

CHAPTER – IV

NANDA KAUL : FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

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Nanda Kaul, a widow comes to stay here at the foot of the Himalayas. She was the wife of a Vice-Chancellor. Once she was a significant figure in society as well as in her big family. Nanda Kaul is one of those intelligent Indian women with a built-in streak of scornful feminism who do not love their matriarchal role. Where as earlier, she had tended her children with a great pleasure and pride, entertained her husband's colleagues and student "Looking sharply to see if the dark furniture, all rose wood had been polished and the doors of the gigantic cupboards properly shut" (FM, P.18), she, now has a different outlook towards her personal life. " The care of others was a habit Nanda Kaul had mislaid. It had been a religious calling she had believed in till she found in fake (FM. P 30). Nanda Kaul feels lonely, haunted and rather dismal existence when she reads a quotation from *The Pillow Book of Sei*

Shonagon ". 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 "I greatly dislike a woman's house when it is clear she has scurried about with a knowing look on her face, arranging every thing just as it should be and when the gate is tightly shut" (FM, P. 27).

Nanda Kaul wants to be alone. She has withdrawn herself completely from the world of "Bags and letter, messages and demands, requests, promises and queries, she had wanted to be done with them all, at Carignano. She asked to be left to the pines and cicadas alone". (FO. P.3). She thinks that her life is totally barren at Carignano - the starkness of rocks, Pine and mountains. She wants no one and nothing else. Seeking an entire isolation, here she fancies, she could merge with the pine ties: " 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." (FM, P. 17). Her desire for total stillness is linked to a charred tree trunk in the forest, a broken pillar of marble in the desert, a lizard on a stone wall " A tree trunk could not harbour irritation, nor a pillar annoyance. She would imitate death, like a lizard. No one would dare rouse her." (FM, P.23). She dislikes almost everyone who comes her way: her haughty and complacent daughter, Asha, her weak and unhappy grand-daughter, Tara, her elusive and sickly great grand-daughter, Raka, her old and weak companion Ila Das.

A sudden arrival of Raka discourages Nanda Kaul and disturbs her private life. Before that Nanda Kaul was alone and she could moan " with self-pity and pain, certain that she was alone and no one would hear" (FM, P. 34). Now in Raka's presence "She could never groan aloud

again : the child would hear" (FM, P. 34). Both Nanda Kaul and Raka live together avoiding each other, but Nanda Kaul painfully thinks that "it was not so simple to exist and yet not to exist" (FM, P. 47). The absolute seclusion of Raka brings a sort of self-realization and metamorphosis in Nanda Kaul's attitude. She gets sick of emptiness in her life. She is unaware of Raka's dependence on her. Nanda Kaul's attitude changes slowly and she begins to love Raka. She tells long stories about her imaginary childhood and tries to make contact by hooking Raka curiously .

The pleasant nostalgic memories awaken maternal instincts in Nanda Kaul. She involves herself in Raka's life and she has to come out with these flattering words : "Raka, you really *are* a great-grandchild of mine, aren't you? you are more like me than *any* of my children or grand-children. You are *exactly* like me, Raka." (FM, P.

64). In order to make one's life meaningful one must learn "to connect". Nanda Kaul and Raka fail to do. It is the drawback of Nanda Kaul.

Nanda Kaul is an admirable woman but inspite of efficiency and talents; she had led a life of deprivation in the house of her husband and children. She is a dutiful wife for a number of years. She feels emotional and retires to the Simla hills to get peace of mind in seclusion. But her estrangement is very short, and she is unconsciously pulled back into her former life when she sees at Raka. Though Nanda Kaul has resented her role in the family, she plays it bravely with apparent satisfaction and calm. Now her fervent desire is to be left alone in her mountain retreat. Nanda Kaul seeks a stillness that exclude all movement, animate and inanimate. Her desire for stillness is likened to charred tree trunk in the forest.

Nanda Kaul had lived a prosperous and happy married life. She was a perfect house-wife, loving and loved, housing the world at her command, sniffing around, "She struck ... into visitors and left them slightly gaping" and her husband was courteous and attentive "Mr. Kaul had wanted her always in silk, at the head of the long rosewood table, in the dining-room, entertaining his guests" (FM, P. 18). However, in spite of all these, Mr. Kaul had been in love with another woman throughout his life. Being proud woman, Nanda Kaul had never disclosed her feelings to her husband. This busy and intense world of her husband led her to enjoy her afternoons. Thus she was much tired of the company. Now she rages any company and despises anyone who tries to interfere with her life.

Nanda Kaul's looking at Raka was reproachful rather than welcoming..... but Raka ignored her, So calmly, that it made her (Nanda) breathless. Nanda kaul's indifference is

born out of "Vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation", but Raka is secluded by nature. The contrast between Nanda Kaul and Raka leads us to the theme of withdrawal and lack of communication. These gaps are different from that experienced by Maya and Gautama. Nanda Kaul's life was full on the surface but empty at the core. The trauma of childhood, on the other hand, had blunted the native thrust of Raka's soul. They both seek to exclude what they need most, the security and fulfillment of love. Nanda Kaul is an escapist who wants to live her life peacefully at the hill. Though, she is different from Maya, Sita and Monisha, she experiences the same loneliness; alienation and disgust with life.

Nanda Kaul, a great grand mother had too much of the world with her, but now she longs for a quiet retired life. Her busy past now looks a "box of sweets positively sickening". Nanda Kaul, wants to spend her deserted life in

Carignano, a rather desolated and haunted house in Kausali. Even she does not want to see postman :

" She hoped he would not stop..... Here, on the ridge of the mountain, in this quite house..... she wanted no one and nothing else. Whatever else came, or happened here, would be an unwelcome intrusion and distraction" (FM, P.3).

Happy and isolated Nanda Kaul is threatened by the irritating letter from Asha, the least loved of all her children. In her letter Asha has asked Nanda Kaul to look after Raka. But Nanda Kaul does not want to take responsibility of anybody. Asha's letter makes Nanda Kaul anxious:

" Now, to bow again, to let the noose slip once more round her neck that she had thought was freed fully, finally. Now to have those wails and bawls shatter and rip her still house to pieces, to clutter the bare

rooms and the cool tiles with the mountainous paraphernalia that each child seems to require or anyway demand" (FM, P. 19).

Nanda Kaul's married life is stiffing, busy but empty as the wife of an ex-Vice-Chancellor of Punjab University. She played her role as a wife such grace and dignity that almost everybody envied her. Apparently she remembers the veranda of their house, surrounded by the wives and daughters of lecturers and professors of the University, who whispered "Isn't she splendid? Isn't she like a queen? Really, Vice-Chancellor is lucky to have a wife, who can run everything as she does, and her eyes had flashed when she heard, like a pair of black blades, wanting to cut them". (FM, P. 18).

Nanda Kaul's relationship with her husband was an unhappy one. Her husband was a scholarly man who could read many languages and always wanted her to be as he

wishes. She led her life as he wanted her to live out of a sense of duty. Yet she could never consider his house as her own: "Mentally she stalked through the rooms of the house - his house, never hers". (FM, 18).

Though her life was crowded and full of social activities it was essentially meaningless and unsatisfying. There had been crowd of guests, coming and going all the time. She could not get privacy in her life. She was not happy and comfort at all. Its crowding had stiffed her: "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", (FM P 29).

Nanda Kaul's busy schedule was lock of warmth and understanding, yet she carried on because of her obligation to her husband and children. Now she has been relieved from her duties. She does not want any hindrances in her

life. She likes "a state of elegant perfection..... her own pared, reduced and radiantly single life." (FM, P. 31)

She had served everyone and love everything. She had suffered from the disorder, the fluctuating and unpredictable excess. She had been so glad when it was over. She is secluded : "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 groaned. " I've discharged all my duties. Discharge". (FM, P. 30).

Emotional dispossession is an important reason of Nanda Kaul's disillusionment with human bonds. Her husband disturbed her life. He took use of his wife as a mechanical appliance needed for running of his household. She played the role of graceful hostess and enjoyed the worldly comforts and Social Status of the wife of a very important person. But she felt lonely and neglected.

Because her husband had love affairs with Miss. David, the Mathematics mistress. This had been the source of pains and agony through out her life. Naturally she becomes jealous and gets mental torturing. Now she comes to conclusion that every attachment to be the beginning of new betrayal and all socialisation is treachery. Her bond with her husband did not involve in her "Self". The annoying memory of the days when the Vice-Chancellor went to drop Miss David home haunts her even in the seclusion at Carignano. At the such occasions Nanda Kaul lost her "Composition and harmony". We so far know the traumatic married life of Nanda Kaul:

"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 who he had loved, all his life loved." (FM P. 145).

The sudden revelation of the arrival of another woman in the life of Nanda Kaul's husband, is a shocking news to any person, particularly to the women. It arises sickness in the soul of Nanda Kaul and therefore she disturbs all attachments and affairs.

If we compare Nanda Kaul with the female protagonists of Anita Desai's earlier novels, she (Nanda Kaul) is a class by herself. Maya, Monisha and Sita do not bother about their responsibilities. They seem to the selfish or self centred, expecting too much from other. They do not consider what the others might expect from them. Therefore they pull themselves in unnatural calamities and situation. But Nanda Kaul saves herself from mental disturbance and courageously brings up all her children because of her sense of duty towards others. It gives

meaning, a purpose to her otherwise insipid existence.

Nanda Kaul is wise and also courageous to face the shifting challenges. She has strong desire for absolute isolation and stillness even during her busy life as a Vice-Chancellor's wife, yet she never evaded her responsibilities. To get relax from unbearable emotional strains, in her married life, she practiced stillness and composure, for years, for an hour every afternoon: "It was an art not easily acquired" (FM P.23). It was very difficult to get rest in that busy house. Where nothing was ever still:

"From all sides these sounds invaded her room which was in the centre.... This would go on for an hour and she would keep her eyes tightly clenched, her hands folded on her chest.... determinedly not responding. The effort not to respond would now longer by the minute, heavier, more unbearable, till at last it was

sitting on her chest, grasping her by the neck." (FM PP. 23-24).

Nanda Kaul is saved herself from disaster and tragedies, because of her capacity to accomodate others and sacrifice herself for her family. Her self willed isolation in Carignano and her harsh decision not to let any one intrude into her house of quiet disolation actually becomes, her undoing. As R. S. Sharma observes : "at Carignano she deliberately seeks to exclude what she needs most - the security and fulfillment of love".² After Raka's arrival at Carignano her little defenses start under the pressure of Raka's human presence. It hurts her to find herself neglected by her own grand-daughter. She wants to maintain a viable rapport with the child who is a recluse by nature. To avoid the familial bond wants to create an illusory substitute for it. G. S. Balarm Gupta rightly discusses:

"It is only physically that she has been able to withdraw herself from her harsh life of duties and responsibilities; irritations and announces and dubious joys and certain sadness. The old woman can neither escape her past nor help her present not predict her future. In Carignano it is only apparently that she is alone. Her past keep surging up in her memory and these reminiscences create uncontrollable replies in her consciousness".³

Nanda Kaul creates an imaginary world to fulfil Raka's interest. In fact, "All those graces and glories with which she has tried to captive Raka were only a fabrication. They helped her to sleep at night they were tranquilizers, pills" (FM P. 145). Totally Nanda Kaul has been a puppet in the hands of circumstances. She has danced according to the rhythm and tunes composed by others. After her husband's death, she wants to live life in

her own style, in Carignano. Nevertheless she soon realizes that ever her life in flake. In the form of Raka she has to glance over the very life which she so vehemently wants to forget.

Her relationship with her children is not so good. She brings up the children and serves her husband, supposing that it is her duty as a mother and a wife. She has so many children, and bringing them up has been a very tough job for her, they constantly need for attention. She remembers her immerse life when the children were all small:

"She seemed to hear poignant shrieks from the canna beds in the garden-a child had tumbled off the swing; another had been strung by a wasp, a third slapped by the fourth-and gone out on the veranda to see them come wailing up the steps without lips bruised knees, broken teeth and tears, and bent over them

with that still, ironic bow to duty that no one had noticed or defined" (FM, PP. 18-19).

It is known that strong maternal instincts in woman, make them derive a peculiar joy in bringing up their children. The memories of motherhood period later fill their heart with tenderness. But Nanda Kaul is an exception to this. The years when her children were small, look to her. "Like the gorge, cluttered, choked and blackened with the heads of children and grand children", (FM P. 17). Bringing them up has been more of a duty than an affection or a source of emotional satisfaction. After a long life of disorder Nanda Kaul has reached a state of elegant perfection. Even when Raka comes to Carignano Nanda Kaul tries to keep herself away as her entrances reminds her of her own children and she does not want "to be drawn into child's world again - real or imaginary, it was bound to betray". (FM, P. 45).

Living in desolate house at Carignano Nanda Kaul does not remember anything pleasant about her children though she is frequently reminded of what she did for them. When she receives Asha's letter, she is in no hurry to open it and go through its contents. It reminds her of the most troublesome of her children: "She struggles to suppress her anger, her disappointment and her total loathing of her daughter's meddling, busybody ways, her granddaughter's abject helplessness, and her great granddaughter's impending arrival here at Carignano." (FM P.16). She tries her level best to forget this and concentrates on the soothing scene outside. But she gets 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 none". (FM, P.17).

Nanda Kaul's too much interest to spend lonely life in Carignano begins to crumble in the presence of Raka. Once again she has to look for someone to care for. Her inner mind forces her "to reach out to other" to love and be loved. Nanda Kaul filled with tenderness for Raka. Naturally she wants to help the child in going bed: "Habit would rear its head inside her, make her prepare to follow, tell her to tuck the child in, read her a story and lead her safely into sleep". (FM P. 80). Always She tried to feel wanted and loved. Consciously or unconsciously she has striven to get positive response from her family for her devotion, but all in vain. Now she concentrates all her energies to win Raka. Despite she feels betrays and disappointments.

Nanda Kaul, is caught in the net of, what Martin Buber Calls, "Self contradiction", "the failure to work out and realize the in-born thou and what meets it." ⁴. Nanda

Kaul is unaware of the split in her personality caused by the desire of the self. She hangs between two different forces: withdrawal and involvement, detachment and attachment. Nanda Kaul, the oldest of Anita Desai's main characters, depicted so far, takes shelter to self-destructive isolation as an alternative to her conflicts. Nanda Kaul follows the pattern of self alienation of the sever kind, leading her towards neurosis. Metaphysically she points to the human existence, the inevitability of human sufferings. She points the sickness of soul, which is imposed upon her from inside. Outer power do affect the working of her mind but her trouble is deeply fixed in the atmosphere of insecurity. Nanda's difficulties arise out of her intense self-contempt grew from her failure in life.

After such hectic life she wants to discharge and wishes for quiet spell of aloneness. Besides the concept is not alien to the Hindu mind. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan

considers silent communion as an essential part of worship:

"In every one of us in a secret shrine where no one could intrude, to which we must retire as often as possible and discover what our true self is as distinct from the appearance we present to the world outside".⁵

However Nanda Kaul does not look for peace in Kasauli.

Nanda Kaul is a formidable old woman. She has snapped all ties and discarded everyone. It is too difficult to believe that Nanda Kaul is basically a compliant character. According to her, love is the most desired sentiment. Her husband's infidelity, his utter disregard, the insensitive attitude of her children deal her blows. The reality is, she is not the queen of his home, just an unloved woman, mother of his children, a Social symbol of his responsibility. In such situation either she has to fight or

bear it mutely. She is helpless. She chooses the second alternative to save her from Self-scolding.

Nanda Kaul does not rage as Maya does in *Cry, The Peacock*. Albeit both these protagonists are compliant and they are different is their sub-types. Maya is dependent woman. She expects indisputable love from others. She wants to take revenge with vindictiveness. On the contrary Nanda Kaul is a self-effacing type. She cripples her capability to fight to demand her rights to be self-assertive. On this "Shrinking process" she loses even a normal self-esteem. She is an epitome of devotion, duty and sacrifice. Her life pattern amply illustrates it attending to guests, looking after "So many children", serving her husband efficiently:

"Too many trays of tea would have to be made and carried to her husband's study, to her mother-in-law's bed-room, 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". (FM, P.29).

She is always engaged in her duties denying her pride. Hardly she is resentful. She also weak and unassuming by her self-effacing drives. She is mostly annoyed when guests disturb her privacy.

Nanda Kaul is not only helpless but also weak and unassuming by her self-effacing drives. Her husband is too busy in his affairs with Miss David to notice the self-sacrificing devotion of his wife. Nanda Kaul thinks of the bird as "nervous and agitated". It is a "hunted, fearful bird, distracted and disturbing". (FM. P. 26). Symbolically she is like the bird, disturbed, agitated, unable to fight and defend herself. Consciously she thanks herself as a "night cat" prowling in the dark, but unconscious forces tell her that she is like the bird flying unevenly, "through the

funeral moonlight". This image flashes on her mind when her husband leaves her alone to continue his love affairs. To relieve the tension of the situation, she considers her aloneness as "a moment of private triumph, cold and proud".(FM, P. 26).

It is to be memorized that Nanda Kaul has nothing to look forward to. Her children are alienated from her. Her misery is shown in the last speech before her death. "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." (FM, P. 145). It is clear that her children do not care her. She is abandoned woman. She has failed to maintain human relations and has pulled difficulties by her compulsive drives.

In order to elude self-reproach Nanda Kaul should find out some ways. She needs to shift her energies from compliant drives to resignation. As the novel opens we meet Nanda Kaul walking alone, aimlessly on the mountain of Carignano. She appears to be a resigned individual set for spiritual experience of inner peace, prepared to run away from conflicts. She feels safe at Kasauli because it is away from the plains where she can act her drama. Carignano has no memories of the past. An atmosphere of impersonal relations suit her. She has got the required loveliness and feels happy. As Emerson argues, we can never go out of ourselves. We always perceive our own thought: "It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to love after your own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of

solitude".⁶ In the opinion of Emerson Nanda Kaul has not achieved the capacity to be timeless and selfless.

Nanda Kaul's self-imposed detachment is weakened due to her maternal love and her basic nature. Once again she is in need of some one to care for. Her inner mind forces her to love and be loved. She tenderly wants to help the child, Raka. Now she concentrates all her attention to hold Raka's interest. She longs desperately for love and comes to know that she is discarded, she will be crushed by self hate.

So far, Nanda Kaul tries to avoid the onslaught of self-hate by escaping into the intra-psyche defenses. Lastly the telephone call informing the death of Ila Das overwhelms with spite for herself. Metaphysically, the death of Ila Das and Nanda Kaul are interpreted as the final reality suggesting the futility of human existence. Ila dies because of her concern for others, Nanda Kaul dies because of her

concern for loneliness. Both involvement and noninvolvement signify a tragic sense of unfulfilment. Feminist criticism points out a social forces which destroy women from within. Anita Desia, however does not subscribe to the view and resents being labeled as a feminist.

When Nanda Kaul hears the news of Ila Das's death, her self-hate operates in different way. She is shocked. She is unable to stamp up. She is overwhelmed by feeling of worthlessness. Self - reproach announces her guilty; she is lowered in her self esteem. Throughout her life Nanda Kaul lives in many pretences. So far, she is the mistress of a happy family; She is always in the hubub of a immerse social whirl. She is the queen of the Vice-Chancellor's house. These pretexts continue in her old age. She lives in make-believe world to compensate for the cruel reality. We may realize that she is, actually a woman unloved and

discarded. A brief moment of self scrutiny allows her a glimpse of her loveliness and misery. Anthony storr describes a schizoid person as cold, aloof and detached, and calls it "a complex mask for a repressed longing for love",⁷ which may erupt in violent aggression. Albeit Nanda Kaul is not a schizoid case, she has neurotic compulsions.

In the end of the novel, Nanda Kaul's aggression is directed against her "Self" because she has to be matched for the struggle between her idealized and real selves. In her last moments we know that behind the broken world reflected by her self accusations, lies the vision of reality, a brief interplay of life and death, destruction and renewal, chaos and cosmos. At last the negative values, chaos and destruction over power her real self. The confrontation between real and idealized selves is inner conflict. Nanda Kaul condemns herself as a murderer of Ila. She does not

commit suicide like Maya or Monisha no do her neurotic impulses drive her to violent outbursts like Nirode. Her death-wish expressed in the last page, works on her psyche. It finally causes her psychic death, followed by a sudden physical demise.

The quiet self-destruction of Nanda Kaul is immediately followed by a more violently destructive act of Raka. Setting the mountain to fire shows the girl's pyromania. Nanda Kaul's apparent quarrelsome attitude and rebellious detachment are so far similar to the defenseless of Ila. She latter appears pale. Being helpless and destitute she evokes our pity. Nanda Kaul has a small spell of self discovery, the truth about herself is too bitter to endure.