

ALIENATION LEADS TO ANNIHILATION IN ANITA DESAI'S CRY, THE PEACOCK, VOICES IN THE CITY, FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN AND FASTING, FEASTING

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ABSTRACT

Anita Desai has portrayed remarkable women characters who, live, act and develop while they react and respond to the changing times. The treatment of violence and death has been as old as literature itself, but it assumes a different dimension in her novels. The protagonists Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, Monisha in *Voices In The City*, Nanda, Ila Das, and Raka in *Fire on the Mountain*, and Uma and Anamika in *Fasting, Feasting* are ruined individuals. Maya, Monisha, Nanda, Uma and Anamika all face the same kind of isolation after their marriage. Whereas marriage is a turning point in one's life, for Maya, Monisha, Nanda and Anamika, marriage leads to annihilation.

Keywords: alienation; annihilation; destruction; women's suffering

Anita Desai has portrayed the psyche of her protagonists in her novels. Here the alienation is more psychic than social. All the four characters (Maya, Monisha, Nanda and Anamika) commit suicide after their marriage, due to alienation. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* becomes insane after her husband's death and later commits suicide. Monisha in *Voices In The City* and Anamika in *Fasting, Feasting* suffer at the hands of their in-laws and end their lives by setting fire to themselves. Nanda in *Fire on the Mountain* dies on hearing about the death of her friend Ila Das who was seduced in her old age. Another

character Raka, a child, sets fire to the mountain because of her self-alienation. Anamika is a beautiful, intelligent girl who fails to overcome her problems after marriage. She suffers at the hands of her in-laws and is treated like a servant, not being given proper food. She even suffers a miscarriage and ultimately burns to ashes.

Cry, the Peacock is a story of Maya and Gautama. Maya belongs to a high class Brahmin family where she receives a good upbringing from her father. Her mother dies when she is a young girl. Her brother Arun goes abroad to pursue his higher studies. She lives under the care of her father and her maid helps her in to come up in life. She leads a happy life before her marriage and marries Gautama who was her father's friend. The age difference between them becomes a great barrier for them to lead a happy life. Her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law live with them in the same house. Her husband Gautama is a famous lawyer who succeeds in his career but fails in his family life. Maya and Gautama are a childless couple. Maya loves her pet (dog) Toto as her own child. There is no mutual understanding between the spouses and this creates a rift between them. The story ends in the death of Maya's husband Gautama and later Maya becomes insane. Her insanity drives her to commit suicide.

Voices in the City is the story of Monisha and Jiban. Monisha marries Jiban but their married life is devoid of happiness and satisfaction. Monisha has two brothers and one sister. Her brother Nirode, a newspaper agent, is ambitious to become a great person but is a failure in life. Their younger brother Arun goes abroad to pursue his higher studies. Their younger sister Amla, a journalist leads a solitary life. Monisha being the eldest in the family has to take care of them since their mother lives with Chaddha a neighbour in Kalimpong after her father's death. Monisha suffers psychologically after her marriage. Jiban, a successful business man fails to fulfill his wife's desires and to understand her. Jiban's mother and sister live

with them and this prevents Monisha from having free conversation with her husband. After her marriage she is left alone in the house as all the family members leave her and go away to different places for work. Monisha being a childless woman suffers at the hands of her in-laws. However, her death unites the whole family and her mother comes for her daughter's funeral, and is joined by her other children.

The narration describes the life of a feudal family of Kalimpong consisting of a dominating mother, a subdued father who is drunk most of the time and their four children, two sons and two daughters, Arun, Nirode, Monisha and Amla. The novel begins with Arun's departure to England for higher studies. Nirode works in a lowly position in a newspaper office. Amla has received training as a commercial artist in Bombay and has come to Calcutta to join an advertisement firm. The death of their father renders their mother lonely as all the children are away from Kalimpong. She seeks the amicable company of her neighbour; Chaddha, a retired major. This relationship stirs deep resentment in Nirode and his hostility to this is noted; as he refuses to read his mother's letters or write to her. Nirode's mother's longing to see him is expressed by her in her letter:

'My son Nirode,' she wrote. 'It is hopeless, quite hopeless I know, to expect a letter from you, my busy, far-travelling son. But, sitting out on the veranda which is washed by a thin honey sun and the scent of my spring orchids which are all flowering in long sprays from their moss-baskets, I caught myself waiting to hear the postman's steps and the creak of the gate which Sharab will not oil. The postman did come – patience rewarded or was it prayer? – and brought me letters, though not from you. Monisha wrote and seemed happy, at least with their weekend in the jungle. The Deputy Commissioner took them on a shoot but shot nothing, they only saw a leopardess with two cubs by a stream. There was a letter from Amla, a short one, for she is preparing for her

examinations with too much ambition, I feel. And, of course, from Arun, who writes every Tuesday. Can you not see him making a point of remembering to do so, every Tuesday? And very little in it except enthusiasm for his work and the professors and doctors – no red – knuckled nurse so far, thank God! – and a thousand questions about me and all of you. What shall I tell him of you? May I tell him that you will come and spend a holiday with me in Kalimpong this summer? May I tell him that you were given leave at last and would get away from your newspaper and come here for a rest? There, that is all, I won't go on and on please, mother (Desai 2007, 36).

Monisha suffers in her married life just as Maya does; and undergoes a similar sense of alienation. The house in which she lives seems to be a cage. The atmosphere in and around the house seems to stifle her self-expression and her predicament is similar to that of Maya. While Maya is obsessed with fear, Monisha is oppressed by a sense of suffocation. Both have in common that their marriages are arranged by their parents. It is the joint family to which they belong which seems to be an obstacle for them to enjoy some privacy. Monisha longs to thrust her head out of the window but the bars are too closely set. It shows that she longs to go out of the house at least for some time to relax but is not allowed to do so for any reason. So Monisha compares her life at her in-laws place to that of a prison.

Childlessness lowers Monisha's status even further since it means that she has failed in the basic female function which will perpetuate her husband's lineage. Monisha's in-laws regard her as an oddity, without understanding her intellectuality. Monisha is very sentimental and loves her brother Nirode and her sister Amla very much. She longs to be with her brother Nirode, a lean and hungry looking youth who aspires to be a journalist. Nirode meets with failure after failure and refuses to make even the most necessary

compromises that life demands. All the three have been alienated from their mother. Monisha encounters parental discord and later suffers barrenness. The void of detachment Monisha creates and the rift she builds between herself and the family members seems to overwhelm her. She erects around herself an opaque wall of darkness through which none can enter, but she cannot bear the pain of being alone. She describes her husband's family to her brother Nirode, who takes her out in the absence of her husband, who does not consent to their meeting. In a similar manner, his sister Monisha frantically tries to search for true meaning in life but ultimately fails. There is nothing in her life to sustain her spirit and this nothingness in her makes her an existentialist character.

All the three major characters in *Voices in the City* are tortured by their hollow existence. Nirode, Monisha and Amla are not concerned with simple problems of day-to-day existence. Monisha's death illuminates Nirode's mind and he makes progress towards accepting everything in his life as it comes. Nirode remains a bachelor and views marriage with hostility. He is an introvert, a rootless drifter without any definite goal in life and is strongly obsessed with failure. Alienation creates a void which is not at all acceptable to him and hinders his success in life.

Maya's life in *Cry, The Peacock* is compared to the caged bear, which tries to set itself free, but fails to do so. Likewise, Maya too is unable to come out of her house or out of loneliness. The life of Monisha in *Voices in the City* is compared to a horse which is fastened to a carriage and it symbolises the life that is led by Monisha. She feels that horses are controlled by their masters, and their eyes are blocked with reins so they cannot go where they wish. Maya and Monisha cannot escape into any other world and they are caught in an irreconcilable situation which isolates her.

Monisha suffers loneliness and longs for privacy. She prefers non-existence and fails to accept the reality of her life. She fails to be

in harmony with all the varying yet vital demands of her life. In her relationship with her husband, Monisha says that she fears love and wants to avoid it because she is void of emotion and is distrustful. She realises that by distancing herself from emotional attachments, she has been left without a touch of love, hate or warmth in her. She advises her brother not to have any attachment towards life and quotes the following lines from the Gita to Nirode: "*Thinking of sense objects, man becomes attached thereto. From attachment arises longing and from longing anger is born. From anger arises delusion; from delusion loss of memory is caused. From loss of memory, the discriminating faculty is ruined and from ruin of discrimination, he perishes*" (Desai 2007, 128).

Gautama, refers to the Gita as does Monisha and the same text is quoted in the novel *Cry, the Peacock*. The Gita teaches man moral values. Life is a circle as it moves from one end to another and joins where it starts. The oscillation between attachment and detachment reflects the need for a meaning in life. Maya scrambles towards love and attachment to find her fulfillment but fails, since her object of love becomes wooden to her emotional participation. The self-world relationship is lost and she is frustrated because she is unable to attain fulfillment through her desires, and fails to involve herself in self-defining activities.

Monisha's relationship with her husband is characterised only by loneliness and lack of proper understanding. There are temperamental differences between them. Monisha's attempts to suppress all emotion lead to a sense of emptiness and futility and a feeling of being locked. Monisha's story is one of protest against the restrictions placed on her by her husband's family. Monisha is made dependent on Jiban's family through financial deprivation. When she takes money from Jiban's wardrobe in order to pay her brother's hospital bill, she is accused of being a thief. Monisha is further constrained within the joint family by a lack of privacy as well as by restrictions on her movements in public.

Monisha is fond of books and this evokes suspicion in the minds of her in-laws as to whether she is fit have a marital relationship with her husband. When Monisha's sister-in-law enters her bedroom, and looks into her wardrobe to inspect her saris and sees it filled with books, she laughs and tells Monisha that she has received one hundred and eleven saris at the time of her marriage; and adds that saris and not the books give status to a woman. Against her wishes, she is never left alone to pursue her reading habit. She lives in the house performing her duties of serving and the lack of privacy upsets her.

The author tries to bring out the dark domains of the psyche of all three characters Nirode, Monisha and Amla. Nirode lives without any attachment to worldly things whereas Amla acts according to her own desires; and Monisha lives a pathetic life. Monisha and Nirode are afraid of human contact and their existential search for meaning and values in life, ends in emptiness and bankruptcy. Amla believes in the supremacy of the self and needs freedom to live her own life. She feels hurt when Monisha makes no attempt to contact her, and also insults her when she comes to see her with Jiban and their niece, in response to Amla's invitation to tea.

Voices in the City is a tragic exploration of personal suffering which arises out of the feverish sensitivity of Nirode. Monisha sees her brother alienated in his own way, subdued and silenced by the fever and fret of his life. Nirode is a rootless character shifting from one goal to another, who finally faces a sense of emptiness. In a conversation with Amla, Monisha lists the components of her degradation within the joint family by an arranged marriage and Amla works as an artist trying to define her own future. Amla is a foil to Monisha. As a modern woman Amla, has the freedom of choice and with this comes the anxiety, stress, and conflict in deciding which direction her life should take. As Amla says: '*Women place*

themselves in bondage to men, whether in marriage or out. All their joy and ambition is channeled that way, while they go parched themselves. My Rita broke away, I made her and I'm not sorry. Read her letters and you will see how she has grown young again, how her life has expanded' (Desai 2007, 217).

Shocked and brought together by their sister's death, Nirode and Amla both sense the message that Monisha is trying to convey to them by taking her own life. Amla realizes it is Monisha who puts an end to her life as she is unable to endure the strain of living in her husband's house and commits suicide. Living in isolation, cut off from their mother and his sister, Nirode and Amla are upset. When Monisha realises that she won't get the love she longs for, from her husband, she becomes depressed. After the death of Monisha, her husband utters: ... '*If this terrible thing is the fault of anyone – it is mine. Forgive me,*' and immediately, when he had said this, their brief sympathy with him was abruptly eclipsed, they forgot him, they left him to make his own terms with it all. His sister led him away to make him drink some tea (Desai 2007, 243).

Monisha's unnatural death brings about the reunion of a long-alienated mother with her children – Nirode and Amla. Although the subject of reunion has a great potential for a deeper exploration, the author does not do full justice to it. The main unifying factor that keeps together different strands of the story is the city of Calcutta which underlies and affects the lives of the chief characters in the book. The novel is a tragic exploration of personal suffering, which arises out of feverish sensitivity of this young intellectual who has lost his way in the inner climate of youthful despairs and is permeated by existential angst.

Anamika in *Fasting, Feasting* is obliterated by the institution of marriage, just as Monisha is. She is relegated to the kitchen to toil for the family, never permitted even to attend any family gatherings. She is beaten, ill-treated and ultimately burnt to ashes. The

neighbours suspect that Anamika's mother-in-law has dragged her to the veranda at four in the morning and poured kerosene over her to set fire on her. Wisker(2003, 13) has viewed Anamika as: "Anamika casts joy and light wherever she goes. She should be the perfect success story but it is her fate to be caught up and sacrificed to the very paradoxes of such a success story: that the beautiful one be unappreciated by a man more in love with himself and his mother; that her intelligence just be seen as marketable value rather than something to cherish." On seeing her school and Oxford University certificates her parents feel very proud of their daughter and as stated: whenever visitors came, it would be taken out and shown around with pride. The visitors would congratulate Anamika and she would look down at her lap and play with the end of her braid and say nothing at all. She could never bring herself to contradict her parents or cause them grief. The scholarship was one of the qualifications they were able to offer when they started searching for a husband for her, and it was what won a husband who was considered an equal to this prize of the family (Desai 2000, 69).

When Anamika is awarded the Gold medal, her parents feel very proud of her. They succeed in giving her a good education but fail in choosing a good partner for her. So she has to suffer in life and feels alienated all the way. Anamika's husband seems to be a perfect match for her so her parents have selected him for their daughter, but later realise that they have ruined her life. Unfortunately, the chosen husband is emotionless, apathetic and dominating. Anamika's marriage proves to be unfulfilling, abusive, and dangerous. Anamika marries a man who ends up being both verbally and physically abusive; and whose mother is extremely cruel as well. Anamika's situation is worse than her cousin Uma who is born and brought up in Bombay. After marriage, she is regularly physically abused by her mother-in-law which leads to her miscarriage. Choubey (1999, 46) examines Anamika's marriage as: "Men marry, not because they need a companion or a soul-mate but because marriage

gives them a license to show power. Thus politics enters into marriages. Anamika is also an instrument for her husband to enhance his superiority to other men."

All three characters (Maya, Monisha and Anamika) are childless women longing to have children of their own but their wish is unfulfilled. All three have brothers who show love and affection towards their sisters but after their marriage are unable to show their affection outwardly. Maya is fond of her dog whereas Monisha and Anamika are fond of books.

Fire on the Mountain is the story about the old lady Nanda and the young girl Raka. Raka is the great granddaughter of Nanda. Nanda marries Mr. Kaul, a Vice-Chancellor of Punjab University who neither loves nor cherishes her. He falls in love with Miss David, a faculty in the department of Mathematics. On hearing of her husband's illicit relationship with another woman Nanda hates him but lives with him in order to gain social status. As the Vice-chancellor's wife she has to fulfill her social role and cater to the needs of her children, born out of a loveless marriage. All the duties exhaust her and alienate her from her own children and her husband. She neither understands nor loves them. She leads an unsatisfied life with her husband and feels like a tenant in her own house.

After her husband's death she moves to Carignano in order to lead a happy life. In her old age she leaves all her children and lives alone in this remote place. As she is leading a lonely life in Carignano, a letter comes to her from her daughter announcing that Raka is coming to stay with her in Carignano. Raka's mother Tara is a sick person and her father is a drunkard who always ill treats his wife. As is stated by Malik(2002,180) "The types of home-life, of which parents and their attitudes are the main constituents, influence the psyche of a child. It is a common experience that homes characterized by friction and discord, lack of parental interest and affection for the child, lead to emotional

instability and poor adjustment on the child's part. "Her mother's disposition partly contributes to Raka's behaviour towards others. The sick, frustrated and unhappy mother is incapable of giving her love and affection. It is even worse in the case of her father, who comes home late at night and treats her mother cruelly.

Disappointed by the father-figure in her life, Raka cannot imagine a loving or encouraging father. The brutality of her aggressive father has left its indelible ugly mark on her psyche. Many a times she has witnessed fearsome scenes between her parents. Raka does not have intimacy even with her mother and does not miss her in the least. She moves about in Carignano as if she has lived there ever since her birth. When Nanda informs Raka that she has received a letter from her grandmother, Raka doesn't show interest but she inquires about her mother's health and finds that she is still hospitalized. She hates her father for his violent behavior with her mother. On the other hand, Nanda remembers her father's love and affection towards her and her children.

Unlike other children, Raka has a peculiar trait of independence which fascinates Nanda. Seeing Raka's return from the hills with bruised knees, dusty hair and thoughtful eyes, reminds her of one who has visited lands of fantasy. She is shocked and wants to enter the closed world of Raka, but the child resists. Increasingly, it is Raka who is instrumental in making Nanda realise that her life has been barren and empty. The childhood impressions are enduring as they shape the personality and attitudes of an individual. However, she also maintains that even in adult life one may undergo a traumatic experience that can obstruct the process of growth or harmony. As a result, the individual fails to conform to the accepted social norms and fails in life.

A child of Raka's age is attracted towards the colourful and beautiful aspects of nature such as flowers, butterflies as well as fairy-tales. However for Raka, these things hold no interest as she is

allured by and drawn towards uncanny places and things. She is fascinated by the ugly, lonely, rugged and barren aspects of nature like the burnt house, fire, the smoke coming out of the Pasteur Institute and the ravines. She loves solitude. She sings in celebration of her isolation and loves privacy and seclusion; and disappears suddenly and silently for hours without informing her great-grandmother Nanda. Her arrival to Carignano and sudden disappearance from the house disturbs Nanda. Nanda wonders at the way Raka ignores her. As Anita Desai says, "...*She eyed the child with apprehension now, wondering at this total rejection, so natural, instinctive and effortless when compared with her own planned and willful rejection of the child*" (Desai 2008, 52).

Nanda realizes that Raka is different from all her own children and grandchildren. She neither makes any demands nor appears to have any needs. All she longs for is to be left alone and pursue her own secret life amongst the rocks and pines of Kasauli. Raka's traumatic experiences deprive her of a child's innocent trust and feeling of joy in the company of others. Raka's abnormal circumstance makes her an introvert.

Ila Das, a friend of Nanda also lives in Carignano where she was initially a teacher and later resigns, to work as a welfare officer in the same village. She is an unmarried woman who works for the welfare of society. Unfortunately, she is raped by an old man of the same village who seeks vengeance against her. Ila Das dies after this incident and this shock brings death to Nanda too. Due to these unhappy incidents Raka feels lonely and this causes her to set fire to the mountain as she is too young to raise her voice against the injustice. Ila Das also suffers from alienation like her friend Nanda. Ila Das lives in poverty and she tries to procure at least one meal a day for herself and her sister. Ila Das has the courage to lead a lonely life which Nanda lacks.

Nanda has moved beyond the stage of the docile victim; she

is independent to make her own decisions and is now liberated from the duties of a wife and a mother. Nanda has initially imagined Raka as fastidious child who would need constant looking after, but Raka comes as a surprise who loves to have a life of solitude. She finds much better companions in the winds, the rocks, the thorny bushes and the uninhabited wilderness. When Nanda tries to penetrate Raka's secret world, she withdraws from her.

Nanda actually rejects life and seeks the elusive peace in selfish solitude. She makes a futile effort to isolate herself from life in search of fulfillment and instead meets her death. She purchases a lonely house in a remote corner in Kasauli and shuns the world outside. This house of Carignano becomes her shelter, her redemption and also her nemesis in the end. Living in an isolated house Nanda seems to be obsessed with solitude. Emotional deprivation is at the root of Nanda's disillusionment with human bonds. Her husband does not love her as a wife but treats her as some decorative yet useful mechanical appliance needed for the efficient running of his household. She plays the gracious hostess all the time and enjoys the comforts and social status of the wife of a dignitary. But she feels lonely and neglected; and she believes every attachment to be the preface of a new betrayal and all socialisation as fake. It creates in Nanda such a sickness of soul, that she distrusts all attachments and affairs.

Nanda, the old woman neither escapes from her past or present nor predicts her future. In Carignano she wants to stay alone but feels annoyed when she comes to know of Raka's visit. She feels like a bird in a cage, a wild animal tamed and domesticated while she craves peace and solitude. At the same time she cannot ignore Tara (Raka's mother) because her husband ill-treats her. Nanda feels happy when she is left alone in Carignano without any responsibilities: *"She had been so glad when it was over. She had been glad to leave it all behind, in the plains, like a great, heavy, difficult book that she*

had read through and was not required to read again" (Desai 2008, 32).

Anita Desai explores the feminine psyche in depth through Raka, she tries to narrate the child's alienation and exposes the existing system of absurd notions. Nanda fails in her personal life which leads to depression. Anita Desai alludes to one kind of alienation in Nanda and to another kind in Ila Das. Ila Das and Nanda are childhood friends. Both of them are very close and they share their thoughts with one another as they talk about their past life and present situation. Ila Das is a social welfare worker of the Garkhal division who earns very little, which makes it very hard to make both ends meet. Even though she is poor she is never in debt to anyone. She manages her affairs with what she earns but feels relieved to think that her mother is no more, to suffer in this life along with her.

Ila Das's struggle for self-realization and self - definition, quest for identity, pursuit of freedom, equality and transcendence has proved futile. Ila Das serves as a contrast to the other characters in the novel. While Nanda and Raka are presumed to be strong and independent, they seek solitude to hide their pain and afflictions from the world. In a sense they are weak and quite the opposite of what they try to portray. Ila Das on the other hand has suffered many injustices not only physically but emotionally and financially, and is taunted by strangers as she is reminded of her misfortunes. Yet she gets up every day and plunges herself into the world of the living with no malice. Unlike Raka who sets her internal world of illusion ablaze, as a radical act of destruction, Ila Das keeps the constructive fire of aspiration and revolution burning within her. It is the fire of rebirth and resurrection, symbols of unexpected free will and human desire.

In society, a spinster is looked down upon as a burden but Ila Das, a modern woman is keen to establish her own identity than seek an identity through a husband. The vulnerability of the

unmarried woman to incidents of sexual harassment reinforces the gender ideology of women as dependent and men as protector. Her attempts to challenge existing gendered structure of the society are seen as potentially disruptive of social order. She is always treated inferior to her brothers in her house and her father is least bothered about her future. Rather, he concentrates on his sons' education and makes huge investments in it. Ila Das is a fat, short statured woman, jeered and laughed at by others. Ugly and unattractive with a shrill voice and funny gestures, she is not loved by anyone in spite of her involvement in life. This makes her feel lonely and alienated.

Ila Das refuses to submit to a position of inferiority to the men in her life and ultimately triumphs over social expectations. Her many good qualities capture Nanda's admiration. After the death of her father, she has to struggle with the realities of life at every step. Her brothers turn out to be selfish and irresponsible while she steps forward to shoulder the responsibility of her family. Ila Das takes utmost care of her bed-ridden mother and needy sister and boldly faces hunger and poverty. Most of her problems are of course due to her principles and she continues to struggle in order to earn a meager income. Later she becomes a welfare officer and comes to the Himalayan foothills to discharge her duties amongst the poor. To gain self - identity, she prepares to work as a welfare officer. She fights against child marriage by enlightening the local people about the evils of this practice, and faces innumerable obstacles from the members of society. She is very much concerned about the social evils that continue to plague India. Ila Das is concerned about the plight of women, in particular the superstitious practice of child marriage, vexes her. In the valley where she works as a social officer, she finds parents consenting to child marriages out of economic necessity. They view marriage as a way to provide a male guardianship to their daughters, to protect them from sexual assault, avoid pregnancy outside marriage, extend child bearing years or

ensure obedience to the husband's household. In spite of the efforts of the government through legislation and enforcement, ending child marriage appears to be challenging to Ila Das because even women who understand its negative impacts may find it hard to resist economic and societal pressures and traditions.

Marrying at a young age has lifelong consequences. Early marriage thwarts a woman's chances at education, endangers her health and cuts short her personal growth and development. She is aware of the role of women in the process of modernisation in India. Rape is a powerful weapon used by the male-dominated society to silence women. Ila has been raped by Preet Singh, who is the father of a seven-year old girl. As a social welfare officer of the village, Ila Das protests when he tries to marry his little daughter to an old man who is a rich landlord, and she prevents it. This incident makes Preet Singh take revenge on her, and so he rapes and kills her. Tripathi (1986, 172) notes: "*Anita Desai's real concern is with exploration of human psyche. She reveals the inner reality of her characters. When there is inner conflict in the characters, a war starts within. Anita Desai exposes very successfully the inner life and inner conflicts and predicament of her characters.*"

Anita Desai's heroines are constantly in search of self in a conservative, fanatic and traditional society from which there is no escape. However, each one finds escape in their own way. Monisha and Anamika are the burning brides of Anita Desai. All the characters (Maya, Monisha, Nanda, Anamika) of Anita Desai die for one reason or the other. Adopting the themes and techniques often employed by psychological novelists, Anita Desai makes a liberal use of symbols, though spontaneously and subconsciously. The minds of the characters are well portrayed by Anita Desai in her novels. She focuses on the psyche of the characters rather than their outward appearance. Thus, actions in the novels are more internal than external. Here the internal refers to inner feelings of the

characters whereas external refers to the outward appearance of the individuals.

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