the characters. The same Paro who was described as a privileged cat who has had stomachful of cream, bewildered by her failed relationship Paro is presented as feeling herself 'like a cat on a hot tin roof' (*PDP* 141), looking for a man, a support, suffering from heat. She feels cut off and vulnerable and her actions are defensive and calculated to protect her interests. She is also referred as a 'love-sick animal' (*PDP* 78) to convey her sense of isolation and alienation. This quality of Gokhale resembles that of Desai as Desai also uses the same image of an eagle in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* to represent helplessness and in *Fire On The Mountain* to indicate freedom and independence.

What is remarkable and unique about Gokhale and what also differentiates her style of writing from Desai is that Gokhale's images are mostly very brief and condensed. They finish within a couple of words or lines as against Desai's images which are more descriptive and sometimes continue for many pages and paragraphs. They are also more repetitive as contrasted to that of Gokhale.

The imagery of 'prisoner' of war has a structural function in Gokhale's *A Himalayan Love Story* in carrying forward the theme of the pitiable plight of one who is stifled by a bond of subjection. Parvati feels like a captive with her husband Lalit and says, "I have lived like a prisoner of war, constantly spying on the habits and inclinations of my captor" (*AHLS* 37).

The relationship between Salman and Parvati is described as a 'shadow game' (*AHLS* 29) indicating its temporary nature, as Parvati herself accepts that "I had never suspected Salman of permanence. I had known in our first meeting that he was only a shadow" (*AHLS* 30).

Cooking has been considered as a distinctive quality of a female by the patriarchal society. This prototype has been presented by Gokhale in this novel, when Parvati found an only outlet of her frustrated married life in

cooking for Lalit. She reflects, "I felt safe when he ate my cooking, I felt it accorded me some power over his corpulent body, some part in the dreary dominion of our home" (*AHLS* 39). Parvati delighted in making meals for her husband as she felt her husband's indifference reduced when he ate the food cooked by her. Plodding of females in the kitchen as a symbol of an lack of any excitement has been repeated by Gokhale in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* too where she presents the making of pickle and caring for it as an essential everyday job of females for generations to generations:

For a hundred years the women in our family brought the pickle out in the morning to put it in the sun, and then in the evenings they took it in again and left it in the kitchen. It had become a sacred chore, one they did without questioning or complaining. They had got so used to it that no one ever thought of eating the pickle. (*GGG* 227)

This same idea has been presented by Desai in *Fasting, Feasting* where culinary skills are considered as the touchstone of a girl who is eligible for marriage. In the novel Uma is deceptively shown to have made samosas herself when the bridegroom's parents come to approve her, to add to her profile positively. Also, Uma is expected to help her mother in the kitchen as if it was her indispensable duty, contrasted to her brother Arun who is not allowed to enter the kitchen, for the danger of his safety. Thus both the novelists voice their feministic concern through the same imagery here, which hints at the similarity in their perspectives.

Gokhale is also obsessed with death, as Desai in *Cry, The Peacock*. But the message is conveyed in entirely contrasted ways. Desai reflects the thought through the images of eagles, crows and other zoological images that death is inevitable, while Gokhale very uniquely and positively presents the idea that, "Death does not make us think of death: death urges us towards life" (*AHLS* 48) and to communicate this she uses inanimate objects like razor, shaving cream, nail cutter etc. As Parvati says:

The body departs, it is taken away, disposed of, it disintegrates, decomposes, it is gone . . . But things remain. Lalit's razor, with the thick stubborn growth still sticking to the blade, the handle worn with use. His shaving cream, and the limp defeated shaving brush. His nail cutter, a gift from his father, sits safely in the steel box that holds his watch and wallet. His slippers still lie under the bed, waiting. They did not perish with him. His two suits hang in the cupboard, his shirts lie folded, quiescent. (AHLS 48)

Through these things of daily use Gokhale projects her belief that there is no need to mourn death as it is not final. It is just an adversary which combats the imperishable things, and even the non-living simple things outdo it and defeat it by existing beyond its perilous shadow.

Just as Desai uses Manori island as a symbol of escape in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, similarly Wee Nooke is used as a symbol of what Mukul desires and dreams in his entire life, in this novel, which is chosen by him as "my retreat, my haven, my sanctuary, my passage into the outside world" (AHLS 95).

The Himalayan snow peaks covered by mist and fog symbolise the life of Parvati clouded by misunderstandings, wrong choices and represent the blurred vision of her future. Parvati looking for a substantial support is described as "the exposed roots of the magnolia tree, gnarled and strong, as they spread about in search of sustenance" (AHLS 151). Mukul feels Parvati depending on her and trying to get his support as the roots of the tree for her survival. Continuing this image Gokhale says through Mukul, "all women weave tiny tendrils of hope and dependence around their victims" (AHLS 187). Thus Parvati is projected as a weak creeper who is in constant search of someone to reinforce herself.

In *The Book of Shadows* as a mode of projecting her vision, Gokhale

uses varied images to reflect the etiolated and disintegrated self of the protagonist. The hallucinations of shadows, the longing for silence and darkness is an attempt on the part of the author to portray Rachita's intention to shut out both the human and natural incursions. The crowing of the cock and the howling of the dogs at night - considered as bad omens - suggest Rachita's intuitions of disaster.

The image of a 'candle was half spent, and the wax that had shaped her head shuddered and trickled down her torso, like some mutilated corpse set afire by a murderer. I wanted to blow it out, . . .' (*BOS* 30) mirrors the death wish of Rachita in the novel. She continues to say that "The smell of acrid smoke and angry wax filled the room. It smelt like murder" (*BOS* 30). The willingness of Rachita to blow out the candle is symbolic of her obsession with death and the odour of smoke and wax which fill the room and her mind symbolise her subconscious feeling of guilt that she was cause of Anand's death, thus it being not a suicide, but a murder she had committed. Gokhale skillfully reflects the inner gloom of the protagonist through the suggestive imagery.

As Deven is presented in *In Custody* as being caged in his own house, similarly Rachita says, "I feel trapped in this house" (*BOS* 64). The images of confinement, thus, find place in the novels of both these writers. These images are mingled with the ardent wish of the protagonists to escape it.

In a quirky imagery Gokhale has likened sanity to a nail paint. As she says, "Sanity is like a nail polish, it chips easily, it has to be restored and renewed. Too constant a use can cause yellowing of nails" (*BOS* 19). Sanity or mental health has thus been reflected as being quite vulnerable and Desai projects the idea that it is very easy to become disoriented in life, depending on the circumstances. Rachita has the realisation that after her finance's suicide she will have to put in extra efforts to remain mentally normal and continue her life after the hard blow. Desai, although uses brief images but deflecting from her writing pattern, in this book certain images find their



continuation up to certain pages. Even later Rachita memorising the same comparison says with a tinge of hope, "If I redo my nails - if I file them . . . - if I paint them pink I might last another day" (*BOS* 64). Very strangely her survival is linked with the maintenance of nails signifying that one is required to be conscious of one's mental balance at every point of life.

Philosophically, life has been projected by Gokhale as a 'butterfly knows it is a fearful quest for nectar. As it peers at the world through the saturated colours of its spectrum the blues, the violets, the indigos - as through this beauty it registers the threat of the other, hooping and diving and beating its wings in a frenzy of fear and panic. . . . Butterflies just have that effect on me" (*BOS* 129). It represents the tangible terror with which Rachita is constantly haunted. Through the zoological imagery life is manifested as being full of hardships and dangers which every creature has to face at every point of life.

Gokhale very scholarly has described the condition of synesthesia in the novel. Synesthesia literally means a crossing over of senses where there is a breakaway from the boundaries and constraints that divide the territories of experience. Or in simple words synesthesia denotes an amalgamation of the world of physical and mental and emotional experiences where our subconscious drives are reflected externally. This state is presented by an image of a prism by Gokhale masterfully. The image runs through many pages and is highly suggestive. Rachita says:

I discovered a prism lying in an old box. When I looked through it, the world changed. Every reality got broken and translated into colour. Instead of the familiar and predictable range of violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange and red, a new colour appeared on my prism. It was completely unexpected colour, . . . it was a composite of another range of vision altogether. As I observed my world bathed in that beautiful glowing light, I felt somehow safe and secure and

familiar, . . . Everything was as it should have been, nothing around me had changed, but that glowing light conferred a mystery and glory to everything it touched. (*BOS* 74)

The image beautifully reflects Rachita's state of mind where she finds the fantastic colour seen through the prism as a transfiguring light, which changed her vision of life ahead. It projects her journey from hopelessness to a revival of hope and meaning in life. The light presents her growing optimism casting all darkness of guilt behind.

In Gokhale there is a symbolic link between different images. They represent the psychic states of the individual and his to and fro movement from sadness to happiness and vice versa. In *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory*, the imagery of signs of bondage is drawn through silver anklets, as Shakuntala feeling uncomfortable by any object, even the ornamental jewellery which indicate subjugation or connectedness says while running away with Nearchus, "I discard my cumbersome silver anklets and leave them on the shore. Suddenly I am free, I will wear them again only when it is time to return home" (*SPOM* 107). The anklets remind her of her marital ties with Srijan and so she unhesitatingly drops them feeling free. The wearing and opening and rewearing of the anklets encode the engagement and disentanglement of Shakuntala with the familial ties and the wheel of duty and dharma.

The image of the caged mina letting out an "untutored squawk, 'Love in a cage is love in a rage' . . ." (*SPOM* 114) is just like Desai in *In Custody* where images of confinement are profusely spread, which lay bare the bruised emotions of the individual soul which feels itself in constraint. There is also the image of a monkey who tries his best to 'break loose of its chain and leash' (*SPOM* 169). Deven feels himself to be encaged in his house just like Shakuntala. Both have an innate wish to unhinge themselves which is symbolically presented by both the novelists. However later the same monkey is presented as " . . . dead. A jackal or wild cat had attacked it in the

night" (*SPOM* 171), signifying the impossibility to break the leash and bondings and run away from the brutality of the world. One has to learn to survive within these chains. Neither Shakuntala nor Deven is able to escape the bondage. Even the death of Shakuntala caused by the wild bull, symbolise the brutal and harsh forces of nature always at work to perish an individual's self.

There is also notable image of "a calf which has wandered away from the herd, but will return to the fold and to its mother at the gloaming hour" (*SPOM* 168), symbolising Shakuntala who had drifted from her home after marriage and had eloped with Nearchus. The words are spoken by a saint which reflect hope of return of Shakuntala to Srijan's home. He encourages Shakuntala to do so.

The images drawn by Gokhale are simple but powerful, they reveal the world inside, a world of the inner weather. The images of isolation add to the splendour of her novels. As we read her novels we see there is subsequent growth of maturity in her vision and presentation skills. Her images become more pervasive and they spread their arms wider and wider to present the inner realm. As we continue to read from *Paro: Dreams of Passion* to *Shakuntala: Dreams of Passion*, the journey shows a subsequent chistling of her art towards perfection.

Thus the sharply condensed and pristine images render the novels of both Desai and Gokhale, a perfect example of verbal and visual artistry leaving the readers mesmerised and magnetized. The difference lies in the frequency and approach, as Desai's images are more extensive and widely permeating as compared to Gokhale's which are brief and fewer than that of Desai. However, images of both the writers are highly elaborative and functional in the expression of the subterranean and subconscious.

Pervading presence of the city or the use of the city as a character is also a conspicuous narrative feature of both Desai and Gokhale. City, not

only forms a backdrop in the novels of Desai as well as Gokhale, but also becomes a character in the novels, exercising a powerful influence on all the major characters around it. The city symbol presents the novelists' urban consciousness portraying the chaos and confusion of the characters graphically. The readers are successfully made to feel as if the city is an inseparable part of their lives and personality. The city is a metaphor that these writers employ subtly to reaffirm and reassert the life-themes in the novels.

In *Voices In The City*, Calcutta is used as a powerful symbol by Desai. Calcutta conceived as a force of creation, preservation and destruction is identified with mother Kali, the goddess of death and destruction. The city of commerce is linked with the pale and melancholic psychic life of the characters- Nirode, Amla and Monisha. Calcutta is imaged as an ugly, ghastly monster in whose lethal grip the three desperate preys gape and gasp for breath. Monisha calls Calcutta “this devil city” (VIC 117) “unrelenting city” (VIC 236). Images of putrefaction like filth, squalidness and adversity create in Monisha a distaste and dislike for the city. Amla too feels the presence of the city demonic, ogre-like, its throbbing pulse attracts as well as repels her thus increasing her inner conflict. She feels trapped and voices her concern as “. . . this monster city that lived no normal, healthy and red-blooded life but one that was subterranean underlit, stealthy and odorous of mortality, had captured . . .” (VIC 150).

Amla calls Calcutta a ‘harsh’ and ‘insidious’ (VIC 94) city. This city engulfs Monisha and leaves the other two awfully battered and shattered. Nirode refers to it as “beastly, blood-thirsty Calcutta” (VIC 94).

Monisha asks in her diary, “Has this city a conscience at all, this Calcutta that holds its head between its knees and grins toothlessly up at me from beneath a bottom black with the dirt that it sits on?” (VIC 116) and she says, “There are no ethics in these houses of trade. Ethics are shunned . . .” (VIC 117). The city thus seems to Monisha as mocking at her dilapidated

condition and appears to her a collaborator with others in exploiting her. The city depicts the diseased generation of the postmodern era marked by turmoil and distress.

The city offers no comfort to the characters but comes out as a beastly creature abetting their alienation and callousness even further.

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, Sita wishes to leave the metropolitan city of Bombay characterised by monotony and menace wheeling away her peace and solace like Amla does in *Voices In The City*. In the inhuman city Sita felt the “long, straight, monotonous track of her life whip itself around her in swift circles . . . leading nowhere” (*WSWGTS* 140). It is symbolic of her tiredness and her unhappy predicament. But there seems to be no permanent escape from its dreariness as the protagonist is presented as creeping backwards to the same place of her pony existence, she dreaded, after a brief decamping, and plunged into its uncertainties with no hope of any relief.

Even Nanda Kaul the protagonist of *Fire On The Mountain* willingly moves away from the hectic and disturbed life of the mainland as it is a grim reminder of the intangibility of her life. She prefers the bareness and emptiness of the lone island to the so called real life of the city. The city surfaces her 'disturbing call from the existence she has cut herself off from' (*FOM* X), symbolising her tensions and expectations. We may call it the axis from which she wished ardently to deviate.

A sense of insecurity, horror and bareness pervades the landscape of Delhi in the novel *In Custody*. When Deven comes to Delhi for an interview with the Urdu poet, Nur he perceives the atmosphere of Delhi as, “White dust and yellow weeds the leafless thorn trees, the broken fences, isolated tin and brick shacks and the scattered carcasses of cattle that littered . . . more bleak and bare under the empty sky” (*IC* 28). Thus Delhi is portrayed as cruel, indifferent and malignant where people are judged by their material

achievements and financial success and people like Deven are an insignificant nobody. Contrasted to the vastness of the city Deven felt small, weak and inadequate. It is ironic to notice that although it was his dream city it made him feel sad and insomniac. It is skillfully presented as just an anticipation of some tragedy to come and of Deven's belittlement. What is interesting to notice in the novel is that both Mirpore and Delhi are used to portray Deven's plight. Although Deven envisions Mirpore and Delhi to be antagonistic to each other, as Delhi symbolises fantasy to him while Mirpore appears as a trap to him. But he soon becomes aware of the reality. Both the cities are as much parched and seared as he himself. They turn out to be not mere external spaces but an extension of his own decay and disorder. The city emerges as a dynamic vision of his own plight and a subsequent awareness of his reality. The city and his journey to and fro between the two places have been described in the novel in detail. Deven, since his entry into Delhi identifies the common elements between Mirpore and the capital as Desai says:

He was thinking the great city was no different from his small town and that the dissimilarity lay only in scale: this was certainly larger, noisier, more crowded and chaotic, but that was all, and it was the scale and not the unfamiliarity that made him feel so small, weak and inadequate. (*IC* 42)

The city objectifies his own failures and indolence and just increases the magnitude of his sensitivity towards them. The journey does not imply any change in the order of reality. He soon realizes that it is impossible to transpose positions in life and free oneself from the cruel trap of the world.

Through the depiction of the city three thematic motifs have been comprehensively and systematically interwoven by Desai in this novel: drive for freedom, captivity and cognizance of reality.

Gokhale's novels are also strictly urban contemporary where the

protagonists are driven by the 'compulsive need to sell themselves' (*PDP* 1). Mulling over what she witnesses, Gokhale presents a chilling realism using city as a symbolic backdrop to key narrative moments, making her novels a buzzing tour de force. How the city draws the characters ineluctably to its mechanical, spiritless, arid, mundane life style has been elaborately depicted in her novels. The fettered self struggling for liberation from the stranglehold of a chaotic society appears to be a dominant trait in her novels. Her social world is a time-space construction where the city throbbing with nerve defeats man's innate capacity to uphold human values. It represents all forms of exploitations and repressions. The city is characterized by an indigenous greed for possessions and the inevitable outcome is apathy and lack of concern for each other.

In *Paro: Dreams Of Passion* the narrator is a tormented soul baffled by the sweep of the teeming city of Bombay and the prejudices of the 'jet-set'-'Bombay's rich' (*PDP* 22). The narrative sways between the two metropolis - Bombay and Delhi as in the novel *In Custody* of Desai it does between Mirpore and Delhi. Whether it be Bombay or Delhi, both similarly play the role of aggravating the nightmarish existence of the inhabitants.

Suresh, Priya's husband, is described as being in the 'top bracket' (*PDP* 65) in his profession in Delhi. The city swamped with business had disenfranchised the sentimentality of its denizens. The picture of the redecorated houses, kitty parties, the plastic flowerpots, the rising heat, the parched earth, the lottery system, the black lanes of Jama Masjid have been vividly drawn to present the city as a place of empty luxury and moral ambiguity. The futility of existence is mapped across the gloominess of the city. As Calcutta is presented by Desai in *Voices In The City*, as concretizing the decay and decadence of the characters, so do Delhi and Bombay in this novel.

The narrative in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* also unfolds the various incidences in the life of the major character with the capital of India

casting a shadow on them. Delhi is mockingly referred to as 'It's a city with a future. A lot can be done in Delhi?' (*GGG* 9). Ammi's and Gudiya's lines take an extra ordinary momentum in the city of Delhi and Gudiya passes through a lot of strenuous moments as she meets the inhuman, self centred people in the city.

Parvati in *A Himalayan Love Story* grew up in Jeolikote, a popular tourist halt on the way to Nainital, overlooking the highway. The lives of postmodern urban characters are as disorderly and polluted as the city itself, assailed by 'the smell of diesel' 'the incessant hooting' 'the dying flowers' (*AHLS* 9) symbolic of the dying vitality and the cunning disguises. The linearity of life has been broken by the city and it's unconcerned people into a great variety of individual, often isolated and discontinuous experiences and episodes. The description of the 'man-eating tiger on the prowl' (*AHLS* 4) indicates the cannibalistic attitudes of the postmodern existence. The image of the city effects the social conditions of the contemporary urban world.

In *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory*, Kashi becomes the symbol of birth, death and rebirth. Shakuntala has a conscious awareness of the opportunities the city could offer her; the conditions of her quest of self and realization of her pace and aim of life. She knows Kashi as a city of no mean existence, "the most blessed spot on the face of the earth . . . why else have you been brought here but for your redemption"? (*SPOM* 195). She feels that there is a wall around her here which would protect her from the evil outside and the water of the sacred tanks will cure her of all her ailments. In the novel there is a naturalistic stress on the effect of the external environment upon the inner responses. The exposure to the purifying forces of the city lead her to a visionary attitude. She understands it as an independent and a purging territory. Dying in Kashi was a blessed option for her. The realization of the laws of Karma dawned on Shakuntala by the river's edge in Kashi and she decided not to die there, hidden and unknown, but to return to "the earth and rocks that knew me" (*SPOM* 198). She felt revived and



everything seemed possible again.

*Priya: In Incredible Indyaa*, Gokhale's next novel also provides a perfect model of a metropolitan city, its happenings and consequences of its growth and conflict upon the feelings of its inhabitants. As she says, "everybody in Delhi knows everybody-everybody who matters that is . . . . Seek out the current lot of 'useful' people, scorn the hangers-on and despise those who might need you" (*PII* 2), symbolising the snobbish social networking of the capital. Everybody hoped to become somebody there and in the competition scraped and snubbed the other. Delhi is far from being a mere background in the novel, it rather becomes one of the main motifs and themes significantly interwoven in the lives of the people. How it has jaundiced the emotionality of the people can be traced throughout the novel successfully. Majority of the dwellers find themselves unable to resist the material temptations the city offers to enjoy their life to the fullest and this fascination has a phenomenal effect on their actions and attitudes. There is a reference to 'social hierarchy' 'paid news' and 'ajeeb society' (*PII* 161), mutual ignorance, changing of spellings of one's name with the hope of achieving success, warning against the 'so-called Delhi friends' (*PII* 132), the world going mad. The writer draws a contrast between the inner panic of the dwellers and "the wide roads, the gracious city, the sprawling bungalows" (*PII* 131) of Delhi mocking at the rise of mass culture and bourgeois life. She lays bare the ironic ambiguities of the material and technological advances of the city which entirely negate the emotionality of the characters. Namita reflects in the novel, "Winners and losers, that's what this new world is about" (*PII* 98). Sentimentality, here, is foolishness. The city is the ultimate manifestation of the impasse postmodern civilization has found itself trapped in.

Thus, both Desai and Gokhale present the city as a powerful force which frustrates the aim of the protagonists to achieve liberty and extricate themselves from the stifling duties and oppressions. Rather it encumbers and ties them further to the disorderliness of their lives. The city is presented not

as a non-living entity, but a living character which at the same time victimizes, as well is a victim of circumstances itself. It adopts the role of a living spirit and acts as a strong adversary towards its inhabitants, thus turning itself into a dark pandemonium full of brutal and demonic, insensitive voices and images. The only exception being *Shakuntala: The Play Of Memory* where the sacred city of Kashi has redemptive qualities, thus playing a major role in rescuing the consciousness of the protagonist.

Being postmodern texts, the novels of Desai and Gokhale have the significant trait of intertextuality, which is a characteristic feature of postmodern writings. The word refers to the interconnection between similar or related works of literature that help in shaping up of a text by figures such as allusions, quotations, pastiche, parody or translation. It may also be referred as a creative transformation of the alluded text in similar or different linguistic and cultural context. By the evocation of other texts, the text concerned gains meaning and a wider interpretation is possible in relation with the referred text or a part of it. Intertextuality is preferred by postmodern writers as it blurs the boundaries of a work of art and encourages connections and associations between different literary genres and materials.

There is a considerable use of other literary works in the novels of Desai and Gokhale. There are allusions and quotations from prose as well as poetry of diverse writers in their fiction. The intertextual references hint at the expansion of the ideas of other writers integrated well with the total effect of the novel. There are several instances in the novels where either there is a recontextualisation of already existing texts and their further modification or other prose or poetry is quoted directly to reinforce the theme and situation, either by drawing a contrast or a striking similarity.

In Desai's *Voices In The City*, when Nirode was perplexed with his life and by the inexorable influence of the city and could not decide what to make of his own life, his professor quoted the famous fable of *Panchtantra*

where four eminent scholars tried to bring a lion to life, as an exhibition of their superiority. The first assembled the skeleton, the second gave it flesh and blood and the third infused breath into it. But the fourth man proved to be of sense and warning them, climbed a tree-top, thus saving his life by his true wit. The lion as soon as brought to life killed the other three scholars. The professor thus quoted humorously:

Scholarship is less than sense;  
Therefore seek intelligence;  
Senseless scholars in their pride  
Made a lion: then they died. (*VIC* 25)

By alluding to the story Desai adds wit to her narration, making it interesting and links the well known tale to Nirode's state of mind, which required more sense than knowledge. The story becomes symbolic and forewarns Nirode against adopting unintelligible approach towards life. Thus the vision of the novelist towards the way to lead life is projected in an interesting and simple manner.

Another noteworthy reference is that of the well known poem *Rose Alymer* by Walter Savage Landor:

Ah, what avails the sceptres race!  
Ah, what the face divine!  
What every virtue, every grace!  
*Rose Alymer*, all were thine. (*VIC* 43)

As David, Nirode's friend, asked Nirode if he was not afraid of defeat and of the city which victimized everyone, Nirode very carelessly answered by referring to the above lines which mean that it is useless to be of an aristocratic race or having a beautiful, heavenly form or possessing all the good qualities and manners because what remains in the end is only a memory of the soul departed forever. The poem in a philosophical vein, through Nirode who shuns success conveys the fruitlessness of worldly

achievements and qualities, and projects Desai's obsession with death as being all encompassing.

Thus, intertextual references act as a vehicle to carry forward the theme of panicked search for meaning and feelings by the protagonists. It guides the readers towards a better and wider comprehension of the concept revealed in the novel.

To portray the mood and behavioral eccentricities of Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, Desai used the narrative technique of poetry. She quotes C.P. Cavafy's poem which resonates the inception of consciousness of the protagonist:

To certain people there comes a day  
When they must say the great Yes or the great No.  
He who was the Yes ready within him reveals himself at once,  
and saying it crosses over to the path of honour and his own  
conviction. (*WSWGTS* 127).

The poem helps to palliate the conflict of Sita and makes her understand the perception of Raman's belief that she lacked the courage which is required to get on with the everyday matters of existence. However Raman knew the art of continuing with life and its business and had the bravery to say the yes towards struggle, while she herself has shunned life and its essential duties. She felt herself to be a 'coward' (*WSWGTS* 127) and realized that by her cowardice she had crushed her life. And that is why, even the children turned to him, sensing him to be superior in courage, in leadership.

There is another example of well sorted poetry of D.H. Lawrence, which Sita recollected after much effort:

The wild young heifer, glancing distraught,  
With a strange, new knocking of life at her side

Runs seeking a loneliness.  
The little grain draws-down the earth, to hide.  
Nay even the slumbrous egg as it labours under the shell  
Patiently to divide and sub-divide,  
Asks to be hidden, and wishes nothing to tell. (*WSWGTS 137*).

These lines from the poem 'End of Another Home Holiday' towards the end of the novel consummate the climax perfectly clarifying the impetus behind her flight and the inevitability of making a compromise. The significance of these lines lies in the way Desai presents Sita accepting the triumph of the oppressive forces of life by drawing a similarity between herself and the calf who runs away to taste a new life, or the little grain that wishes to rest under the earth or the sleepy egg that lies under the shell peacefully. But eventually these too have to assume the routine of life, willingly or unwillingly, as she herself who had to the ordinariness of her regular life. The poem, thus, becomes a perfect mode of projecting Desai's visionary beliefs and reflects her vivid imagination and knowledge. Desai, through the allusion, conveys the futility of lamentation of our fate and derides any illusionistic escape. The poem by hinting at the similar mode of survival of almost all the elements of nature helps to finalize the narrative by a recognition of the unremarkable configuration of life.

The novel *In Custody* begins with William Wordsworth's poem Rob Roy's Grave:

. . . they should take, who have the power  
And they should keep who can. (*IC 1*)

Desai opens her theme by the good old rule that all creatures rise and fall by the measure of either their might or wit. Only a person who has the required strength can get and then preserve what he desires.

The poem attests Desai's conjecture that disparity between one's dreams and the courage to act is the basic cause of suffering, as in the case

of the protagonist, Deven.

There is a reference to Byron, Keats and Shelley's poetry in the novel who are presented as being Deven's favourites whom he "likes to quote frequently and fulsomely" (*IC* 182):

O Wild West wind,  
thou breath of autumn's being?  
Hail to thee, blithe spirit,  
Bird thou never wert . . . , mumbled Deven. (*IC* 182)

Intoning dramatically he recites the Rose Poems:

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,  
Alone and palely loitering? (*IC* 182)

Desai points out at the similarity of ideas and images between Deven and the poets he admires. Deven feeling humiliated at his failure to record Nur's verses and to be of any worth in the world of literature, feels pessimistic like Shelley. He senses an approaching storm and feels sapped of the energy to fly away from it. Everything seems chaotic to him. He feels nobody has the power to heel him. Feeling alienated he finds his life gloomy and exhausted of all the vital energy like the knight in the Rose Poems. Thus the helplessness, despair and inaction of Deven are aptly illustrated by the narrative technique of intertextual references here.

In Desai's *Fire On The Mountain*, the swinging of Nanda Kaul's conviction - one towards herself and another towards her family - and the turbulence caused by this conflict are very well portrayed through the reference of Gerald Manley Hopkins' poem:

I have desired to go  
Where springs not fail,  
To fields where butterflies no sharp and sided hail  
And a few lilies blow.

And I have asked to be  
Where no storms come,  
Where the green swell is in the haven's dumb,  
And out of the swing of the sea. (*FOM* 63-64)

Although Hopkins has not written this poem about a place but about a nun's vocation, but the same applies here too. Nanda's swelling dissatisfaction and anguish and her willingness to lead a secluded life where sea is calm and there is tranquility all around. The wish of the incessant spring season symbolises her quest for unending happiness and meaningful existence.

Pieces from *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon* have been quoted to illumine how intensely Nanda Kaul hated to be dumped into the house and it's care once again. She reads the passage entitled 'When A Woman Lives Alone':

When a woman lives alone, her house should be extremely dilapidated, the mud wall should be falling to pieces, and if there is a pond, it should be overgrown with water plants. It is not essential that the garden be covered with sage brush, but weeds should be growing through the sand in patches, for this gives the place a poignantly desolate look.

I greatly dislike a woman's house when it is clear. She has scurried about with a knowing look on her face, arranging everything just as it should be and when the gate is kept tightly shut. (*FOM* 29)

The passage has a structural function in progressing the theme hinting at the amusement which Nanda Kaul felt with disorder and fantasy of a carefree life. Stifled by the crowd of her house and the incoming guests, she wishes to celebrate her untroubled existence and thus enjoys the happy-go-lucky attitude conveyed in the referred passage.

In the epigraph to the novel *Clear Light Of Day* lines of Emily Dickinson:

Memory is a strange bell -  
Jubilee and knell -

echo the structure of the novel where the reverberation of the past memories play a major role in cognizance of the protagonists.

Another poem suggesting the same is by T.S. Eliot in the epigraph:

See, now they vanish,  
The faces and places, with the self which, as it could be, loved  
them,  
To become renewed, transfigured in another pattern.

The meandering of the characters in the labyrinth of the past is reflected here which may either result in the onslaught of the consciousness or its recovery. It creates an intertextual impact since the beginning of the novel.

The ephemeral nature of life is propagated by Desai through the reference to the *Life of Aurangzeb*. Bim giving an account of the emperor's death quotes from the book:

Alone he had lived and alone he made ready to die . . . he wrote to Prince A'zam; Many were around me when I was born, but now 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. (*CLD* 255)

This paves the way for Bim to understand the deep submerged reality



of life -that a person has to foremost have hope in himself and depend on his own internal resources, rather than looking up to others for support. Bim clears her drawers of old letters including Raja's letter and forgives him. She felt the words of the emperor like a prayer and they lightened her heart of the old grudges. This led to her final reconciliation and thus the piece has a significant impact on the climax of the novel.

At the end of the novel there is a quotation from T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*: "Time the destroyer is time the preserver" (*CLD 277*), which reinforces the idea portrayed throughout the length of the novel that there is a continuous stir in life with the passage of time. Although time seems to flow in a linear fashion destroying whatever comes in its way, actually it damages nothing, as past, present and future always co-exist in our consciousness. The various recollections of the books of prose and poems help in the intuitive understanding of the inner workings of the characters and the theme.

In *Fasting, Feasting* Desai quotes from Bible, Hindu meditative songs, American catchphrases to streak colour into the narrative. These help to intoxicate further the reader with the atmosphere she wishes to create. As for example, Uma's character delineation is enhanced by portraying the fascination of Uma with convent school, its nuns and the chapel attached to the school, which she frequently visited. She was sure that the Bible in its gospel contained within it a 'golden promise' (*FF 20*). She felt the teachings of the holy scripture as a relief to her disorder life and intoned the words often like:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:  
He leadeth me beside the still waters.  
He restoreth my soul . . . (*FF 20*)  
and  
Jesus loves; this I know

For the Bible tell me so . . . (FF 20)

These references help to give a positive ray in the midst of negation of life projected in the novel. They depict the enthusiasm Uma had managed to keep alive in herself.

Uma draws hope from the story of Raja Harishchandra "who gave up his wealth, his kingdom and even his wife to prove his devotion to god Indra . . . when at last God took pity on him and restored his wife to life" (FF 40). This allusion proffers the anticipation of Uma as well as the readers that ultimately something positive may happen in her life by the blessings of the God. It lays bare her sub-consciousness desire of some miracle to happen and change her circumstances. As we proceed with the novel the real grey existence of Uma when contrasted with these quotes seems all the more pathetic and stark.

The poem by Ella Wheeler Wilcox in her compilation *Poems Of Pleasure*:

You are wasting your life in that dull, dark room  
O'er the casement lean but a little, my queen,  
And see what the little world holds.  
Here the wonderful blue of your matchless hue  
Cheapen both sky and sea-  
You are far too bright to be hidden from sight  
Come fly with me darling-fly. (FF 138)

is symbolic of Uma's life. The lines can well be conceived as presenting Uma's condition, who is wrenched into doing monotonous chores within the four walls of the house. She wriggles for freedom and finds herself a misfit in her family. She yearns to fly away forever from her enclosure and explore what the world has in store for her. Desai, thus, uses the poem as a medium to fetter out the latent pains and yearnings of the protagonist in an interesting manner.

In order to perpend her theme, speculate about the troving of consciousness of the protagonists and present the medley of emotional quavering, Gokhale too uses the technique of intertextuality. However her use is limited to some of her novels and is less extensive within them too than that of Desai. Her references are however are as subtly interspersed as that of Desai and convincingly communicate the distinct vision of the novelist.

In the epigraph to *The Book of Shadows* there is an allusion to the poem *Metamorphoses* by the Roman poet Ovid:

My intention is to tell  
of bodies changed  
to different forms.

The lines hint at the novelist's belief in the constant process of transformation - external and internal - that is ever at work. In the narrative that follows everything is in a process of changing. Thus, it forms a perfect prelude to the story opening its theme.

Referring to Shakespeare's *King Lear* in the preface to chapter 1, Gokhale quotes:

I have no way and therefore want no eyes,  
I stumbled when I saw. (*BOS* III)

Rachita's feeling of disorientation and desolation verging on insanity are effectively represented by these condensed lines. These come as a recollection to Rachita when she, feeling malacious, and lonely realizes that she has no vision and no way to move ahead. Her blurred vision makes her stumble and she accepts to herself that she cannot face anything anymore. The lines establish the ability of Gokhale to suggest the depth and complexity of characters experienced, by the technique of relevant

juxtaposition.

Rachita remembers Mahadevi Verma as she quotes:

And the dawn is as a death:

Darkness alone the companion of my restless spirit.

Speak not of union: In separation I am eternal. (*BOS* 74)

The poem opens the door towards a deeper understanding of surging of Rachita's consciousness, her maturity to accept the murkiness surrounding her and her search for a solution, it being withdrawal and obscurity. The lines come as a familiar understandable representative of Rachita's renounced state.

There are references to Cowley, Aeschyles and some other renowned writers but they do not play a major role in carrying the theme forward.

The dawn of commitment to herself in Rachita's mind is reflected towards the end of the novel by reference to the lines by Rainer Maria Rilke: "This is at the bottom the only courage that is demanded of us: to have courage for the most strange, the most inexplicable" (*BOS* 191). Gokhale resonates the basic consideration of the novel here, that is, it is unnecessary to find a logic or explanation in the trials of life. What is most essential for survival is consistent courage to face the crisis and get through the crossroads successfully, keeping our self intact. Carrying the same thought forward Gokhale quotes the following lines:

If at the end of our journey

There is no final

Resting place,

Then we need not fear

Losing our way. (*BOS* 202)

The lines skillfully establish the novelist's vision of the caricature of reality - it is not necessary that our journey of life may eventually lead to a

vital destination. The whole life of an individual should be considered an odd adventure as there is no end to our experiential cycle. We have to keep accommodation ourselves to the notion, that is, life.

There is a powerful recontextualisation of the historic story of Shakuntala in *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory*. Parallels as well as contrasts have been drawn between Shakuntala of the postmodern age and that of the past and their various isolating situations. The confiscation of the protagonist's independence by the callous society is reflected in both the stories. The historical story further reflects the hostile reality of the present. The story begins with the recollection of Shakuntala's tale narrated by Kalidasa in *Abhigyan Shakuntalam*: "Shakuntala died here, by the banks of this sacred river, swollen by the rains. Yet I find no release" (*SPOM* 1). This contrasts the continuous lacerating pain Shakuntala feels even while approaching her end, as against, Shakuntala of Kalidasa who found salvation in death. Shakuntala feels convulsed by the comparison and says:

I was named Shakuntala after the heroine of Kalidasa's classic drama. My namesake was not a mortal like me, she was a nymph, daughter of celestial apsara Menaka who seduced the sage Vishwamitra and stole his seed. That Shakuntala had been deserted by her mother, and her birth father Vishwamitra and later by her husband Dushyant-one could say that she carried within herself the Samskara of abandonment. Some even consider it as an unlucky name. (*SPOM* 6-7)

The reference to the story in the novel makes it clear that with a complete knowledge of the drama, Gokhale name her heroine 'Shakuntala' deliberately, considering the similarity of fate of distress of both characters. By giving a peep into the story she enlightens the readers and prepares them for the awaiting convulsions in the protagonist's life accumulating our deep sensibilities. Just like the Shakuntala of the drama, this Shakuntala too gets no fatherly love, due to his early demise. She was devoid of true love and

care of her mother, whom she hated in turn. She, too, grew up in a mountain country, like the Shakuntala of history. Both led a harsh life. As Shakuntala of the epic was charmed by King Dushyant, Gokhale's protagonist, "too was ready for love, eager for the exquisite sting of Kamdev" (*SPOM* 24). She fantasised that one day her King Dushyant would come and take her away to distant lands beyond these 'unchanging hills' (*SPOM* 24). In a dramatic way Gokhale presents her character again and again remembering her 'namesake Shakuntala' (*SPOM* 122) and her sufferings. The protagonist compares it to her own lot and feels the curse lies in the name itself as Shakuntala admits, "I was born under the star of exile, like my namesake Shakuntala" (*SPOM* 166). Her namesake too had to take an interminable journey of struggle with her child in her womb as the protagonist of this novel. The lives of both were at the same time desolate and sweet, intuned to the memories of the lost worlds. In this novel Shakuntala is described as carrying within her core the seeds of the historic Shakuntala's karmas. She is even presented as witnessing the classical play re-enacted and a detailed description given by the novelist, of the responses of the audience. The play has a cathartic effect on Shakuntala and she feels herself partaking in the actress' sufferings:

I could see the men in the audience nodding their heads in sympathy. Shakuntala stood before them, shamed, abandoned, discarded, and I suffered with her the consequences of her passion.

One should be cautious in forming a secret union declared the ascetic Sarvngarava. (*SPOM* 148)

Through the clever use of the play Gokhale has skillfully presented the state of self-pity of Shakuntala, wherein she considers herself to be doomed forever. Her psyche, burdened with the guilt of adulteration with Nearchus and of leaving Srijan's house, suffers from an identity crisis. She realizes that she cannot identify with her namesake too in certain aspects, as Kalidasa's Shakuntala, even in the moment of disgrace, had the sanctity of a

secret marriage whereas she had betrayed everything. There was the intervention of immortals to set everything right in the case of the former, while she was helpless and hexed forever. There was nobody to console her. The novelist, thus, sometimes in her authorial voice and sometimes through an interior monologue helps us to visualise the whole drama of Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* and makes it an instrument to understand with a humanistic sympathy, the life of *Shakuntala*, her protagonist, who strives and strains to emerge out of her alienation and suffering.

Thus, the technique of intertextuality provides both Desai and Gokhale an adequate frame of reference to represent the thought process, the inner problems, randomness, sometimes scraps of happiness and hope and most of the times the perplexity and unsettlement of life. Intertextuality of both types - explicit as well as implicit - is present in the novels. The first which has direct allusions from other texts and the second which gives a reference of texts without quoting them directly. The diffused penetration of other texts have a considerable share in almost all the novels of Desai while the same is noticeable only in the later novels of Gokhale. The connection with the past writers and their texts indicate the resemblance as well as the difference between the thoughts propagated by them as well as the present works. The intertextual strands give to the novels a sense of timelessness and ubiquity. Both the novelists do not imitate the past but being actually conscious of their contemporaneity present it only as far as it is cogent to the vinette they wish to create. By assimilating considerable portions of poetry, the intertextuality of these two novelists widens the spectrum of inter-subjectivity as it fuses the arena of poetry and prose. By non-conformity to a specific genre, Desai and Gokhale have established themselves as prominent Postmodernist novelists. Their novels hint clearly at the involvements of the texts with each other. The texts are so well absorbed that they shed light on the way the text is interpreted and blurs the boundaries between different genres of literature. They also propagate the idea that society and history form an inseparable part of our interpretations.

As regards language, Desai and Gokhale use various linguistic devices of alliteration, repetition, irony, lyricism, discontinuity, randomness, paradox, excess, which qualify their stylistic distinction in presenting remarkable depth and intensity within a limited milieu. Their narrative territory is limited, where the protagonist herself is made to narrate the story. The larger world is explored only as far as it forms a part of the psychic dimension of the characters. Thus the narrative focus is restricted. Gifted with a unique potentiality of indepth observation of happenings around them, the novelists with a tone of simplicity reveal a mind that is sheer restless. Their language is characterised by a rare sensuous richness, a high-strung sense of sounds, colours, smells and beauty, lyrical intensity and an artistic vision and a creative imagination. The words are reflective of the feelings and emotions of the characters. There is an absence of much diversity in the characters of these authors but the narrowness of fictional compass is compensated by the density of their fictional world, enriched by the use of powerful set of symbols and imagery. As in a frame of a zoom camera, alternating between the first and the third form of narrative, the focus is moved closer and taken far to create an interesting pattern of identification and objectivity. The theme is never sacrificed to form. The linear story telling is inverted by the use of gradual inversions. The aim of the texts is not social or philosophical but psychological, that is to reveal the world of female sensibilities primarily and the fractured truths associated with them. Thus, the novelists gifted with a rare sensibility weave the various psychological strands into a viable narrative framework and explore the contemporary reality in all their human details. While expressing their ire against male-dominated patriarchal system of society, Gokhale sometimes becomes more frank and candid as compared to Desai. She makes some excessively outspoken and frank comments. For instance she says in *The Book of Shadows*, "A man's body is a most peculiar construct. A woman's body contains symmetry of purpose - . . . A man is an idiot on two legs with a tap of semen between the testicles; his life-force is stored in a vulnerable



exterior container" (*BOS* 90).

Both Anita and Namita are instinctive writers who prefer pattern to plot. They do not limit their writings to the art of deliberately fitting a story into a well structured plot, rather first think of a pattern and then narrate the psychic stages of their protagonists at some crucial juncture of their lives. To validate this effort they have forged a style which is supple and suggestive, enough to convey the interplay of thoughts, feelings and emotions. Although each book has an individual structural pattern but every novel justifies the relation between language and artistic function. The words and phrases have been carefully chosen but with a spontaneity and originality, such that it well fits the incidence or feelings they wish to delineate. Desai and Gokhale do not give significance to the theme but catenate their insight. There is an intrinsic relationship between animate and inanimate objects in their novels. The antithetical technique adopted is also clearly visible in their novels, where the protagonists vacillate between their world of past and of imaginary dreams and that of sordid reality of the present. This is true with almost all the protagonists whether it be Maya, Sita, Monisha, Deven, Nanda Kaul or Priya, Gudiya, Rachita, and Shakuntala. It is an arduous job to force a way into the inside of a human psyche, but it well fits into the narrative skill of Desai and Gokhale. This is achieved to a large extent by the art of never leaving the abstract notions as abstract, but exemplifying them with concrete images. For example Maya's feelings when Gautama soothed her exhausted mind by saying, "It is best to accept, Maya.", are revealed through her words, "I heard these phrases frequently, and each time I felt them soothe me like a stream of cold water that tumbled through the ferns of Darjeeling, . . . "(*CTP* 48). Or in Gokhale's *A Himalayan Love Story*, Mukul's perplexity and irritation with Parvati's unwelcome responsibility is expressed as annoyance with worms, "Then one day I was cutting bhindi in the kitchen. It was crawling with green worms. The more I chopped, the more worms crawled out. Ladies fingers. There were insects in my mind. They were crawling out" (*AHLS* 182).

Simple English vocabulary has been employed by the novelists but the effect has been heightened and intensified by an interesting combination of words like "flower-soft eyes and moth-warm, mother-soft grey and fawn" (*CTP* 156) or "fevered-hand" (*AHLS* 46) or "acid smoke and angry wax" (*BOS* 30). Desai and Gokhale prefer simple words to polysyllabic ones. Both also adopt original words from Indian languages which assist them in creating a uniquely native atmosphere. Anita, for example, uses words like 'baksheesh' (*CTP* 75), 'dhobi' (*CTP* 116), 'Chalo, chalo' (*WSWGTS* 14), 'lungi' (*WSWGTS* 8), 'ayahs' (*WSWGTS* 38), 'chelas' (*WSWGTS* 38), 'cheekoo' (*WSWGTS* 142), 'Amla di' (*VIC* 160), 'babu game' (*VIC* 17), 'fried puris' (*IC* 12), 'Deven bhai' (*IC* 167), 'hai hai' (*IC* 124), 'shamiana' (*IC* 115), 'bibi' (*IC* 90), 'akhadas' (*IC* 53) and many others. Similarly in Gokhale's novels we observe words as 'Asli memsahib' (*PDP* 31), 'that kala kutta' (*PDP* 80), 'kala bhoot' (*PDP* 80), 'mamaji' (*GGG* 15), 'burka' (*GGG* 14), 'choola' (*GGG* 15), 'bhakt' (*GGG* 15), 'mithai' (*GGG* 15), 'silver payalas' (*GGG* 238), 'sagad' (*BOS* 27), 'choti' (*BOS* 14), 'dayans' (*BOS* 14), 'kheer' (*BOS* 15), 'hurkiyas' (*BOS* 200), 'ghagras' (*BOS* 200), 'lal tanki' (*AHLS* 89), 'hut, lachua, hut' (*AHLS* 100), 'gajar-shalgam pickle' (*PII* 11), 'dal roti' (*PII* 11), 'rishta' (*PII* 81) etc. The use of Hindi words is more abundant in Gokhale as compared to Desai.

Another important feature which is important and conspicuous in the narrative style of the two novelists is a considerable use of adverbs of time, place, direction, degree and manner giving their writing a vividness and throwing light on the personality and psychology of the characters. There is also a compact and significant use of adjectives and adjectival phrases to render visibility to the physical and psychological tracts. Transitive and intransitive verbs have been used in balance which help in maintaining the speed of description of a scene or images and sometimes even gears it further. The transitive verbs assist in enhancing the liveliness of the situation or description. A lot of similes, metaphors and fallacies are used to probe deeper into the subconscious depths of the characters. Parenthesis,

exclamation marks, and interjections also find substantial place in their novels to achieve an artistic manner of expression. To quote a few examples of distinctive adjectives used by Desai-"the words dropped into our midst, burningly mnemonic, subtle as a soundless ice-cube, overwhelming lava. The wild, irresponsible longing" (*CTP* 67), which bears a proof to the crowded use of adjectives. 'profound, invulnerable sleep' (*CTP* 81), 'heady, dizzying perfumes' (*CTP* 123), 'beastly, blood-thirsty Calcutta' (*VIC* 94), 'grinning, smirking disastrous old witch' (*VIC* 129), 'insidious city' (*VIC* 189), 'exhausted naked bullis' (*VIC* 189), 'unaccustomed fun' (*WSWGTS* 103), 'tabooed word' (*WSWGTS* 102), 'Bombay women, huge hipped, deep-thighed, pink-gummed, and habitually raucus' (*WSWGTS* 38), 'desulatory, disorderly crowds' (*FF* 12), 'earthbound joggers' (*FF* 205), 'ridiculous magazine' (*IC* 3), 'puerile fantasies' (*IC* 11), "fidling, shifting, unworthy ways' (*IC* 29), 'stained, soiled, discoloured, odorous rags' (*IC* 184), 'unaccustomed stubbornness' (*CLD* 16), 'hidden, scummy pool' (*CLD* 150), 'Quick, nervy and jumpy' (*CLD* 169), 'unwelcome whim' (*FOM* 61), 'crafty, little mosquito' (*FOM* 126). In Gokhale's style also we see such fondness for adjectives. For instance 'obscene looking coconuts' and 'obsessive staring eyes' (*PDP* 3), 'anatomically endangered head' (*PDP* 9), 'owlish youth' (*PDP* 18), 'wicked-waylaid mother' (*GGG* 28), 'star-crossed love' (*GGG* 128), 'demure, downcast eyes' (*AHLS* 96), 'violently patterned nylon sari' (*AHLS* 97), 'diconcertingly gentle voice' (*AHLS* 97), 'pompous bitch' (*BOS* 18), 'fragile frame of a butterfly' (*BOS* 127), "enormous, empty, waiting shell of this edifice' (*BOS* 128), 'untutored squawk' (*SPOM* 114), 'unlikely, mysterious custodian of the temple' (*SPOM* 94). The adjectives have been employed by both the novelists to mirror the physical and psychological states of characters or their surroundings which are successful in arresting the minds of the readers.

A highly vehement feature of Desai's and Gokhale's narrative is the use of irony, which is also the hallmark of post modernistic style of writing. Under the camouflage of beautiful words, the true meaning of life, the

experiences of characters and the psyche has been effectively probed, thereby rendering their total image for immediate understanding and analysis. Through the device of irony Desai and Gokhale achieve the true function of art i.e., to disturb and to remind us of the basic realities ignored by the society. There is an artistic use of irony of situation as well as irony of character in their novels. What is remarkable is that they often combine irony with satirical bitterness to remark upon the present day society and with paradox to present the contradictory nature or thought process of the characters.

As in *Cry, The Peacock* we notice the irony of situation where Maya, while trying to become defensive to save her own life, tragically turns offensive and violent and kills her own husband.

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer* we see the use of irony in expressions as, "Perhaps one should be grateful if life is only a matter of disappointment, not disaster" (*WSWGTS* 130). Hinting at the everyday life of Sita full of disappointments Gokhale ironically presents the reality and stirs us to think whether we should complain about it, would it be of any use or we should be thankful for it being free from big calamities. Sita's psyche is revealed with the help of paradox, "she had the courage, too, the courage of being a coward" (*WSWGTS* 127).

Intense dramatic irony is visible in *Voices In The City* in marshalling events and characters. For example, the instability and temporary nature of postmodern relationships is presented in the outlook of Nirode ironically, "He knew that vocations and employments be no more stable than human relationships, that one could tire of editing poetry as one could tire of old love" (*VIC* 64). Sounding optimistic outwardly, the statement reflects the intrinsic pessimism of Nirode who reveals a paradoxical belief that relationships should be unstable. It is ironical how he compares love to poetry in the sense of being boring and stale as an old piece of unfinished verse, thus trivialising the dignified emotion. Desai herself reflects on the

irony of character of Nirode as she presents Nirode as, "he even smiled ironically" (VIC 67) when Nirode felt appeased to think that David, his friend, is as 'objectionable' (VIC 67) a creature as he himself was and thought "that he had now acquired the power of a true anarchist, the power to attract a disciple" (VIC 67).

In *Clear Light Of Day* the irony of Bim's condition of being betrayed by everyone and bereft of any support is reflected in the unconcern shown by Jaya, "No need to worry about Bim - she's always looked after herself. She can take care of herself" (CLD 245). It is ironical to notice how nobody cares for Bim, thinking that she is self-sufficient and does not need to be looked after.

*In Custody* reflects the bitter irony of anguish over the inability of a person to have power over his own life and how this becomes a general process in the postmodern condition. The novel manifests the termination of an old false friendship and beginning of a new vexatious friendship. Deven ironically quotes these lines, "When calls us away, it is a blessing" (IC 27). These lines are not spoken in a spiritual vein but Deven thinks death to be benediction as it gives a chance to escape the uncontrollable events of life. Deven wanted to be a successful savant but against his desire he became an 'insignificant and gullible nobody' (IC 28). In an ironic tone Desai says, "He was a scholar after all and a lover of poetry" (IC 29). Even Siddique's, his colleague's comment on Deven's fate and luck is ironic when he says, "You are a lucky chap, Deven. I've noticed how things come your way while the rest of us have to go out and work for them" (IC 165). This comment seems to be mocking seeing the course of Deven's life who had never had even a glimpse of the Goddess of Luck. Even the name 'Nur' is ironic. Nur means light but his life journey is contradictory as he represents a light which has grown dim and is fading away. His condition also seems ironical when compared to the huge literary talent he embodies. Thus irony largely sets the tone of the novel.

The novel *Fire On The Mountain* marshalls the protagonist's 'ironic bow to duty that no one had noticed or defined' (*FOM* 20). The whole novel revolves around the way Nanda Kaul is again forced to give that 'ironic bow again' (*FOM* 21) as her grand-daughter drags her back into the life of care and concern for her family. It is deeply ironic the way Nanda's friend Ila Das calls this situation "how marvellous. Your great-grand-daughter? How marvellous, how-I must come and see her" (*FOM* 23). The situation which is full of despair for Nanda is referred as being amazing by her close friend.

The concurrence of MamaPapa in *Fasting, Feasting* is ironical as it indicates how the zone of men is centralized and that of the women is marginalized to the extent of non-existence. Mama succumbs to her lot submissively and Papa assumes an air of authority accepting the existing orders of things in society. Hinting at the patriarchal pride and ego of Papa, ironically Desai says about the mother in the novel, "More than ever now, she was Papa's helpmeet, his consort. He had not only made her his wife, he had made her the mother of his son. What honour, what status" (*FF* 31). Aruna's life, fraught with unconcern is deeply ironic as what is love and care for his family is actually a 'sense of mistreatment' (*FF* 188) for him, as it made him feel trapped and under unwanted restraint.

Gokhale's novels too present the value and autonomy of visual and verbal art as separate from the reality they represent, since they function to present the discordant notes and disharmonies underlined in the novels. As in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* it is ironic to notice how Pandit Kailash Shastry portends the future of Gudiya as "Fortune will follow you wherever you go and not only that, but constant good luck and the blessings of elders" (*GGG* 138). "Fame, name and good fortune" (*GGG* 139) This promise of her ascendance by Pandit is highly ironic as it is contradictory to the trajectory of crisis Gudiya is faced with throughout her life. Gudiya's consideration of Kalki as her dream prince and liberator is also ironic as his treatment of Gudiya is reproachful and contrasted to her expectations.

Irony of existence, its entanglement and incessant struggle is explored with an exuberant richness in *A Himalyan Love Story*. Mukul's conditions is ironical as the same girl, Parvati, who he loved but could not marry tries to yoke herself and her daughter to him. The novel begins with Mukul's return to his home town and in an ironic tone Namita presents how Mukul unaware of the parasitic encounter with Parvati that would turn her life paraplegic. Feeling relieved to come to Nainital he says, "A pool of loneliness that has been travelling within me slid gratefully into the tranquil water. I felt I was finally home, never again to wander or stray into the troubled world below" (*AHLS* 75), as we read the novel further this statement occurs highly ironic on associating it with the challenges he confronts after his return. His coming back is actually a beginning of new tribulations not an end to them.

Gokhale herself comments on the irony of survival as she reflects in *The Book of Shadows*, "It's an irony of the human condition that in the course of their short and tedious passage through the closed corridors of time, humans truly live but a few hours of their lives" (*BOS* 164). Namita uses this device of irony to portray an intense spectrum of emotions. Rachita's life is compounded of ravage and ruinations and we witness how the measure of her solace and happiness is negligible as compared to her limitless extended cord of traumatic confrontation.

In *Shakuntala : Dreams of Passion* there is mockery of the 'matrimonial promises of love' (*SPOM* 111). Shakuntala's ecstasy and fleeing away with Nearchus is also ironical as it turns out to be only an illusion of happiness.

Thus there is a deliberate use of irony by both Desai and Gokhale to represent the impasse of existence. Irony becomes a perfect artistic medium for them to corroborate the torrid atmosphere and the oppressive odour picturised in the text and the incoherence and disjointedness of the characters and their subconscious mind.

Desai and Gokhale are meticulous artists. Their artistic potential is also visible in their lyricism and repetitions of words. There is a frequent use of poetry, songs and rhythmic language which reveal the novelists' power of rhetoric and impart their novels a colloquial colouring. Their narration gets an incantatory tone by the device of repetition. The repetition of significant words help to strongly evoke the atmosphere they wish to create. The novels of Desai and Gokhale have a poetic depth taking the story to the zenith of imagination and thought. Lyrical language compensates the lack of action, wherever it is there. Rather than being superfluous the poetic language of their novels is in resonance with the theme, and thus serves to raise the stature of their novels.

The artistic eminence of Desai and Gokhale which makes their novels highly postmodern is that they are polyphonic or open - ended, that is, their climax is open to various interpretations. Being postmodern writers both Desai and Gokhale take the readers on a voyage of the ups and down in the life of various characters, with the novel culminating in an emotionally charged situation. It is a self-conscious jibe at the multiple meanings contained in their work of art, leaving the judgement entirely in the eyes of the beholder, with the narrator's ambivalent reaction to the conclusion. The story, for them, is just a medium of psychological analysis with their focus invariably on the inner life. Their imagination gives depth to stories and evokes the reader to form their own analysis of right or wrong. The novels do not end with a note of finality or a conclusive statement but the climax indicates only a beginning of a new phase in the protagonist's lives. Thus be it the murder by Maya, compromise of Sita and Priya, suicide of Nanda Kaul or Monisha or Paro, finding a ray of hope in their struggle by Bim or Deven or Gudiya, the loss of support by Parvati, the misfortune of Shakuntala - the novelists do not analyse their acts of fate as wanton or justified rather it is left upon the reader to judge them and frame their own opinions which may vary from person to person as well as from time to time.



Thus, we may say that novel writing to both Desai and Gokhale is an intense and spontaneous activity, with their preoccupation being to explore the intricacies of human psyche and behaviour. The pattern of their novels follows this end. The use of language accordingly, is reflective and introspective. It has substance and depth with specific relation to the emotion and character, the novelist wishes to portray. Both employ the techniques of reconstruction of the past, stream of consciousness, montage, devices of symbolism and imagery, fantasy and imagination, lyricism and open-endedness. The novels get their postmodern shape by their flexible specialization, objective presentations, employment of irony and intertextuality, use of paradox and non-linear flow of events - rational or irrational. Their novels reveal their unflinching love for nature. They are in love with the phonology of sounds and this combined with the picturesque presentation give the novels the impression of a slow motion picture with appreciative insight. The novels of both these authors move in a fluid sequential flow with each event being an extension of the previous one. The events being largely psychological rather than external actions. The plot is extremely contemporary and so is its culmination. Poetry, too, is well rendered by Desai and Gokhale. When comparing their styles, the difference we come across is in dimension. Desai being more experienced and senior in writing, emerges as a more mature artist. Desai's writings interpret and record human life in wider proportions, diversities and complexities. The strength of her literary imagination can be affirmed in her scholastic mastery of stream of consciousness, wider and more profuse use of images and symbols and the penetrating handling of language.

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## Chapter – 7

# SUMMING UP

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The preceding chapters elaborately discuss the concerns and style of narration of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale. The conclusive note would help to form a coherent picture of the novelists' vision as well as the novels and identify their postmodern artifice and theme features by reiterating the salient features of the research indicating the postulates of the two writers.

The aim of the thesis was to discover the similarities and dissimilarities between the novels of Desai and Gokhale and highlight their postmodernist perspective. Its objective was to initiate critical thinking and interpretation of these two writers in postmodern context which would open new avenues of contemplation and give a better understanding of their works. This was done by paying careful attention to the treatment of themes, characters, approach, technique adopted by these writers, through an extensive research of the theory of Postmodernism as speculated and conceptualized by its proponents. Further various recorded reflections and their indepth study about Desai and Gokhale by different critical writers, and the exploration of different psychological and feminist theories of acclaimed writers provided a valuable backdrop for a host of ideas and responses presented in the thesis.

The resultant outcome is the formation of a broader edifice of vision of the novels of Desai and Gokhale with an attempt to move beyond the already stated interpretations and accept them as trailblazing novelists who mark a new transitional phase in Indian English novels with their vigilance and overt sensitivity towards the postmodern process or movement. With their vibrant richness and new sense they cannot be denied the traits of being bold, experimental and extremely contemporary.

To sum up the hallmark traits and themes, as already discussed in foregoing chapters, we can begin by admiring the early literary spark that triggered the deepest desire to write in both Desai and Gokhale resulting in their foray into the literary world. Desai thus began writing at a tender age of seven and Gokhale in her teenage. Deeply fascinated by the field of writing and being avid readers and minute observers of the society around them, their novels no doubt are erudite, spontaneous and impassioned presentations of their attitude towards life. Thus Desai wrote her maiden celebrated novel at the age of twenty-six and Gokhale at twenty-eight which stirred the literary field and brought them on to the international literary stage.

As regards their personal experiences, Desai's life was subject to lesser disturbances, obstacles and biases than those encountered by Gokhale. However, the ambience of chaos and suffering prompted her sensitive mind and stimulated her literary instincts all the more. The works of both are reflections of how deeply they are rooted and attached to their culture, which proliferates and even spills over their works.

The thematic reverberations in the novels of Desai and Gokhale are almost parallel, both authors being indisputably drawn again and again, to introduce, develop and explore the subject of the complexities of human relationships. Relationships – be it man-woman or woman-woman – form an important part of the very narrative structure of their novels. They play a vital role in every story and for every character. Blessed with an intensely sensitive psychoanalytical disposition salvaged by their deep interest in the portrayal of psycho-emotional atmosphere, the novelists triumphantly evince the turmoil and agony felt by the protagonists entangled in the narrow loyalties and unemotional bonds. The dichotomy between the divergent temperaments of husband and wife, their contradictory view points, the bitter experiences of the protagonists and the resultant emotional disruption, agitation and despair caused are recurring themes in the novels of Desai and Gokhale. The maladjustments of characters within the family, the polarization of the family members, their disharmony and their confinements

which make them more vulnerable and insecure are recorded in an engaging manner. Highly emotional and sentimental treatment has been given to ordinary incidents. Both Desai and Gokhale do not fail to recognise the potency and centrality of traditions and institutions like marriage and family, but being postmodernists they concentrate on fragmentation and celebrate the differences that lie at the heart of every affinity. They deny the obligation to maintain these relationships and stick to them merely to keep appearances. There is a hypnotic representation of the inner storm and fury of the protagonists with a pragmatic inclination, without any pretence at posing themselves as social reformers. The difference between the two novelists lies in the severity of reaction manifested by the protagonists which determines their future development or regression. Gokhale does not feel it unfair to break the familial or marital bond if it is solely based on compromise and oppression, not on love and understanding. Desai's characters make greater attempts at reconciliation as compared to that of Gokhale.

Another dominant theme in their novels is revelation of the fulfillment and happiness that may be achieved by the symbiotic bonding between women and their possible advantages which bespeaks of their authorial attitudes. The mutual malevolence, competitiveness and envy which block their options of getting support have also been displayed with an uncanny magnetism. Both display the permanent similar gender effect on the life and psychology of the characters. The protagonists are presented as feeling deeply hurt when their female counterparts become co-exploiters with males and fail to understand and sympathize with their situation. The novelists have exhibited the psychological fact about expectations, which are bound to be associated with motherly or friendship bonds but are smashed in their novels, leading to utter hopelessness and gloom. The protagonists feel insulated when their counterparts behave contemptuously with them. This enhances their strain and stress and makes their crusade towards self-definition all the more difficult. However if they are kind and affectionate

towards each other, it helps them to cling to life more easily and survive against the oppressive paradigms. In the midst of chaos, Gokhale traces the concept of erotic triangle which has not been dealt by Desai in her novels. Similarly sisterhood relation which has immense potential for emotional warmth and sharing on one hand, while on the other can drain one's vitality and make life ludicrous and pathetic has been encoded by Desai. Gokhale's novels are devoid of this female association. These relationships among women are considered by postmodernists as an important tool for rebellion against the prevalent stereotyped value systems. Desai and Gokhale, through their fiction, perpetuate this postmodern idea of women community and collectivity which may assist in saving them from falling prey to the subtle exploitative system.

Although Desai and Gokhale cannot be labelled as feminist writers, but gifted with a feminist consciousness each of their narrative firmly foregrounds a female character who uninhibitedly articulates her utilitarian and self-seeking manipulations in seeking her space in the patriarchal society. Multifarious aspects of women have been skillfully created in flesh and blood. There are women who choose to surrender, to conform and be meek, there are those who prefer to escape and avoid others and there are those who decide to rebel by breaking conventions and take up a new road, where nobody would be able to violate their spirit and their happiness. Without caring to form the image of ideal womanhood, Desai and Gokhale reconstitute their female characters following their own mysterious laws of life. The female characters are caught between two immanent forces, the conventional worldly exterior around them and the inner reality which constitutes their personality. In trying to maintain a harmony between the two they suffer from frustration and disillusionment. The palterer agencies of society and culture expect them to become typical representative figures which would fit into the established norms of ethics and morality. However, women of Desai and Gokhale's novels display real tendencies of postmodern women. Destructuring the traditional cocoon of stereotyped constraints, they

reinterpret their own codes of living in tune with their desires and with the changing social structure of the postmodern times. Desai and Gokhale believe in the enormous strength vested in womanhood. They launch an entirely innovative concept of a new woman, who is aware and conscious of her own identity and needs in this male chauvenistic world. She is ready to struggle with an aura of masculinity and bear the consequences of her attitudinal or verbal brazenness and irreverence, as they may be termed in terms of stated patterns of behaviour. Thus their protagonists, who are quite contemporary in their approach, try to resist their oppression through a self-conscious reversal of the typed image and of cultural patterns. As postmodern novelists, Desai and Gokhale do not wish to please the minds of the flagbearers of society by creating the vision of a flawless woman but reconstitute these dialects to explore the true potential of a woman, who struggles to be acknowledged as an individual and fulfill her urges and wishes. In the deployment of feminine images, Gokhale does so with great candour and lesser inhibition regarding the depiction of sexuality than Desai. Chastity of body is assigned secondary position to chastity of mind. Without any self-guilt, Gokhale's women cater freely to their yearnings and cherish the dream to make a place for themselves. Sexual involvements outside marriage are portrayed in almost all of Gokhale's novels as performing therapeutic function to fill the void in the protagonist's life and give her physical and emotional satisfaction. Thus, the censorship and restrictions on feminine desires is lifted in her novels in a bold and brutally honest language, where honesty of a person lays only to his own conscious and not to the external factors. The magnitude of sexual frankness is lesser in Desai. However, both Desai and Gokhale believe in the philosophy of exhibitionism and spontaneity and reversal of hierarchy and of phallogocentric norms. The challenge and appropriation is however individualistic and not feminist.

Alienation – from self and from society – forms a major framework of the novels of Desai and Gokhale. Loneliness and destruction which lies at the heart of postmodern culture are highlighted with great poignancy and

insight. Going into the depths of the factors that precipitate alienation the novelists depict how the characters are ostracized not only socially but also emotionally and psychologically. This alienation is sometimes forced by external agents and sometimes it is self opted. Mostly it occurs due to problematized family and marriage where different individuals are bound in an unwanted close proximity. The delineation lays bare the precariousness of human life against a glittering background of human relationships, otherwise devoid of any emotional intimacy. The lack of emotional bond brings to the forefront a conflict and disorientation and the protagonist impaired by the strain tends to lose all contact with the people and resigns to a life of depression and embitterment. The anguish of loneliness has been presented by the authors in a penetrating manner. Well-equipped with a critical mind, Desai and Gokhale make the readers aware of the problems and difficulties of the postmodern regime, by drawing interesting parallels in the novels. The portrayal reveals the deep humanity and observant power of its authors who beyond the spangling surface sensitively perceive the pathos of contemporary human condition.

Interwined with alienation is the delineation of assertion in the fiction of Desai and Gokhale. Disowning the imposition of feminity on women as a social construct, the novelists champion uniqueness and centrality of women and advocate the opposition of injustice from which women suffer, rejecting the idea of allowing either males or females to do it. Rebuking every differentiation between individuals on the ground of sex, the female protagonists of Desai and Gokhale strive to assert their individuality and demand freedom of choice and autonomy in every field. Their female characters are referential agents who propagate the idea of common humanity of man and woman as foundations of a balanced societal group. In an authoritative tone the novelists voice the affirmative will of the protagonists which gives direction to their lives without any effort at explaining it as logical or illogical. The novelists do not lay emphasis on the outcome of the journey towards self-realization, but present the frothing pain



in undertaking the pursuit and underline the difficulties faced by the protagonists and their reactions to those obstacles. Their novels reinstate their belief in Indian philosophy which recommends the analysis of various aspects of our soul through an evaluation of self. Knowing oneself is the first step to know and understand humanity. More than the destination, what is more important is comprehension of the need to assume responsibility towards one's 'self'. This is what renders meaning to a person's existence. The route chosen by the protagonists to assert their own wishes and redefine their identity, laid with a number of hurdles, has been vanguarded by both Desai and Gokhale in a vociferous tone. The difference between the two novelists lies in the extent of deviation which is more extreme and superlative in the fiction of Gokhale as compared to that of Desai. The protagonists of Gokhale become users and emerge as desiring women, who try to realize their personhood by making sexual relations acts of non-conformity. They erode and crumble the traditional standards by their overriding obsession with self. Desai's heroines commit murder or suicide or nullify the family values but such sexual involvements are excluded from her textual strategies.

In order to grasp the writer's perception an understanding of the narrative strategies which helps to decode their themes is quintessential. Desai and Gokhale are bearers of tremendous verbal energy which assists them in projecting unabashedly their unconventional literary discourse. Their novels present a wave in women's literary writings where the narrative springs out of their deeply felt sensibilities. Through the use of various techniques like stream of consciousness, montage, diary the psyche of an individual is manifested efficaciously. Their narratives are rendered even more pulsating by the use of flashback to present the reverberations of past memories of the characters and their interconnectedness with the present situations as well as the thought process of the characters. The employment of images and symbols help in the brilliant exposition of the abstract feelings and emotions of the characters and are a witness to the authors' creative,

artistic temperament. By this method the subjective world of the individuals is linked to the wider dimensions and aspects and an apt atmosphere is created. The tragedy of human existence has been communicated in an intense and powerful language. Most of the novels have the protagonists as the narrators of their own story, thus each emotion is presented in precise detail. The language used is simple and lucid, being free from unnecessary ornamentation and verbosity. Besides these features the characteristics which make the texts of Desai and Gokhale essentially postmodern are the use of intertextuality, irony and polyphonic endings. The novels are structured in such a way that intertexts form an important part of their pattern and they proceed in the form of a musical symphony. The poems and prose of other writers are well blended with the total structure of the novel. Irony deepens the strong sense of futile existence of individuals. The flux of time in the novels is not linear but as per the emotional sequence of events. The novels are a re-evaluation of the burden of existence exhausted with incompatible relationships, and not a suggestion to lead a particular way of life, thus they are open-ended. In a self-reflexive manner the narratives portray the disillusionment and decisions of the protagonists, refraining from any admiration or criticism. The readers are free to paraphrase the actions of characters as per their own views. The use of symbols and imagery is more profuse in Desai as compared to Gokhale and the stream of consciousness technique has been more masterfully utilized by Desai than Gokhale. The remarkable maturity of style is matched with the insight and presentation of life in the novels of Desai and Gokhale, thus pronouncing their claim to being writers of unique distinction who have successfully given a new dimension to the fictional world. By their fictional oeuvre they have made phenomenal contribution and have marked a new phase in the field of mature literary writings.

From the foregoing research we can infer that the novelists have established their foray into the era of postmodern fiction by their magnificent literary talent and deep and uncanny insight into the feminine

mind, where they seem to be reaching much closer to the present day realities and situations. The study reveals the common underlying theme in their novels, that is manifestation of individuals who struggle not only to survive but to realize and regain their true individual self, with an objective to clearly expose the complexities of life and analyse human nature, psychologically. The novelists, gifted with a cosmopolitan outlook and a sympathetic understanding of human needs and desires, have a remarkable ability to comprehend and present the emotional problems of their fellow beings. Both Desai and Gokhale have the tendency to turn the focus of their works on to the unexplored inner regions of the human self that have won them laurels in the literary world and have attracted wide readership and attention. All the novels are centred in cities giving a subtle flavour of urban consumer culture. The males in their fiction are mostly practical, successful and insensitive as against oversensitive females. Yoked together in marriage they are unable to maintain the illusory concept of conjugal closeness, leading to suffering and unmitigated loneliness. The sufferer in most of the cases is woman who is relegated a secondary place in the family and condemned to male dictates in society. Emotional consummation and estrangement are construed by both Desai and Gokhale as a reflection of the ambiguous relationships. The protagonists are alienated from their immediate environment as well as from their self. The patriarchal myths are broken in the novels by giving significance to women's psyche. The values that dominate the literature of Desai and Gokhale are those that reinstate the existing power structures and serve to invert the patriarchal traditions. The protagonists do not care for the established image of a woman's role and stand confidently against the stereotyped manipulations to openly voice their own responses towards their functional roles and dissonance with the existing framework of right and wrong. The feminist thrust is thus dissipated in almost all the texts through various attitude revealing strategies as escape, rebellion, illegitimate sexual relations, rejection of institutions and resistance against emotional exploitation.

The research scouts the unexplored avenue in the fiction of Desai and Gokhale, that is, manifestation of the importance of female friendships or associations which can provide alternatives of escape or release from the emotional dissatisfaction or disgust in the postmodern world marked by barbed personal zones. Without any attempt at ennobling motherhood, sisterhood relations and friendships the relations are portrayed paradoxically, where they can be both the cause as well as their protection against social vulnerability. Many a times these relationships become a beacon light showing the path to be followed for personal fulfillment and act as a mirage in their drab existence. The protagonists of both these authors try to create a world where male dominance may be eased out or eliminated. The women in the novels are strong and assertive of their will. The narrative structure of the fiction of Desai and Gokhale suits the preferences and beliefs of the writers and is evident of their artistry and objectivity, where the characters are provided ample opportunity to express the inner workings of their mind and to grow from a critical juncture in their lives towards exercising their right to opt a specific course of action. The novels are like a transparent orb representing the inner world.

The present comparative study highlights the differences besides revealing the similarities between the works of Desai and Gokhale. The primary distinction being in the approach adopted by their protagonists as the heroines of Gokhale are more ruthless in terminating their marriage than that of Desai, who try their best to maintain the wedlock, however it is not at the cost of their identity. Desai has presented sisterhood affiliations and rivalries in exquisite detail while competitiveness between two women to lure the same male for their selfish interests has been dealt with by Gokhale. The moral constraints exercised by Gokhale's heroines are almost negligible while that of Desai are still constituted to some extent by the ethical conditioning of society. Breaking the codes of society the protagonists of both the authors venture unafraid into the future with their body, mind and spirit. But in this pursuit, women of Gokhale's novels see sexual freedom as

a precondition for equality and proclamation of their rights to determine their own actions and choices. The narrative pattern of Desai is a more sparkling spectacle of symbols and imagery and is a more diversified parade of facets of human nature and tendencies than that of Gokhale, whose writing is comparatively less mellowed than that of Desai.

The research reconnoiters the commitment of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale towards creating an awareness and consciousness about the plight of women and their need to traverse beyond living death, not by glorifying the gender framework, but by stepping out of its evil trap and move with an indefatigable zeal to break these chains and stand up unbeaten. The analysis advances the new concept of the institutions of family and marriage, as savored by Desai and Gokhale, which is different from the sclerosed traditional one as they are based on relativity, pragmatism and are realistic as against any idealization or universalization. The study appropriates the insistence on leading life on one's own terms which the novels strongly entail.

The significance of the present study lies in filling the research gap in this field as the fiction of Desai and Gokhale have not been studied so far from a postmodern perspective and a comparative aspect and will help in formulating a new feminine consciousness in keeping with the changing times by relating the works of these writers to the contemporary realities and their pragmatism. The research work calls for an acceptance of the fact that there are no absolute truths, the only reality is what life teaches us by our own experiences. The study is a point from where further studies can be conducted. The novels can be studied in relation to other literary theories and can also be compared to other works of Indian as well as non-Indian writers. These two novelists have authored some other works related to different themes such as immigration and reconstruction of mythology, they can be investigated from various perspectives. A detailed linguistic analysis of their fiction can also be a field of further research for scholars. I hope the research will be a new reflective iota in the field of analytical study.

## SUMMARY

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Postmodernism, from the historical perspective, is a period beyond 1980s which brought a revolutionary transformation not only in the field of literature but also in architecture, painting, sculpture, psychology, sociology, etc. As change is inherent in every being and every phase of a movement, postmodernism began as a wave of transition, from modern which literary means 'just now', to beyond it i.e., 'post just now' or literally, 'after just now'. This inference led to the surface understanding of this expression as being an afterbirth of modernism. However a deeper probe leads to further clarity as modernism itself is unendingly contemporary, being at war with what comes immediately before it - modern is always post something. Thus the modern must inevitably become postmodern. Postmodernism is, therefore, an ever changing way of life and its presentation. It is not a theory but a state of mind, a vision, a perception which is bound to metamorphose.

Postmodernism has been interpreted differently by its propagators. The key thinkers on the global map being Fredreich Neitzche, Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, Jean-Francois-Lyotard, Ihab Hassan, Jean Baudrillard, Linda Hutcheon. An in depth study of their ideas and works leads us to infer the basic tenets of postmodernism as a belief in - taking an interrogative stance towards everything, nurturing paradoxical concepts and presenting them as such, projection and proliferation of differences and complexities, absurdity of life, singularity and individuality, reliance on self-help rather than external resources, spontaneity, immediate satiety, delegitimization, fragmentation and disintegration, provisionality and incoherence, rejection of centrality of power and central sameness, no claim to rationality, truth, reason, permanency, universality or stability.

In coherence with the concept of postmodernism, characteristics of literary postmodernism can be understood as rejection of boundaries

between high and low forms of art, rejection of genre and gender distinctions, giving voice to the marginalised, broadening of thematic range, being free from old rules of taste and judgement. With the vast fundamental changes taking place in the contemporary culture and society, postmodern fiction, with its emphasis on human freedom and emancipation, diversity, spontaneity, individuality, change and disorder reconstructs the modernist literature. Postmodern literature is a part of socio-cultural and historical development and can be viewed as a specific way of depiction of the contemporary life and culture. In simple terms we can say that postmodern art is like an empty room which the owner is free to furnish as per his/her wishes or whims and fancies, without caring for the responses of other people. Whatever the writer writes and however he writes is art, in postmodernism.

The phenomenon became more evident in America and France. Prominent examples are works of John Fowles, Alian Robke Grillet, Thoman Pnychon, John Barth, Kurt Vonnegut, Leonard Michaels, Brigid Brophy and Richard Brautigan, among other postmodernists. However Postmodern fiction in India also witnessed a luxuriant growth at the same time resulting in the creation a new literary epoch depicting contemporary society with insight and objectivity. In the hands of Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Shashi Tharoor, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Namita Gokhale and a few others Indian English novel gained such recognition in India and abroad in the postmodern period the way it had never done before.

The fiction of Anita Desai (1937) and Namita Gokhale (1956) bear affinity to each other in the depiction of their themes and employment of technique. They portray the postmodern culture that we inhabit in the contemporary times. The spirit of postmodernism is reflected in their works where they mirror a denial of any belief in the naive representational scheme, they evade any possibility of rational consideration, focus on consumerism and lack of fixity of any kind in our lives, witness a path breaking shift in thinking, perception, and understanding, represent new life-

choices, scepticism towards universal knowledge, and project a belief in the relativity of self.

In the present thesis entitled “Postmodernist Concerns in the Novels of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale: A Study in Comparison”, the vision of life that is based on contemporary reality of the two promising and distinguished postmodernist writers has been reviewed and studied in detail. The outlook that the novels of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale are Postmodern fictional texts which explore the temper of their times in relation to cultural dynamics has been justified in its full possibility.

What allured my attention was the reading of some of the novels of the two women writers - the way they invite us to rethink and relocate the notions of self, society, community, reason, values and history and do so without any nostalgia or regret and without any utopian aspirations. My interest in these women writers continued to grow as they present different facets of feminine experience, flout the traditional values, unfold the grotesquerie of life and uphold the right of an individual to lead life by his own choice with a superb sense of detail. I have focused my research on the following seven novels of Anita Desai - *Cry*, *The Peacock* (1963), *Voices In The City* (1965), *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975), *In Custody* (1984), *Fire On The Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) and the following six novels *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (1984), *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* (1994), *A Himalayan Love Story* (1996), *The Book of Shadows* (1999), *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* (1995) and *Priya: In Incredible Indya* (2011) by Namita Gokhale.

In order to justify and critically analyze the novels, their themes and technique, the thesis has been divided into seven chapters –

1. Theoretical framework
2. Spirit of the age
3. Intricacies of human relationships



4. Spectrum of female sensibilities
5. Alienation and assertion
6. Narrative pattern
7. Summing up

The opening chapter deals with the framework of research formulating a broad outline of the proposed study. It states the objectives of the present research, the chief being - a critical analysis of the novels by a systematic study of the selected novels on the basis of their themes, characterization and technique, concentration on the postmodernist elements in the novels to show how postmodernism is reflected in these novels, applying certain psychological theories to trace the behaviour of the characters, to point out how the self-actualization process of women is bringing about a change in the life of individuals as well as that of society at large, to conduct a comparative study of the novels of Desai and Gokhale from a socio-cultural and psychological perspective, contribute to the sphere of Indian fiction in English by putting forward an original point of view. The chapter states the hypothesis on which the research is based. The first hypothesis being - Postmodernism is an important literary movement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale have been recognized as leading novelists on the literary horizon. Their fiction can be understood in the light of postmodernism, highlighting the complexities of human relationships, alienation, self-assertion and conflicts of identity. The second statement of hypothesis is - A comparative study of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale can be conducted on the basis of their themes and techniques with the postmodern approach as the framework of analysis. The research methodology adopted for research is also clarified which includes a detailed study of the textual materials of the key thinkers of postmodernism, indepth study of the selected novels, study of some previous critical reviews and articles related to the subject. With the help of the available materials the novels were analysed in comparison to each other thematically and structurally and were evaluated in the light of postmodernism. Their

similarities and dissimilarities were highlighted. *MLA Handbook For Writers of Research Papers* 8<sup>th</sup> edition has been consulted for the purpose of documentation, quotations and bibliography.

The next chapter traces the genealogy of English Fiction in India, where 1930s are considered as the take-off decade, when foundations of great literary careers were laid down. The novelists of this period were more concerned with the social, economic and political conditions. However the second part of the twentieth century marked a paradigm shift in the outlook towards women and led to the growth of feministic literature. Gender issues became their main focus. Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale represent the novelists of this era and exhibit a strong influence of their society, educational and family conditions. What makes them distinct from their contemporaries is their greater interest in the psychology of the characters and their inner dilemmas and conflicts than external circumstances. An attempt has been made in this chapter to describe the different parameters of postmodernism by interpreting the theories of its key thinkers.

The third chapter which introduces the theme of human relationships in the novels deals with the complexities underlying these interactions. The analysis lays bare the deference shown by men to the emotional and physical fulfillment of women. Love, sex and marriage are major themes of fiction of both Desai and Gokhale. Most of the wedlocks are failures. The incompatibility in marriages is chiefly due to incompatibility of temperaments and lack of communication, which is a postmodern horror. Although both the authors accept that relationships are indispensable part of human life but at the same time marital relationships are presented non-chalantly. Due to lack of fulfillment the resulting mental agony, frustration, fear and inner conflicts are highlighted. There is no attempt at any justification. The writers project the postmodernistic view that since husband and wife are two different individuals, differences are bound to be there. Any attempt at negating this diversity is futile. Hypocrisy and appearances of any kind are discarded in their works. The difference between Gokhale

and Desai lies in the extent of delegitimization. Gokhale's women have a lesser hesitation in deviating from the institutional ideas and ending their marriages than the protagonists of Desai who, without any exception, try their best to maintain the wedlock. Another aspect of relationships dealt with in this chapter is, mutual relationship between women. Postmodernists consider these female encounters functional in redemption and re-integration of women, if they are based on motivation and support, the examples of which are characterised in Desai's and Gokhale's fiction. They can be an important source of communion. On the other hand, if these interactions are competitive and based on jealousy they can result in life-long rivalries and misunderstandings and can scar the psychology of individuals involved, permanently. Desai's depiction of intimate as well as intimidated sisterhood bonding is missing in Gokhale whereas Gokhale's perspective on erotic triangle is absent in Desai. Motherhood finds voice in fiction of both the writers.

In the fourth chapter female sensibilities in the fiction of both Desai and Gokhale in its vast range has been mirrored. Their fiction revolve around the world of women - the chief protagonists are mostly females. Oppressive and discriminatory attitude towards women is depicted in its full intensity. The novels reflect how patriarchy deliberately distorts and enhances the gender differences and try to impute inferiority on females. However the wish to be free is instinctual in every being. This results in external and internal turmoil. The novelists lambaste the patronising attitude of men towards females as it results in the ruination of the inner self. The protagonists are extremely conscious of their identity and separate existence. Being atypical and non-representational figures, the females expand their focus from society or family to themselves. Manifold aspects of womanhood have been manifested in the novels. There are submissive, escapist, rebellious, as well as estranged women. Psychological aspects dominate the text. There is a constant postmodern questioning of centralisation of power. Women are self-evolved and establish authoritative defiance towards the

traditional standards. The dissimilarity between the two novelists is exhibited in the free play of choice of pre and extra-marital physical relationships by the protagonists of Gokhale, who consider these sexual attachments as a way to fill their emotional void and get individual fulfillment. While Desai's protagonists consider virtue and chastity still relevant to the new structure of living.

Chapter five deals with alienation which is another important feature of postmodern environment delineated in the novels. Isolation, restlessness and meaninglessness of life and relationships are characteristic of postmodern consumerist culture. The protagonists are presented as buffeted by chaotic circumstances. The authors sketch the confusion, frustration, estrangement of characters from the society as well as within themselves. This alienation is sometimes instinctive and self-imposed resulting either due to expectations from others or due to over-sensitive nature of the protagonist. Many a times the cause is lack of substantial relationships owing to which they feel emotionally unattached. Different facets of alienation are mirrored in the fiction of Desai as well as Gokhale. Wearied by the futility of life, they suffer social alienation. Besides this, emotional and psychological alienation have been considered as a significant part of their fragmented life. Helplessness and pitiful existence are communicated effectively. Alienation is portrayed in its extremities. Most of the characters have a tendency to withdraw from the society due to their frothing discomfort. This realisation of self-alienation makes both Desai and Gokhale essentially postmodern in their approach.

Assertion has also been focused upon in the fifth chapter as affirmation of one's desires and of one's individuality is a prominent trait of postmodernism. Desai and Gokhale have created female characters of flesh and blood who are instinctive and spontaneous. They break their long silence in the face of patriarchy. The women characters are not static rather we observe a significant growth in their self-consciousness with the advancement of plot. They, with their immense potential, are ready to affirm

their dynamic participation and independence in every facet of life concerning them. The women in their fiction symbolise determination and confidence. Rejecting their submissive roles, the women refuse to be restricted within their limited boundaries to act like shadows of their male counterparts. Refraining from any idealization the patriarchal interests are decoded in search of their own identity. They assert their right to live life on their own terms and safeguard their survival and self-image. The novelists make us realize the undeniable presence of females struggling for the authenticity of their existence and identity. The journey of the new woman has reached its acme in the postmodern period with these two outstanding literary personalities. The autonomy undertaken by Gokhale's women is more alien to traditional thinking as compared to that of Desai's women. However, both favour the journey towards assertion of identity even if it is bristled with thorns.

The sixth chapter deals with the analysis of the narrative techniques employed by Desai and Gokhale as it is important to understand the narrative pattern of the writers to chalk out their ideas, concepts and attitudes. The novelists record the external events and the workings of the subconscious by employing the various techniques of stream of consciousness, diary technique, montage, soliloquy, interior monologue, flashback to reflect the interplay of thoughts, feelings and emotions of the characters. Anita Desai uses symbols and imagery more profusely as compared to Gokhale. Moreover Namita Gokhale's novels are gothic characterised by a macabre humour as contrasted to the fiction of Anita Desai which are sensitive and psychological and humour is largely ironical. What is vital to the postmodernist construction of the novels is the use of the technique of intertextuality and irony. The novelists allude to poetry and prose of many celebrated authors which makes their works open to wider interpretations and dissolves the boundaries between different genres. Irony and polyphonic endings are other postmodernistic devices used by Desai and Gokhale. The novels are left open to the interpretations of the readers which

may change from person to person and with time.

In the conclusive chapter it has been inferred that the novelists have established their foray into the era of postmodern fiction by their magnificent literary talent and deep and uncanny insight into the feminine mind, where they seem to be reaching much closer to the present day realities and situations. Their novels are undoubtedly a clear exposition of the complexities of life and deep psychological analysis of human nature. The novelists, gifted with a cosmopolitan outlook and a sympathetic understanding of human needs and desires, have a remarkable ability to comprehend and present the emotional problems of their fellow beings. Both Desai and Gokhale have the tendency to turn the focus of their works on to the unexplored inner regions of the human self that have won them laurels in the literary world and have attracted wide readership and attention. The authors, having spent major part of their lives in metros, centre their protagonists in the cities, giving a subtle flavour of the consumer culture of urban life. The males in their fiction are mostly practical, successful and insensitive as against oversensitive females. Yoked together in marriage they are unable to maintain the illusory concept of conjugal closeness, leading to suffering and unmitigated loneliness. The protagonists of Gokhale are more ruthless in terminating their marriage than that of Desai, who try their best to maintain the wedlock, however it is not at the cost of their identity. Even the atmosphere of the family is hostile towards the females, be it the males or their female counterparts, they fail to offer any solace to the perturbed protagonists. Any attempt to reach out to another human being ends in a fiasco and they feel alone. As per the postmodernist thinkers, women can help each other to learn survival lessons. In the same vein, the novelists have stressed the importance of female friendships or associations which can provide alternatives of escape or release from the emotional dissatisfaction or disgust in the postmodern world marked by barbed personal zones. Without any attempt at ennobling motherhood, sisterhood relations and friendships, these relations are portrayed paradoxically, where they can be

both the cause as well as their protection against social vulnerability. Many a times these relationships become a beacon light showing the path to be followed for personal fulfillment and act as a mirage in their drab existence. Desai has presented sisterhood affiliations and rivalries in exquisite detail while competitiveness between two women to lure the same male for their selfish interests has been dealt with by Gokhale. Emotional consummation and estrangement are construed by both Desai and Gokhale as a reflection of the ambiguous relationships. The protagonists are alienated from their immediate environment as well as from their self. The postmodern individuals in the novels do not seek social sanctity by fulfillment of societal and familial expectations from them, rather they deny any conformity which may result in their marginalization. The patriarchal myths are broken in the novels by giving significance to women's psyche. The values that dominate the literature of Desai and Gokhale are those that reinstate the existing power structures and serve to invert the patriarchal traditions. The protagonists do not care for the established image of a woman's role and stand confidently against the stereotyped manipulations to openly voice their own responses towards their functional roles and dissonance with the existing framework of right and wrong. The feminist thrust is thus dissipated in almost all the texts through various attitude revealing strategies as escape, rebellion, illegitimate sexual relations, rejection of institutions and resistance against emotional exploitation. The moral constraints exercised by Gokhale's heroines are almost negligible while that of Desai are still constituted to some extent by the ethical conditioning of society. The protagonists of both these authors try to create a world where male dominance may be eased out or eliminated. Extremely conscious of the significance of rendering meaning to one's own existence, the novelists manifest individuals who struggle not only to survive but to realize and regain their true individual self. The protagonists are strong and assertive of their will and confidence. Breaking the codes of society they venture unafraid into the future with their body, mind and spirit. In this pursuit women of Gokhale's novels see sexual freedom as a precondition for

equality and proclamation of their rights to determine their own actions and choices. The narrative structure of the fiction of Desai and Gokhale suits the preferences and beliefs of the writers and is evident of their artistry and objectivity, where the characters are provided ample opportunity to express the inner workings of their mind and to grow from a critical juncture in their lives towards exercising their right to opt a specific course of action. Postmodern devices like intertextuality, circular narration, irony, imagery and symbolism have been employed besides stream of consciousness, montage, diary and other strategies to provide aesthetic merit to the text as well convey the theme in a larger objective manner. The fiction of Desai and Gokhale are thus striking samples of their authorial posture which negates capitulation to orthodoxy at the cost of self-destruction and epitomizes the journey to fetch one's identity.

The significance of the present study lies in filling the research gap in this field as the fiction of Desai and Gokhale have not been studied so far from a postmodern perspective and a comparative aspect and will help in formulating a new feminine consciousness in keeping with the changing times by relating the works of these writers to the contemporary realities and their pragmatism. The research work calls for an acceptance of the fact that there are no absolute truths, the only reality is what life teaches us by our own experiences.



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ISSN 2277-5587  
Indexed in ULRICH & IJIF  
Impact Factor 3.193  
Registered & Listed by UGC 43289

# Shodh Shree

(International Referred Journal of Multidisciplinary Research)

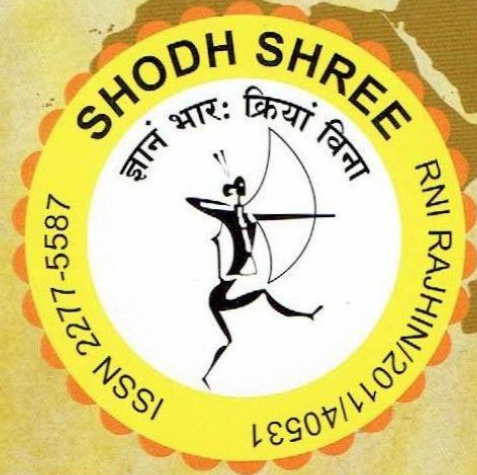
## शोध श्री



Issue - 4

October-December 2017

RNI No. RAJHIN/2011/40531



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# Shodh Shree

(International Referred Journal of Multidisciplinary Research)

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## Post Modernist Artifice in The Novels of Namita Gokhale

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### Abstract

*Namita Gokhale has received wide critical acclaim as an unconventional story teller. A wide spectrum of concerns, specially related to women, have been inflected by her through postmodernist aesthetics. The postmodern spirit lies coiled within her literature in the form of alienation from reasoning, cause and effect phenomenon, society and in the intense consciousness of self. Her novels are a manifestation of a new paradigm of mind and culture where she refrains from any form of totalization and celebrates indeterminacy and unfinalizability of meaning, truth and reality. Namita's oeuvre is best defined by her ability to apply postmodernist plurality to produce new and unusual insights into the depth of human nature and needs.*

**Keywords:** *Postmodern spirit, self, alienation, plurality.*

Contemporary literature is a witness to modern man's anti-illusionist sense of isolation and his quest to redefine his identity by raising consciousness and evaluating the existing dilemmas and mental turmoils. As a contemporary post modernist writer, Namita portrays the triumph of the uncanny and subverts the notion of ultimate meaning of anything. Her humanistic concerns are displayed by her powerful presentation of the innate longings and cravings of a woman lifting the veil of secrecy from female sexuality never discussed before, so boldly in public. The hidden unexplored sexual aspects of a woman's psyche, have been discussed in her novels in an outrageous manner. The Postmodernist genre of writing suits her as she undermines the commonly held notion of things and provides new and unusual solutions to the problems of the protagonists.

*Paro: Dreams of Passion*, the debut novel of Gokhale challenges the trends and values of the conventional patriarchal society and raised much controversy in the literary and social circles due to the writer's audacious approach. It exposes the inherent hypocrisy and double standards of society. Paro, the protagonist, being a postmodern woman defies the uniform pattern of leading a life chalked by the society and unsettles people by her unusual ideas and actions. She signifies real passion, spontaneity, natural charm and revels in the art of how to tame the needs of men around her. She is liberal and independent as compared to her counterparts and is a touchstone of a postmodern woman who leads life by her own choice. Paro has no inhibitions in seducing men, even if they are older or younger to her or her friends' husbands. Refusing to get tied down to the humdrum monotony of being a house-wife, she moves boldly and freely in society and repulses the idea of clinging to the traditional image of a

'homemaker'. Paro, in the beginning of the novel, is married to BR, a sewing machine business tycoon. But one night she finds her husband screwing the neighbour's daughter in her bedroom. Her husband's infidelity deeply hurt her and she tried to wound herself with a knife. When B.R. saw this, he did not pay much heed, instead he laughed at Paro. This faithlessness and promiscuity of her husband struck Paro deeply. She accepted that good and evil are a part of the universe and you can't stand outside the universe. Great promises and ethics do not exist in reality. To take revenge from B.R., she also chooses the path of plurality. Namita, here presents the belief that a wife is not husband's bond-slave. But his companion and equal partner in all his joys and sorrows. She, as a human being, is also free to choose her own path. She does not aim to make her novels accurate representations of life but simply portrays how her character's confront life without any attempt at reasoning or justifying their acts, Paro, thus separates from her husband and feels herself free. She does not search for a stable meaning in life but wishes for temporary satiety. Just for the namesake of security in marriage she does not make any compromise. Shattering the established codes of morality, she moves from one relationship to another, from B.R. to Bucky Bhandpur, a test cricketer to Avinendra, the son of Minister of State of Industry and then to a politician Shambu Nath Mishra. She displays a wonderful potential of making a virtue of necessity. Namita does not advocate the ideal of self-sacrifice for woman but through the narrative device of irony she lays bare the complex ideology of exploiting stereotypical feminine image and her role in society. Demeaning the normative pattern, Paro follows her urge. However, Namita does not recommend or criticise any mode of living. Every relation of Paro is based upon her desire to get physical satisfaction and ends in hatred, vice and sin eventually. In the end, she commits suicide. Being a postmodernist writer to the core, Namita leaves her novels open-ended. The readers are

free to decipher their own meaning and articulate their opinions.

A similar postmodern firelight is encountered in Namita's *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, where the author has traced the female development through its formative stages – childhood, youth and sexual initiation. She describes, through the central character Gudiya, how the suppressive forces of society at every rung of ladder result in a growing lava within a female's consciousness, which bursts out at the peak of disaster breaking the threads of guilt, monotony and resentment. Gudiya is a teenage girl, who lives with her grandmother and has nobody to depend on except Ammi, her sole caretaker. Ammi, the grandmother, is a prostitute turned saint who resorts to spirituality as a means of livelihood. From an old haveli full of servants, Ammi and Gudiya shift to a temple for their survival. Gudiya yearns for meaningful communication which she is unable to get. With Ammi's increasing detachment for Gudiya, the teenager starts romanticizing the institution of marriage. She aspires for love and harmony in wedlock. Dissatisfied and frustrated she daydreams of a prince charming who would relieve her of her restricted spaces. Her fantasy is further fired by Pandit Kailash Shastry, a devotee of her grandmother, who assures her that the void in her life would be filled by the coming of an avatar, Kalki on a pale horse. With a hope to change her present and future, Gudiya clings to her romanticism. Resultantly, when she sees a young handsome, orphan 'bandwallah', she assumes him to be no other than Kalki and gets infatuated to him. Being with him relieves Gudiya of her irksome domesticity and isolation. In Kalki she finds her liberator. But all this soon turns out to be paradoxical calculatedness. Kalki is a self-seeking and self-absorbed individual who is oblivious of Gudiya's needs and happiness. His love is inconstant and is in conflict with Gudiya's concept of love and marriage, who considers them as her chief destiny. Their union becomes a process of romantic misjudgement and leads Gudiya towards the quest of self learning. Kalki

as a typical male, treats her badly since their engagement and maintains a considerable distance from her. Gudiya desperately tries to please Kalki by changing her appearance and looks but fails miserably. Kalki's habit of drinking and gambling and his neglecting behaviour frustrates her. However with the help of Phoolwati, her friend and guide, she realises that a bond of symbiosis between her and Kalki is impossible. She rejects the time honoured archetype of womanhood that demand losing one's self for mate, children and family. Gudiya refuses to assume the role of a waste. She displays sense, and respecting their fundamental differences, she frees Kalki of his responsibilities and allows him to go to Bombay to pursue his career and ambitions. Namita's views about marriage and female identity can be explicitly supported by D.H. Morgan's words : "*While it is true that marriage, the home and the family form the major areas of a woman's life (and hence should form the major areas for change), it is also true that the role of a woman in modern society is not simply the role of a wife plus the role of a mother plus the role of a daughter – and so on. In other words her identity is not simply a sum of domestic based identities.*"

Namita, here projects the belief that the cage of being a woman-wife-mother is not inescapable. Women in her novels are not helpless creatures but are more than just an aggravate of their various domestic roles contenting that true identity can be obtained only when a woman evolves a role for herself in the wider canvas of life. She does not suggest an annihilation of all values or codes of conduct but as a postmodernist writer, Namita attempts to follow the subtle, powerful effects of differences already at work within the illusion of a dazzling harmony.

**Shakuntala** : *The Play of Memory* also presents the postmodern emotional impairment and alienation in a powerful narrative style. Without any garb of moralising or respectability, the psychological dilemmas and insecurities of the

agonised soul of Shakuntala have been delineated in the novel. The novel is a journey of a woman who is introduced as a girl child of five and by the end of the story she matures into a strong, experienced and mature woman. Shakuntala is a carefree and high-spirited daughter of a widowed mother who is too authoritative and represses the freedom of Shakuntala at every point. She cherishes the desire to escape the emptiness and passive complicity of her maternal home and thus become eager to be married. Unbearable staleness of her childhood lead her to marry Srijan, chief of fourteen villages and a widower. Her marriage is just an agreement and not a blissful event, settled by her mother. Shakuntala is his third wife. In the beginning, she enjoys the freedom given to her by srijan but the incompatibility in their temperaments snuffs out the spirits of Shakuntala. Srijan starts imposing code of conduct upon Shakuntala. He teaches her the importance of conformity and fidelity of a woman. He believes the self-effaciveness of a wife to be an important virtue. But Shankuntla finds it difficult to accept marriage as an oppressive remnant of patriarchy and is unable to devitalize her spirits. She further becomes restless when Srijan brings home another woman, Kamalini. Unable to give birth to Srijan's child and the presence of the other woman, Shakuntala suffers from deep anguish, insecurity, fear, hopelessness and identity crisis. She rejects the stereotypical image of a marginalised wife who is supposed to work out an ethic of sacrifice and accommodation. She is not a meek woman. On the contrary, the rejection and disapproval she faces strengthen her from within and she emerges as a self-asserting woman who batters through the pretensions and hypocrasies of society to establish her voice and identity. With a determined perception of her own needs, she elopes with another man, Nearchus. Freed of any marital obligations, she is happy with young and well-built Nearchus but even this illusion does not last long. This relationship too turns out to be emotion -

draining. It is Shakuntala's ill fate that both the men with whom she is associated become instruments of her dissatisfaction and unhappiness. Grappling with meaninglessness, she does not give up, and leaves Nearchus too to find her spiritual self along with her unborn child. At this juncture, we are reminded of the expression of Shashi Deshpande in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*.

"Human beings..... they're going to fail you. But because there's just us, because there's no one else, we have to go on trying. If we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk."

Namita Gokhale too advocates unshackling of all constraints. She nowhere demeans the institution of marriage but derides the claustrophobic role-playing as a wife and mother in a traditional marriage. Being postmodern writing her novels jeopardise the conventional equations and renegotiate the established sex roles.

In the postmodern era, with the growth of new perceptions and attitudinal changes in society, it has been recognised that decoding of established representational pattern is necessary. The three fictions of Namita discussed under study, attempt to deconstruct the 'binary opposition' between sexes and dignify the innate differences among human beings, irrespective of their gender. Delivering her characters from reason,

the author support their instinctive nature given to the immediate fulfillment of every mental and physical impulses. Namita believes that the ideals of losing one's self and that of a quasi-sexless, tangentially platonic and utterly romantic relationships are just erected to safeguard power politics. She reveals the ambiguity and shallowness of marital relations and instead of portraying her protagonists as relics of an old culture and bygone era, the major issue for her is to be able to exist and quench their hunger for identity. As a postmodernist Namita believes that a man is free to cast himself as he wants and thus resists from passing any value judgements respecting the existential authenticity of each individual.

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ISSN 2348-3857

# Research Reinforcement

(A Peer Reviewed International Refereed Journal)

## रिसर्च रिइन्फोर्समेंट

Year 3

Volume II

November 2015 - April 2016

# Research Reinforcement

(A PEER REVIEWED INTERNATIONAL REFEREED JOURNAL)

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# Image of Women in the Novels of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale: A Comparative Study



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## Abstract

*The gripping and nuanced narratives of Anita Desai and Namita Gokhale present relationships as the focal point. The literary world of both the writers project women characters as the crux. Marital maladjustment and male domination precipitating into fragmentation and heterogeneity of sexes have been depicted through comprehensive characterization. Emancipatory ideals of women emulate from their early victimization, their exasperation and eventual confrontation with subjective meaning of life. The theme of alienation is interwoven in different aspects like self-pity and escapism. Due to emotional incompatibility between partners the characters of the two novelists suffer from existential crisis when the quest for self begins, whereby they succeed in maintaining their dignity and individuality.*

**Keywords:** *Troubled Sensibility, Self-Abasement, Social Vertigo*

*"Tradition, transition and modernity are the stages through which the woman in Indo- Anglican novel is passing".*

**Meena Shirwadkar**

Post- modernist Indian writers depict both the diversity of women and the diversity within each woman, rather than limiting the lives of women to one ideal. The novels emerging in the twenty-first century furnish examples of a whole range of attitudes towards the imposition of tradition, and an analysis of the family structure and the caste system as the key elements of patriarchal social organization. The work of Indian women writers is significant in making society aware of women's demands and in providing a medium of self- expression.

Anita Desai presents a new dimension to English fiction through the exploration of troubled sensibility, a typical neo-Indian phenomenon. In order to place Anita Desai in proper perspective it is essential to compare her with the other women novelists who have more or less the same thematic and theoretical exposure and who, in their own way, deal with the commonly shared

theme of human relationship. Namita Gokhale's fictional oeuvre too probes into the human psyche and offers a psychological delineation of characters and their sensibilities.

Although some post-modernist feminists claim that traditional forms of female oppression still exist in modern society and feminist politics cannot be abandoned prematurely, yet the images of women in South Asian novels have undergone a change in the last three decades.

The earlier notion about women as a shadow figure to a male caretaker is he a father, a husband or a son, continues to persist. But a special positive power that comes from suffering and self-sacrifice has given way to the alternative ideal of self-assertion. Women in the novels of Desai and Gokhale successfully defy traditional mores. Women today, after hundreds of years of struggle are in a negotiating position and they do have choices.

Women narratives in India revolve around the institution of marriage that has received social

approval and sanction in all cultures and at all times. The institution of marriage is the most glorified and sacrosanct pattern of existence socially, religiously and sexually. But it is also, significantly the patriarchal weapon that finalizes the complete subversion and obliteration of women.

In *Clear Light of Day* Mrs. Desai portrays the fears, needs, frustrations and guilt of the two major women characters- Bim and Tara. Patriarchy permits no alternative to marriage and attempts with utmost cruelty to thwart the individuality of even single women like Bim in *Clear Light of Day*. Bim, how may be considered a female hero in the novel, poses the question of true and false selves before us, which may be differentiated as the idea of what one is according to oneself as opposed to the idea of one by Society Bim undergoes a period of inner conflict. The irony is that in spite of her sacrifice for the family everyone is busy in his or her family and she gets nothing but bitterness and melancholy which shatter her balance at times. Although Bim seems very independent, there are obviously spheres that she feels that she is unable to handle as a woman, that her society has prevented her from being equipped to handle. We see this in the way that she manages the household and also in her insecurity about the family business wherein she relies on her brother-in-law's advice. But in the whole gamut of Indian cultural and social beliefs she succeeds in presenting herself as a human being with a mind. She portrays the meaning of being a woman in modern India. She makes no attempt to completely acquiesce to societal desires and norms but on the contrary propagates that she has the right to survive and to shape her life according to her needs.

In the Misra sisters, we see the opposite of Bim's stubborn independence. They are women ready to reconcile to their lot; their lifelong goal being becoming housewives. Though they are successful in marrying, they are rejected by their husband as being too traditional and old-fashioned. They are representations of mere stereotypical women. They silently suffer at the

hands of their father, brother and husband. They are ready to bear the crushing burden of their marriage at all levels, as it is the only way of life they have known.

The novelist has meticulously depicted the relation the two sisters-Tara and Bim. Tara is timid and submissive, self-assured and dull mentally. She is always quiet and disapproves of Bim's intellectual strides. Tara was afraid of school life whereas Bim has devotion for studying and later for teaching. "Tara looks down upon her school life a kind of confinement. She makes no friends when the others cluster around, sharing a delicious secret like a lollipop passed from one to another for an unhygienic lick, Tara was left out. If they are choosing teams for a game, Tara is always the last one standing forgotten and wretched, and then one of the leaders would reluctantly agree to include her. She was no good at any game while Bim had a natural affinity with the bat and ball, and had the most splendid coordination." (*Clear Light of Day*, 124.)

Tara's marriage to domineering and egocentric Bakul turns out to be a similar convenient arrangement as that of Maya in *Cry the Peacock*. Both marriages point out qualities and shortcomings, capability and weaknesses of husband-wife and projects how day have not cautiously and deliberately been balanced. It results in conflicts, desperation and loneliness. Women who are treated casually become sufferers eventually in these conflicts. In case of Tara Desai comments: "He even came closer to her and touched her cheek, very lightly, as if he could hardly bear the unpleasant contact..... how she could only collapse, inevitably collapse." (*Clear Light of Day*, 18)

Desai's novels depict the immense problems and obstacles women have to undergo only because of their sex, society's mental set-up and segregation of roles by society. But she also suggests that marriage does not throttle independence and a sense of self in the women may be sufficient to sustain oneself.

In *Voices in the City*, Monisha lives a fragmented and famished life. She is caught in a true

existentialist contingency and suffers from a nervous anxiety. The alienation between Jiban and her is rooted in their different temperaments, and Jiban's inability to understand and fulfill the emotional needs of his wife. The husband has no time for his wife. He is so much under the influence of his family that he goes to the extent of blaming his wife for stealing money from his pocket. There is no element of love in Monisha's life. Monisha craves for privacy because she is unable to share the world of her in-laws. Her lonely broodiness brings her to the idea of death: "But I have no faith, no alternative to my confused despair, there is nothing I can give myself to, and so I must stay..... Ah yes, yes then it is a choice between death and mean existence, and that surely, is not a difficult choice." (Voices in the City, 122)

Another major character Amla also suffers from existential pangs. Amla is a modern predicament who becomes anxious about the unpleasant change that has come over Monisha and Nirode after their arrival in Calcutta. Her love relationship with Dharma suggests to her the loss of her own identity. Monisha's death shocks her; giving up her quest she chooses a life of compromise. Amla, like other women realizes the hollowness and futility of her being. Her mental disturbance, anxiety and irritation are adroitly portrayed by Desai.

Cry the Peacock by Anita Desai presents the incompatible marriage of the protagonist, Maya. Maya is yoked inevitably like one bull with another, with the son of her father's friend. She is married to an older man, nearly twice her age, Gautama, a very reputed lawyer. They are quite opposite to each other. Sentiments of discontent, injustice and powerlessness simmer through the text. Maya is born of a traditional God-fearing family and brought up in a protected atmosphere. Unaware of the unpleasant realities of life she tells in these words, "my childhood was one in which much was excluded, which grew steadily more restricted, unnatural even, and in which I lived as a toy prince in a toy world. But was a pretty one." (Cry the Peacock, 59) Gautama,

however is a practical, rational and professionally busy man. Their marital discord is based in their contrasting characters and family background.

Maya is victim of emotional deprivation. Though Gautama loves Maya but there is a lack of intimacy, tenderness, communication and companionship between them. Gautama has intelligence and understanding whereas Maya craves for sensuousness. Lack of mutual concern leads to apathy which causes the total breakdown of husband-wife relationship. Her husband's insensitive treatment makes her stop behaving like a normal lady and start behaving like a child to get attention. Crushed by smashed sensibilities, she turns to her dog Toto for affection as a child substitute. The death of her pet dog, makes the situation worse. The disinterested tendency of her husband hurts her. He knows very little about her and dismisses her grief with a mere "it is all over." (Cry the Peacock, 89) Maya has neither a career nor does she take divorce.

Some other female characters in the novel are Pom and Leila, who are Maya's friends. Leila has married for love and has chosen a career as a college lecturer. She loves her husband till death. Even Pom's wedlock presents continuous clashes and seclusion. Nila is the only one who divorces her husband, breaking the hegemony.

The female characters of Desai continuously try to listen to the voice of their conscience and revolts. But, unfortunately, they fail, miserably either due to the impact of culture and tradition, or fear of stigma, or timidity or all these combined together.

Even Namita Gokhale illustrates how the mental structuring of Indian women has its own ingrained parameters and boundaries. The deep-seated belief in biological inferiority, in dependence on man, formulates a perspective which is a truism even today for the contemporary writing. According to T.N. Madan, "The Indian woman is, it would seem, forever nailed to her cross." The sanctity of the conjugal and familial periphery forbids an exposure of the inner world of a woman. However, Gokhale has commendably

achieved an externalization of the private world of her female protagonists. Amidst the weariness of self-abasement and stagnation the women are presented as trying to employ the strategy of withdrawal.

Paro : *Dreams of Passion* presents the protagonist's struggle who longs for a new ambience and a new satisfying relationship where she can become the master of her 'self'. "Paro was a child of privilege. I couldn't remember her ever passionately wanting anything, she took the luxury and adulation that surrounded her for granted, as a part of the perks. But now, with the despondent Lenin by her side, she had her first experience of deprivation indignities of need." (Paro: *Dreams of Passion*, 24) Namita in her novels shows her preoccupation with the modern Indian woman's search for sexual freedom and self-realization. She is interested in exploring life, trying to plunge below the surface and plunging the depths. She unravels the struggle of woman to come out of her closed room and get individual freedom from the oppressed environment. How the protagonist tries to be equal or even superior in this male dominated society and how does this affect the society as a whole, is superbly portrayed in Namita's novels.

Paro is a highly-flavored tale of the passions and jealousies of a group of middle-class Indians. Paro is a magnificently spontaneous female. She seems to believe that the sterility of the Indian women is the corollary of their smugness. They are dead not because of the fault of somebody but because they lead a vegetative life. The sexy, seductive Paro struggles to live life on her own terms. She realizes that existence requires efforts on her part to have a identity of her own. Fully aware of the puppet like existence she herself says to Priya, "they make the rules". This feeling suffocates her and she successfully flutters to come out of the fetters. She becomes a free spirit and mentally mocks at society. Lenin says about Paro, "Paro has done it all, she's left a husband and a lover; she has a small son of ambiguous parentage. She is a conversation piece at dinner parties, and it is considered daring and chic to know her." (Paro: *Dreams of Passion*, 66)

Life has not tired Paro-she is undiminished. She even influences the males around her. In a reflective and introspective language Gokhale presents a contrast between Paro and other female character in the novel- Priya, who is her chronicler. While Paro and Priya both have an aptitude for life but the means to satisfy it and level of satiety are different. Paro, married to BR, becomes increasingly dissatisfied with the traditional role of a family woman breaks all the stifling standards of morality and responds to her instincts. However Priya, who secretly becomes her spy, is about coming to terms with middle age and with middle India.

Namita's world is made of seemingly contradictory forces. On one hand is the ambit of family and society and on the other are the self-searching liberated women who have no self-consciousness or moral constraint in seeking their space in patriarchal society. Her female characters uninhibitedly articulate their utilitarian and self-seeking manipulations. Gokhale represents the theme that demystification of ideology and disintegration of cultural patterns are largely time-based phenomena and are bound to get formulated gradually despite rigid indoctrination.

The protagonist Priya in *Priya: In Incredible Indya* is in everlasting pursuit for a consequential life. She makes fruitless attempts to establish a fulfilling relationship. Hailing from a lower middle class family, after much struggle married to Suresh Kaushal, a reputed lawyer, Priya understands the value of money. Careful of social obligations and restrictions, she is conscious of her moves in society unlike Paro who visibly took undue advantage of her advocate husband Suresh. Enmeshed in the middle-class Indian family system she is the more meek, staid one. She accepts her fondness for Paro but knows she can never be Paro. She says she suffers from 'social vertigo' but wants to stay there. Although she realizes the comparative superiority of Paro but does not overlook her individuality. Priya does not want her family to disintegrate, had her own imaginations and desires and a remarkable sensibility to maintain a credible balance

between sexes. The novel skillfully makes the readers to care about the characters and think about the underlining issues.

Displaying a mature understanding of the female psyche Gokhale's novels portray strong women striving for self-definition while immersed in the daily struggle in the male - dominated world. The character of the grandmother in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* is praiseworthy for her foresightedness. She creates a home for herself and her grand- daughter Gudiya. Her philosophy of life was, "There is a cycle to saving things, to preserving them, and then to devouring them, letting them go." (*Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, 36.) She reappraises her own role- enactment by creating a space for herself by her ability to metamorphose things according to her advantage. She had earned respect in society. Grandmother is a manifestation of the 'new woman' in her unique display of courage and assertiveness. She aspired for a life of fantasy and knew how to mould people and situations. She had a strong impact on Gudiya who says, "Grandmother's increasing abstraction, her detachment, and her inexplicable remoteness had affected me much more than I betrayed. Outwardly I was happy and normal child although I could see from the looks on male eyes things were changing my mother's fabled beauty and grandmother's legendary charm had their genetic renewal." (*Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, 132)

Gudiya's character is based on a virtual disregard of the traditional power- structure. Gokhale validates the ideology of woman's desire in that Gudiya openly voices her heart's desire.

She accepts that she wants to marry a rich man. Gudiya does not succumb to circumstances but solves her existential angst by living in harmony with Phoolwati who is totally devoted to Gudiya's care. Speaking fearlessly about herself, she is a woman of strength who exhibits feminist awakening and upsurge.

Endowed with boundless artistic excellence and a broad humanistic outlook both Desai and Gokhale undeniably reveal amazing profundity in their fictional world. Their novels are reflective of an astounding originality. They realistically depicts Indian women's situation and put forward a pragmatic solution which have given their novels an imperishable importance.

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