

CHAPTER III

FEMALE PROTAGONIST IN *FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN*

Anita Desai's Sahitya Akadami winning novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) is a story of three women. They are female protagonist Nanda Kaul, Raka, her great granddaughter and Nanda Kaul's school and college friend Ila Das. The story of the novel always turns around these three female characters. They live at Carignano, the lonely villa in Kasauli. They are dubbed as crazy women by the people who come across them in the remote mountain valley. The novel *Fire on the Mountain* mainly deals with the loneliness and isolation of the female protagonist Nanda Kaul and her great granddaughter Raka. The novel focuses on the resultant anger and agony in the desired lives of female protagonist Nanda Kaul and her great granddaughter Raka and her close friend Ila Das, a social welfare officer.

Fire on the Mountain won the Royal society of Literature's Winifred Holt Memorial prize and the 1978 National Academy of Letters award.

Fire on the Mountain is the story of the agonized cry of female protagonist Nanda Kaul. The novel is divided into three parts. Part one "Nanda Kaul at Carignano" deals with the protagonist's desire to remain in isolation at Carignano. Female protagonist Nanda Kaul is the wife of an ex-vice chancellor of Punjab University. She withdraws herself to a haunted house named Carignano. The house built on the ridge in the hill town of Kasauli. Nanda Kaul comes there to settle alone with a servant to escape from the haunting ghosts of her past. She feels very happy in the barrenness and emptiness of the house. Female protagonist Nanda Kaul closes herself in the four walls of the house at Carignano. Its loneliness and starkness pleases and satisfies her.

'Raka comes to Carignano' is the second part of the novel. It deals with the experience of Raka, great granddaughter of female protagonist Nanda Kaul. Raka seems to enjoy the richness of life at Carignano. At the very beginning of the novel Nanda Kaul behaves with Raka as "an intruder, outsider a mosquito blow from the plains to tense and worry." So she fails to adjust with her great grandchild. She feels her mind disturbed. Raka also feels suffocation to see the strange behavior of her great grandmother. They run separate life under living one roof. Throughout the novel we see there is a transformation in Nanda Kaul's attitude towards Raka from her initial hatred towards the child. Towards the end of the second section, female protagonist Nanda Kaul is impressed by Raka's instinctive love of solitude. While reading the novel we come to know that female protagonist Nanda Kaul is a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation but Raka, her great granddaughter is a recluse instinct. That is why during a walk with Raka one evening female protagonist Nanda Kaul exclaims:

"Raka you really are a great grandchild of mine, aren't you?

you are more like me than any of my children or grandchildren

you are exactly like me." (64)

Raka's father Rakesh and her mother Tara have not proper familial relationship. Raka was unnerved to recall the shattered lives of her parents. Her father Rakesh used to come home drunk and beat and abuse her mother Tara. So Raka unwillingly tried to avoid any kind of relationships. Nanda Kaul finds Raka perturbed so she wishes to establish a rapport with her. First Nanda Kaul thinks to tell the truth about her mother but remembering that fantasy and fairy tales, she restrains herself. She feeds the child on untruths about her own happy life, she hopes that these will soothe Raka's tense mind.

Section three "Ila Das leaves Carignano" deals with the barren, miserable life and the tragic death of Ila Das, a welfare officer. Ila Das is female protagonist Nanda Kaul's childhood friend. She comes to meet Nanda Kaul at Carignano. She comes there to glorify their childhood days spent together. At Carignano Nanda Kaul and Ila Das share their memories since childhood. They highlight the career of Ila Das and the reality about Nanda Kaul's past. Towards the end of the novel Nanda Kaul received news of Ila Das's rape and murder by village rough Preet Singh. Nanda Kaul shocked and died. Thus novelist Anita Desai, points out the futility of Ila Das's complete involvement in reality. Novelist also points out female protagonist Nanda Kaul's retirement to life of absolute illusion. By this novelist seems to suggest a fusion of reality and illusion will be a possible solution to the existentialist predicament. At the end of the novel Raka is unknown of the deaths of Ila Das and female protagonist Nanda Kaul. She enters the house and says:

"Look, Nani, I have set the forest on fire. Look; Nani-look-the
forest is on fire" (108)

Thus the theme of loneliness, the image of the forest fire, behavior of female protagonist Nanda Kaul and other female characters and the locale of Carignano lend structural unity to the novel *Fire on the Mountain*.

The title of the novel derived from William Golding's famous novel *Lord of the Flies* the second chapter of this novel is entitled Fire on the Mountain. It is the symbolic fire which burns in the heart of female protagonist Nanda Kaul. The novel also explores the alienation of Nanda Kaul and her great granddaughter Raka. The novel also reveals the loneliness and isolation of these two female characters. Female protagonist Nanda Kaul feels happy in the barrenness and she enjoys her own company:

"All she wanted was to be alone, to have Carignano to herself in this period of her life when stillness and calm were all that she wished to entertain." (17)

Anita Desai through her novels raises the questions of Indian woman's unhappiness after their marriage. In all her novels Desai describes the helplessness of millions of married women, the emotional world of women and their sensibility as well as psychology. Indian women fail to adjust themselves with their families, with their family members even with their husbands. It happens because of misunderstanding. While studying her novels we come to know that Anita Desai depicts man-woman's inner life and their feelings. She also depicts Indian sensibility and culture in female's point of view.

Desai's fictional world is full of helplessness of women's agony, anger, struggle and surrender. Desai dwells upon the theme of love and marriage. Madhusudan Prasad writes about Anita Desai:

"As alienation, absurdity of human existence, quest for the ultimate meaning in life, derision, detachment, isolation and time as a fourth dimension, focusing how women in the contemporary urban milieu are bravely struggling against forces of absurd life"(Prasad 140)

Through her novels like *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the city*, *Bye Bye Black Bird*, *Where shall We go this Summer?* And *Fire on the Mountain* Anita Desai describes the marriages in India and the various complexities involved with them. She tries to represent the western world which is not available here. We see in foreign countries, people have no respect for arranged marriages but in India even today the arranged marriage is considered to be a blessing. Anita Desai deeply involves in her novels, the inner emotional world of her female protagonists as well as other female and male characters. Maya and Gautama in *Cry*

the Peacock, Monisha, Amla and Nirode in *Voices in the City*, Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das in *Fire on the Mountain* reflect the various facts of their personality.

In India most of love marriages fail due to marriage ego of husband and wife. At one stage they don't care of one another's feelings. In Hindu religion after her marriage woman shows her sincerity and faithfulness towards her husband. Anita Desai through her novel *Fire on the Mountain* deeply dives in to the inner emotional world of female protagonist Nanda Kaul and two other female characters Raka and Ila Das. The novel also explores alienation loneliness and isolation of these three female characters. After reading the novel, we understand that the alienation and loneliness of female protagonist Nanda Kaul and her friend Ila Das is due to their maladjustments in their own marital life on the other hand Raka's alienation is due to the maladjustments in the marital life of her parents.

Anita Desai's female protagonists fail to maintain familial relationship with their family members. In her novels we see there is no harmony between husband and wife. Wife always considers inferior to husband. In her *Cry the Peacock* female protagonist Maya is inferior to Gautama. In this novel husband wife relationship is broken. We also see the same situation in the novel *Voices in the City* female protagonist Monisha and her husband Jiban have no proper communication. Monisha is inferior to Jiban. And in the novel *Fire on the Mountain* female protagonist Nanda Kaul and Mr. Kaul, her husband fails to maintain husband wife relationship.

Desai's female protagonists always run miserable life; aloneness alone is treasure for them. Desai's female protagonists always run away from society and prefer to live lonely life. In the novel *Fire on the Mountain* Nanda Kaul is female protagonist. She shifted to Kasauli hills after her husband's death and lives a reclusive life. The married life of the female protagonists of Anita Desai's novels is not successful. The main reason of their

unsuccessful married life is the remembrance of their childhood memories. As we see Maya and Gautama in *Cry, the Peacock*, Monisha and Nirode, in *Voices in the city* and Nanda Kaul and Mr. Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain*.

The married life of Nanda Kaul, the female protagonist of the novel *Fire on the Mountain* is not life of the ordinary people because she is a wife of vice-chancellor of Punjab University. Her relationship with her husband is nothing beyond the duties and obligations. The novel *Fire on the Mountain* presents a trauma of female protagonist that takes refuge in seclusion. The female protagonist Nanda Kaul always feels refuge in her own house. She is obsessed by her husband's life long affair with Miss Davidson. The lifelong faithlessness of Mr. Kaul to Nanda Kaul and the hypocritical situation force her to be reclusive. The wedding of Nanda Kaul and Mr. Kaul is veritably based on physical lust and circumstantial convenience for Mr. Kaul. Mr. Kaul does not love Nanda Kaul as a wife, but for him she is only a mistress. Female protagonist Nanda Kaul becomes a mother, grandmother and great grandmother of many unwanted and unloved children.

By this Anita Desai shows the miserable condition of Indian women. Though they all have physical wealth, property, money and everything they want, but they are not happy in their own houses. They do not have freedom to live their own way. Their lives are only committed to serve their husbands. They do not rebel against the situation but accept it as their destiny. There are millions of Indian women who are struggling for their real freedom. Though India is an independent country, her women are not free psychologically. There in the novel *Fire on the Mountain* Anita Desai presents the same situation through female protagonist Nanda Kaul.

Female protagonist Nanda Kaul is the wife of vice-chancellor. Her house was full of crowd and social activities. There are many guests coming and going all the time. Nanda

Kaul passes her life to arrange the dinner tables as hard working houses. The following lines suggest this:

“The old house, the full house, of that period of her life when she was the Vice-chancellor’s wife and at the hub of a small but intense and busy world, had not pleased her. Its crowding had stifled her There had been too many guests coming and going, tongas and rickshaws piled up under the eucalyptus trees and the bougainvilleas, their drives asleep on the seats with their feet hanging over the bars. The many rooms of the house had always been full, extra beds would have had to be made up, often in not very private corners of the hall or veranda, so that there was a shortage of privacy that vexed her. Too many trays of tea would have to be made and carried to her husband’s study, to her mother-in-law’s bedroom, to the veranda that was the gathering-place for all, at all times of the day. too many meals, too many dishes on the table, too much to wash up after.

They had so many children, they had gone to so many different schools and colleges at different times of the day, and had so many tutors-one for mathematics who was harsh and slapped the unruly boy’s, one for drawing who was lazy and smiled and did nothing, and others equally incompetent and irritating. then there had been their friends, all of different ages and

sizes and families. (29-30)

There are many servants in Nanda's house. Nanda Kaul always looks busy throughout the novel. There is no privacy to her. The following lines suggest this:

She would go to the kitchen to see the milk taken out of the ice-box, the layer of cream drawn off, the row of mugs on a tray filled and carried out to the green table on the veranda around which the children already sat on their low cane stools-the little girls still having their long hair plaited and their fresh cotton dresses buttoned and the boys throwing themselves backwards and kicking the tables legs and clamouring with hunger. Then there was the bread to be spread with butter, jam jars opened and dug into, knives taken away from babies and boys, girls questioned about homework, servants summoned to mop up split milk and fetch tea and life would swirl on again, in an eddy, a whirlpool of which she was the still, fixed eye in the center. (24)

While reading the novel everything about female protagonist Nanda Kaul appears free from harshness outwardly but inwardly Nanda Kaul burns with a fire of frustration. She feels lonely and neglected. Nanda Kaul inflames internally. As we see in *Cry the Peacock* female protagonist Maya and her husband and in the novel *Voices in the City* female protagonist Monisha and her husband Jiban. Both have binary opposition of thoughts and feelings. They don't have any emotional attachment between each other. Maya as well as Monisha always inflames inwardly. The same case happens with Nanda Kaul. Her husband

Mr.Kaul has a lifelong illicit affair with Miss Davidson. He invites her for badminton parties and compels her to stay at night. When she sleeps he secretly comes to her bedroom.

In Indian Hindu tradition a Hindu wife cannot endure such an illicit relationship of her eyes in the same house where she lives. Yet, she cannot rebel against it even she is not able to protest the thing. So she accepts whatever as a destiny and lives in agony, like female protagonist Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain*. Anita Desai shows almost all traditional women seen as insane immolating their lives in such a critical situation. Novelist also shows the modern women cannot endure it. They can break their marriage and try to live their own lives. But female protagonist Nanda Kaul is the representative example of traditional Indian women. In the novel female protagonist Nanda Kaul keeps the false smile on her face. She looks after the children, family, her house and servants. She is always busy shutting the doors, cooking food, lunch, dinner. She keeps the visitors at ease and waits with a singular, burning, soul-destroying jealousy for her husband. To stop all these perpetually she feels widowhood is blessing. She wants complete separation from men and children. So she forced herself to go Kasauli at Carignano.

Nor had 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 life-long 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 loved.
And her children-the children were all alien to her nature.
She neither understood nor loved them. She did not live here
alone by choice-she lived here alone because that was what
she was forced to do, reduce to doing. (145)

Nanda Kaul feels happy after the death of her husband because everything was over for her.

“After the death of her husband she has 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----discharge me she granted, I’d have discharged all my duties. Discharge.” (30)

Thus the novel presents marital disharmony. Female protagonist Nanda Kaul tries to conceal her agony. She has violently injured and disappointed in her life as a wife, mother and housewife. She prefers seclusion not because she favours it but she accepts it unwillingly. She prefers seclusion to rest her pain-filled psyche, her stagnated pulses, bits and pieces of identity. So Nanda Kaul gets shelter in Carignano. Here Nanda Kaul strives to concentrate on the soothing scene outside. But she feels upset and perturbed, puzzled and disgusted and asks:

“Have I not done enough and had enough? I want no more. I want nothing. Can I not be left with nothing? But there was no answer and of course she expected non.” (17)

Female protagonist Nanda Kaul performs the duties of her married life very well. But her husband and children never bothered about her inner psyche. Due to her careless husband and indifference children she searches for privacy. That is why she goes to Carignano and runs reclusive life. Even she does not like the idea of Raka’s staying with her.

The place Carignano is presented in the novel as a contrast to the city life. While Nanda Kaul’s stay in Carignano shows she dislikes city life. She has no interest in her family.

In one letter Asha, Nanda's daughter tells her about heat and dust in Delhi. Asha thinks it would be very fine for Raka, Nanda's great granddaughter, to stay at Carignano for the rapid recovery of her health.

Raka is another major female character in novel. Like Nanda Kaul Raka is also fond of loneliness. But her loneliness is not natural but her parents make her reclusive.

“Somewhere behind them, behind it all, was her father, home
from a party, stumbling and crashing through the curtains of
night, his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench,
beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse-harsh,
filthy abuse that make Raka cower under her bed clothes
and wet the mattress in fright, feeling the stream of blood,
and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes
and wept.” (71)

Raka's psychic behaves and deteriorating physical power makes her miserable and helpless. She loses her father love. Her father does not give her time. Thus Raka is deprived of her father's love and care.

Through the character of Raka, novelist Anita Desai tries to show the miserable condition of Indian children. There are millions of children who are far away from their parents love. And if there is female child in a house it is unwelcomed by other family members. The children are neglected, in Indian society. Parents don't care about their children; hence they become reclusive and lonely. They prefer to live in isolation, although they are genius like Raka due to over stress children lose their mental balance. William Walsh lays stress on the significance of love for the while some growth of a child in this way:

“The child’s consciousness, which is partial and successive, does not include a sense of the past or the future. It has to be discovered, and the provocation to learn it, is love. Affection is the seed of time. It is love-intensifying the delight in the present and correspondingly bringing discomfort in absence-which introduces an element of permanence into the child’s experience.” (166)

In the novel Ila Das is another intruder at Carignano. Novelist portrays her as a pathetic, slightly comical creature; nevertheless she draws out our sympathy at the end of the novel. Ila Das, a piano teacher, discharges her duties as a welfare officer in the area. She loves her work promptly and efficiently. At the end of the novel Preet Singh brutally assaulted, raped and murdered her only because she tried to stop the disastrous child marriage of his daughter. Ila Das’s life indicates the tragic life of the women in our society.

Thus, the novel *Fire on the Mountain* presents tragic view of female protagonist’s life, in which innocent are bound to suffer and pay a heavy price for this. The novel becomes the emblem of destruction and purgation, the destruction of an unkind world of many Nanda Kauls and Ila Dases. The novel also focuses an unequal situation in which women suffer from the slings of misfortune, social inequities and injustices committed on them by savage society of men.

Anita Desai is a novelist of human heart. She points the inner crisis of her female protagonists of her novels. She gives importance to the personal tragedy of individuals. Anita Desai explores the interior layers of her female protagonist’s mind. She draws out various shades of inner crisis of protagonist. The novel *Fire on the Mountain* presents the inner crisis of female protagonist Nanda Kaul and other two female characters Raka and Ila Das.

Nanda Kaul, an old lady always busy in kitchen. So she desires for a quiet, retired life. Her busy past now looks like 'a box of sweets'. She desperately wants to avoid familial obligations around her. She likes to be free from all stifling and irritating involvements. So she withdraws herself into Carignano, her hill side home, at Kasauli. She hopes here to live a parted, reduced and single life. Nanda Kaul's cry is a cry of despair. She withdraws herself physically from her duties and responsibilities, irritations and annoyances, dubious joy and sadness. She can neither escape her past, nor help present, nor predict her future. Her past creates a series of pleasant and unpleasant feelings in her mind. Her present disturbs her.

Raka is another major female character in the story. She also runs miserable life like a caged bird. They live under the same roof separated. They live together resenting and avoiding the presence of one another. Both female protagonists Nanda Kaul and Raka love to live alone.

When Ila Das, a piano teacher, a social worker and close friend of Nanda Kaul came to Carignano, she breaks Nanda Kaul's solitude. Her playful voice disturbs Nanda Kaul. Ila Das's inner crisis turns into her capacity to face the odds of life. Therefore she always keeps herself smiling. Towards the end of the novel Preet Singh assaulted and raped her. Because of her good intentions she was trying to stop disastrous marriage of Preet Singh's daughter. When the sad news of Ila's unfortunate death reaches to Nanda Kaul the climax of her inner crisis reveals the hidden reality:

"It was all a lie, all. She had lied to Raka, lied about everything. Nor had her husband loved and cherished 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, who he had loved, all his life

loved. And her children, the children were all alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them. She did not live here alone by choice. She lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing. All those graces and glories with which she had tried to captivate Raka were only fabrication. They helped her sleep at night, they were tranquilisers, pills. She had lied to Raka. And Ila had lied too. Ila, too, had lied, had tried. (145)

Female protagonist Nanda Kaul detects that the events happen in human life are futile. She finds a senseless compromise between inner and outer experience. Nanda Kaul peeps into her past but there are memories of husband's illicit, affair with lady Davidson. She resents Raka but unable to do so Nanda Kaul doesn't like Ila's arrival but she cannot dismiss her. In such a situation Nanda Kaul hangs herself between her decisions and indecisions. Throughout the novel we see Nanda Kaul's feminine jealousy against Miss David, the mathematics mistress, with whom her husband leads a life of romance. The inner crisis is also there in Raka's personality the following lines show this:

"Somewhere behind them, behind it all, was her father, home from a party, stumbling and crashing through the curtains of night, his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse-harsh, filthy abuse that made Raka cover under her bed clothes and wet the mattress in fright----- (148)

As a psychological novelist Anita Desai deals with internal states of minds of her female protagonists and other female characters. So she reveals interior selves of her female characters. Desai's female protagonists' problems are not physical but psychical. They originate and exist because of the incompatibility of their temperaments. As we see female protagonist Maya is hungry for love but her husband Gautama is cold in *Cry the Peacock*. Female protagonist Monisha in *Voices in the City* and two other characters Nirode and Amla are sensitive having feelings of individuality and self-respect. Nirode, main protagonist of the novel prefers to starve but would not accept money from his mother. Here we see how male dominancy act. Female protagonist Monisha fails in her psychic problems and commits suicide. In the novel *Bye-Bye Black Bird* Adit, Dev and Sarah have their own problems. Female protagonist Sita in *Where shall we go this summer?* Suffer from her inner crisis to check the delivery of her baby. In *Fire on the Mountain* female protagonist Nanda Kaul long wishes in her soul for her personal reasons. In the novel *Clear Light of Day* female protagonist Bimala lives in her dreamy world.

Thus, while reading the novels of Anita Desai, we come to know that the most of her female protagonists are sensitive and male protagonists are insensitive. They aggravate the problems of female protagonists. Gautama in *Cry the Peacock* is detached and inconsiderate. Adit in *Bye-Bye Black Bird* is insensitive to the sufferings of female protagonist Sarah. In *Where shall We go this Summer?* Raman fails to understand female protagonist Sita. Preet Singh rapes and kills Ila Das. female protagonist Nanda Kaul's husband keeps life-long love affair with other lady in *Fire on the Mountain* Raja is inconsiderate to his sister Bim in *Clear Light of Day*. Hari's father is more interested in wine than his sick wife in the novel *Village by the Sea*.

Thus, novel *Fire on the Mountain* presents an unforgettable, pathetic portrait of female protagonist Nanda Kaul. Her life is full of loneliness and isolation, angst and agony.

Novelist focuses there traits through the inner crisis of female protagonist Nanda Kaul and other female character Ila Das and Raka.

Nanda Kaul is the oldest than Anita Desai's other female protagonists. Her life is full of suffocation and choked with children and activity. She passes her whole life by submitting the requirements of her husband's status and his wishes. Unwillingly Nanda Kaul is devoted to her husband. While talking about personal life of female protagonist Nanda Kaul, her life is not happy and satisfied. She is always isolated. As Gautama, female protagonist Maya's husband in *Cry the Peacock* who is always busy in his work. Jiban, female protagonist Monisha's husband in *Voices in the City* also busy in his work. Mr. Kaul vice-chancellor, female protagonist Nanda Kaul's husband always busy in work. He finds pleasure only in work. He has nothing to do with her private self. Even he doesn't care about his children. Nanda Kaul is an epitome of devotion, duty and sacrifice. She always engages herself in duties disavowing her pride. She hardly ever resents her husband's infidelity, his utter disregard and the callous attitude of her children towards her. Wearing silk sarees female protagonist Nanda Kaul presides over his table and manages her household. Life does not honour her. She suffers from a severe kind of self isolation and frantically searches for detachment. She has strong desire to live in complete isolation, shipping all ties and discarding everyone. So even in her hectic days she tries to fortify and steady herself by an hour of isolation in stillness everyday:

"She had practiced this stillness, this composure, for years,
for an hour every afternoon, it was an art, not easily acquired..
she remembered how she had tried to shut out sound by shutting
out light, how she had spent the sleepless hour making out the
direction from which a shout came or a burst of giggles.....All

was subdued, but nothing was ever still (23)

Thus, female protagonist Nanda Kaul's earlier life was hectic and full of works. That made her life boring and monotonous that is why when she arrives at Carignano, she wants to live alone with herself only.

"I want no more. I want nothing, can I be not left with nothing?" (17)

Obviously, it is highly impossible; one cannot live in isolation, a human being is a social animal. But for Nanda Kaul this rule is exception. Aloneness alone is treasure for Desai's female protagonists. In the novel *Fire on the Mountain* female protagonist Nanda Kaul treasures her privacy and guards it. Her privacy proves that past unhappy experiences of life still haunts her. Her love for privacy is not inherently come lonely is the result of unhappy and cumbersome relationship with her husband and children. In her real life Nanda Kaul was unhappy and dissatisfied. As the wife of the Vice-Chancellor of the Punjab University, she shouldered the responsibilities of running a household, maintaining the social status of her husband and looking after children. She lived a very busy and tiring life hence she wishes to enjoy complete peace in her old age without any pressing demands or distraction from anywhere when Asha, her daughter wrote a letter to Nanda Kaul requesting her to take under her care Raka, Tara's daughter and Nanda's great granddaughter who has just recovered from a near fatal attack of typhoid. The letter disconcerts her, she feels angry and furious and she struggles to suppress her anger. She wants to live alone only in Carignano.

Thus, female protagonist Nanda Kaul's withdrawal to Carignano in Kasauli symbolizes her fourth stage of life contemplation i.e. *SANYAS*. After spending the early years of her life as the vice-Chancellor's wife, she doesn't want any more activities and family responsibilities. Even she wants to avoid children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Now she wants to retire from her life. The two stages of her life-*Grihstya*

and *Vanaprstha* are already spent. Thus, Carignano becomes the *Sanyas Ashram* to her. So she doesn't want any interference there.

"It was the place, and the time of life, that she had
wanted and prepared for all her life" (3)

Female protagonist Nanda kaul likes the calmness and emptiness of Carignano. She also enjoys the starkness of the town.

"Glad to lean it all behind, in the plains, like a great, heavy, difficult book
that she had read through and was not required to read again" (30)

Thus, Nanda Kaul feels very happy in Carignano. She enjoys solitude there but her enjoyment is no more there her enjoyment is intruded by the arrival of Raka, her great granddaughter.

Raka is another major female character in the novel. She is also a strange isolated creature like her great grandmother Nanda Kaul. Raka loves loneliness and solitude. In Kasauli Nanda Kaul let work Raka her own way. There is no proper communication between the two. In the early part of the novel they try to avoid one another. While proceeding further we come to know that Raka's arrival is not a worrying matter for Nanda Kaul as she has not any demand on her great grandmother. Here, at Carignano Raka and female protagonist Nanda Kaul live in double singleness. Raka spends her days in her own way. She goes on unknown and mysterious expeditions on her own. She broods silently over the strong landscape and the fantastic and improbable things she sees. She lives her own secret life and ignores the people around her. Desai's these two female characters show the present woman's situation in the Indian Society. Desai's female protagonists whether young or old, prefer to live a lonely life. In the novel *Fire on the Mountain* Desai shows us that Raka's rejection of female protagonist Nanda kaul and of the world all around her is natural and instructive coming with effortless ease whereas female protagonist Nanda Kaul's rejection of

family responsibilities and everything around her is a planned, strained and willful rejection.

The following lines show this:

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

Raka's childhood is baked. Her parents were not able to give her love and assurance. As her father always drinks and enjoys club parties and her mother is deadly alive. Raka's familial and social atmosphere makes her reclusive. In Kasulali Raka secretly watches the fancy dress ball club that reminds her father returning home from parties in the club late in the night-

"....his mother opening to let out a flood of rotten stench,
beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse-harsh,
filthy abuse that made Raka cover, under her bedclothes
and wet the matters in fright" (71)

Raka becomes nervous by her father's behavior. She always finds in tense. She is psychically unfit. She is not loved and spoiled by her parents. Her loveless childhood full of traumatic experience coupled with her prolonged illness fills her heart distrust and suspicion. Raka turns her back upon human beings and their so-called safe, cozy and civilized world. So Raka develops a strong fascination for the ugly, lonely, rugged and desolated aspects of nature. The dissonance or chaos in the life of Raka's parents completely obliterates the feeling of belongingness and generates the feeling of rootlessness. She does not miss her parents. In the novel Raka looks always worried. When Nanda Kaul tries to attract her towards herself by narrating the stories of her childhood, Raka shows no interest in this talk

of belongings. Her childhood impression leaves her insecure and isolated. That shows how parents' misbehavior with children affects upon their psyche and how they hate their parents. Painting the character of drunken father Anita Desai presents the real issue of Indian middle class family. There are millions of Rakas who face the same situation in our society. They are not safe in their own houses.

Raka is a victim of emotional deprivation. Throughout the novel we see both Rakas' father and mother could not care to her emotional need. Her father has not time or even an inclination to do so. Her mother is abject and helpless always shattered with maltreatment by her husband.

Though female protagonist Nanda Kulkarni and Raka runs miserable and lonely life Raka is in contrast to her great grandmother. Some extent she enjoys the variety of life in Carignano:

Left to herself in the afternoon, Raka felt over the room which
her bare feet. She walked about as the newly caged, the newly
tamed wild ones do, sliding from wall to wall on silent,
investigating pads. She pattered a cheek o wood, here,
smoothed a ridge of plaster there. She met a spider that
groomed its hairs in a corner saw lizard's eyes blinking out
of a dark groove, she probed the depth of dust on shelves and
ledges, licked a window pane to cool her tongue-tip. She
sagged across the bed on her stomach, hung her head over its
edge, but the sun caught her eye, slipped in its yellow wedge
and would not allow her to close it. (40-41)

However, female protagonist Nanda Kaul does not like Raka's arrival. She looks upon her as an unwelcome intruder. She does not even go out to welcome her. Like Nanda kaul Raka also dislikes her great grandmother's company. She feels like a caged bird, a wild animal tamed and domesticated there. They live in the same house but apart from each other. They resent and avoid the presence of each other. Both tries to avoid each other and both loves detachment.

According to R.S.Sharma:

"Nostalgia for a lost innocence and awareness of decaying

life are decaying life are recurrent themes in Anita Desai.

In this novel, the contrast between the two in made

evident in the two characters of Raka and Nanda" (Sharma122)

Thus, the different natures of both Nanda and Raka, and the lack of communication between them suggest a sickness of soul. Both are worried about themselves. Both are gripped with a strong sense of isolation female protagonist is like a bird, agitated, disturbed, unable to fight and defend herself. In Anita Desai's novels wives are neglected by their husbands. They have nothing to do with their emotions. Like female protagonist Maya, Nanda Kaul is also neglected by her husband as well as her children. Children do not care for her. While reading the novel further we come to know that Nanda kaul is forsaken and always lives in tense. She has carried out her responsibilities towards her husband and she settled her children in sprit of dedication and self sacrifice. But both her husband and children neglect her that makes her sorry. So to relieve from the tension of this situation she resorts herself to isolation and considers it a moment of her private triumph.

Female protagonist Nanda Kaul consoles herself as she is a triumphant. But really she is neither triumphant nor proud of her isolation, only in order to hide the inner fear of

isolation she creates a façade of pride and victory. Nanda Kaul's house is full of guests. There are many visitors who visit her house daily. Her visitors are mostly wives and daughters of lecturers and professors. When they visit Nanda Kaul they admire her and applaud her house keeping skills. Nanda Kaul has no love lost for these sycophants. She rather loathes them knowing well her predicament. Thus, female protagonist Nanda Kaul is not an alien figure by nature or by birth, but in her mind there is an instinctual urge to connect, to associate herself with her relations and children, but her urge has always been stifled. Nanda is disregarded by her husband who has lifelong affair with Miss. David, the mathematics teacher. She is despised by her children and even she is ignored by Raka at Carignano.

Because of this instinctual urge Nanda Kaul gradually involves in Raka's life at Carignano. But Raka doesn't care about great grandmother's feelings towards her. Even she does not care much for her own isolation:

She was not sure if it was poignant, ironical or merely irritating that Raka herself remained totally unaware of her dependence, was indeed as independent and solitary as ever.

Watching her wandering amongst the rocks and caves of the ravine, tossing a horse chestnut rhythmically from hand to hand, Nanda Kaul wondered if she at all realized how solitary she was.

She certainly never asked nor bothered to see if there was a letter for her, or news. Solitude never disturbed her (79)

Though Nanda Kaul and Raka both are isolated Raka has easily acquired her solitude where Nanda's isolation is not easily acquired. Raka's isolation is natural and deliberate on

the other hand Nanda Kaul's isolation is artificial and undeliberate. Hence Raka does not respond to the love of her grandmother at Carignano. Nanda Kaul diverts all her attention to possess Raka but is not use. In her effort to win favour of Raka, Nanda Kaul recreates an imaginary childhood in which she projects some of her own longings. These longings converge on the memories of an adventurous father. Her father has a menagerie at home and brings back exotic relics from Tibet. In the process she almost arrives at a "second childhood" Nanda Kaul's imaginary stories create nostalgic atmosphere in her mind.

When we study the character of Raka in a psychological angle we come to know that her isolation is related to her unfortunate home. This is the same house that leaves Raka isolated and insecure. By the indifferent nature and behavior of Raka, novelist Anita Desai gives us message that the world is so hostile, the easiest way is to withdraw from it. Instinctively Raka learns that except nothing from it and she gives nothing to it. On her part there is no need to her to participate in living, to strive for achievement and to become social. Raka seems to have lost "intentionality". It is consider that losing intentionality is the biggest loss of one's personality. Without intentionality one cannot be succeed. If one want to be succeed one must have strong desire to be so. Intentionality makes man's life meaningful, obliterates the feeling of rootlessness, meaninglessness and gives birth to impulses like wish, want-will action, and actualization. It is because of this loss of intentionality that Raka is unable to get in touch with her impulses. Thus she is handicapped in finding deeper roots of her own thrust into life.

A false ego has developed in her. She considers herself as an independent person. She is above all socialization and competitions. As novelist narrates her imagination is superior to all "higher than the eagles, higher than the Kasauli and Sanawars and all other hills". Towards the end of the second part of the novel, by Raka's instinctual sense of withdrawal Nanda Kaul fascinates to her. Nanda's maternal love awakens and her self-

imposed detachment weakens. Once again Nanda Kaul loves Raka. In her mind she develops a feeling of tenderness for Raka but she keeps safe emotional distance to Raka. Thus, the novel *Fire on the Mountain* highlights the relationship between great grandmother and her great granddaughter.

The last part of the novel deals with the story of Ila Das, a social welfare officer. She is a close friend of female protagonist Nanda Kaul. Ila Das tries to make little progress in a tradition bound attitude in our community. She dedicates her life to social service. She faces many problems as a social worker. Her life is full of anguish and agony. Her life is full of pathos. At the end of the novel her death is really heartbreaking.

Though Ila Das is a close friend of protagonist Nanda Kaul, she doesn't like her arrival at Carignano. Ila Das is a permanent headache to Nanda's enjoyment of solitude. Nanda Kaul was disturbed even by her frequent telephone calls. Although, Nanda Kaul does not like Ila's arrival she regularly eager to meet her in order review to memory of her childhood. She uses to visit Carignano, Nanda Kaul's villa. They reveal their past days. As we see in Anita Desai's novels, her female protagonists are the victim of familial disturbances. Her male characters are passive, inactive, lazy and happy-go-lucky. Familial relationships in Desai's novels are futile. In the case of Ila Das, we see her family members are her parts of headache. When Ila's family was passing through hard times, Mr. Kaul, Nanda's husband gave her job in Home Science Department out of mercy. Her mother was laid in bed with broken hip. Her father passed away. Her three drunken and desolate brothers squandered what they had inherited. Then they either disappeared or died.

Going through such a disastrous situation, she never goes away from her ambition. She tries to face every uncongenial situation bravely. She has courage enough to face the situation bravely. Ila Das has an outstanding fighting spirit, so she can stand against evils in

the society. Leaving her earlier job, she is now working in the Himalayan foot-hills as a social welfare officer. She is a staunch social welfare officer. She hates everything which is bad. She is against the superstition, child marriage, and such harmful customs in our society. She works amongst peasants, wood-cutters, road-labourers and goat herds. Ila Das is a hard worker. Doing her social work she wants to help sister Rima who is suffering from a serious eye disease. In the village over hills she has waged a war against the old misleading traditional beliefs and priests. As a part of her job Ila persuades one seven-year old child marriage to an old man.

After passing a longtime with Nanda Kaul, she leaves Carignano, goes to market and then to her village. But unfortunately, on her way, Ila das is attacked by Preet Singh. He raped and strangled her. When the police inspector informed Nanda Kaul about this sad news she deeply shocked and dies. Throughout the novel novelist Anita Desai portrays Ila Das as a suffering woman in search of love and happiness. Though Ila Das runs barren and unfulfilled life like Nanda Kaul but she is contrasted with her. Nanda Kaul runs lonely and miserable life for her own's sake of happiness whereas Ila Das runs lonely, miserable and pathetic life for others sake of happiness. Nanda Kaul trapped in situation when there is no escaper. But Ila Das fights bravely at against the bad customs till the end of her life. Female protagonist Nanda Kaul was very busy in her household chores, she did these things unwillingly. But Ila Das was busy whether a piano teacher or as social worker willingly. These are some differences between them. Still they both are good friends.

Doing her social work sincerely Ila Das dies in tragic circumstances. By the tragic news of Ila Das, on telephone female protagonist Nanda Kaul shatters all her illusions. She is overwhelmed at the futility of human existence:

All those graces and glories with which she had tried to

Captive Raka were only fabrications: they helped her to sleep at night, they were tranquilizers, pills. She had lied to Raka and Ila had lied, too. Ila, too, had lied. No, she wanted to tell the man on the phone. No, she wanted to cry but could not make a sound instead. Ti choked and swelled inside her throat. She twisted her Head, then hung it down, down left. let it hang (105)

The novel *Fire on the Mountain* ends with the tragic death of both female protagonist Nanda Kaul and her friend Ila Das. While reading the novel throughly and thinking about the deaths of both the female protagonists, it shows the final reality of human life. Every human being has to die at last but question is that how one die. Here death of Ila Das and Nanda Kaul suggests the meaninglessness of human existence. Ila Das dies because of her human concern for others whereas female protagonist Nanda Kaul dies because of her concern for loneliness. Both Ila Das's involvement and Nanda Kaul's detachment signify a tragic sense of unfulfilment. By feminist way we find social reality in their deaths. Their deaths signify the social factors which destroy women from within. While psychological standpoint we say; female protagonist Nanda kaul destroys herself due to her self- destructive drives generated within by her own failure.

The silent-self destruction of female protagonist Nanda Kaul is immediately followed by a more violently destructive act of Raka, her great granddaughter. She sets hill-side to fire:

"Look Nani, I have set the forest on fire,

Look, Nani Look the forest is on fire" (158)

This act of setting a hill on fire is expressive and symbolic. It shows Raka's anger comes out which is hidden in her mind. Her long time suppression has exploded. Raka fires the mountain to destroy a world where a woman cannot hope to be happy with being unnatural. From psychological point of view Raka is expressive of her anger. Raka lessens her conflicts by violence. By an act of setting fire to the hill-side she saves her ideals self from annihilation.

Thus, in this novel Anita Desai pays more attention to character portrayal than to writing a gripping story. Her characters are individuals rather than types. They behave in an uncommon, extraordinary, strange way. Their eccentricity is diverted towards an isolated life. In an interview with Yashodhara Dalmia Anita Desai observes:

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

Thus, portraying such a dismal, pathetic, pessimistic female protagonist novelist Anita Desai conveys a positive message to the readers. The message is very important in the context of our contemporary society. The novelist suggests that we must try to strike a balance between illusion and reality in order to make our existence rather meaningful and thereby redeem ourselves from the existential to be disastrous.

Anita Desai's female protagonists try to search their identities throughout their life journey. In her novels we see the existential alienation and despair of the female protagonist turn into an insistent longing for death as a possible exit out of their hollowness. It is sought to be overcome by the inner awareness of the protagonist. Her female protagonists try to search within the meaning of life but finally they fail in this search for truth. Hence Desai's female protagonists undergo crisis of consciousness. They can go against anyone. In the novel *Fire on the Mountain* we see the conscience of female protagonist Nanda Kaul. She also is in search of her own identity till her last days. So avoiding all the familial responsibilities she comes to the Carrignano and settles there alone with a servant to escape from the haunting ghosts of her past. She feels happy in barrenness and emptiness of the house.

Anita Desai's female protagonists trapped in internal and external conflicts. In the novel *Fire on the Mountain* novelist presents the conflict of female protagonist Nanda Kaul and other female characters Raka and Ila Das. In this novel the conflict continues the need to withdraw in order to preserve one's sanity and the need to be involved in the painful process of life. This oscillation between attachments reflects the need for meaning in life of female protagonist Nanda Kaul. Her life is choked with children and activity. All her life female protagonist Nanda Kaul has been busy learning how to live what other people expect of her. she thinks about whether she can fulfill their expectation. But towards the end of the novel she realizes the falsity of her thinking. Her life is full of stillness. Every time female protagonist Nanda Kaul acquires what she does not like. First Raka, then Ila Das and finally death creep into her unwanted and undesired. Destiny creates more troubles in her life.

Ila Das's arrival creates additional complications because past tense is reproduced. At the end of the novel Nanda Kaul is shocked and died with news of inhuman death of Ila Das. This shock is greater than any other shock that Nanda kaul has faced. As a result she faints

and her psychological defiance is shattered forever. Thus, the novel *Fire on the Mountain* projects the national anxiety in its search for identity and meaning. Novelist Anita Desai crystallizes in a family crisis in the mind of female protagonist and she succeeds in conveying the mixture of fear, despair and hope present in the woman's breast.

Thus, the novel *Fire on the Mountain* gives the message through the character of female protagonist Nanda Kaul that one should not take a prejudiced view about anything. Further, Nanda Kaul detached from life completely which is neither possible nor desirable. Because all of us have our moorings in the society and it is not possible for anybody to cut himself/ herself off from the source. Then one should not misjudge and hate anybody. The character of Ila Das gives the message of making untiring efforts for human welfare. Though she was herself in abject state, she had pity for the poor persons of her area. She fought against the reactionary religious forces at the risk of her life and met a martyr's death. But these messages presents in an artistic manner.