



**CHAPTER – V**

**MINOR CHARACTERS**

### **Minor characters**

In her presentation of the minor Characters, Anita Desai expresses her own concern with feminism. Perhaps she wants to show that woman is always a sufferer. These minor characters help to strengthen the story. Any novel needs a sound plot to convey the message of the writer. Anita Desai's minor characters are scaled on these lines Though Maya , Sita and Nanda kaul are main characters much of their concern is certainly with these minor characters. Their appearances, their behavioural patterns, their ways of life, their approach towards life certainly influence the major characters. These minor characters have their own realm in which they wonder keeping their identities in tack. If we exclude them from the story perhaps the story will not be complete .It seems that Anita Desai is not creating these minor characters only for the sake of characters. On the contrary these characters

contribute immensely to the growth of the story. Most of her characters reveal Anita Deasi's views on life.

### **Cry, The peacock**

#### **1. Gautama's Mother:**

Gautama's mother is a dominant person in the family. She is short stature, lean and lan woman. She looks after her several children in a proper way and at the same time. she engages herself in social work. She is hard worker. She does not like lazy persons, when she tells Maya, her daughter-in-law, "The best way to fall ill is to stay in bad" (CP,P.157). Nila, her own daughter surprises to see the habit of hard work of her mother "That is because she herself never goes to bed before twelve and is always up at five. How does she do if? I don't know (CP.P. 157)

Gautama's mother loves her children. She, always, guides and advises them for their welfare. She does not

like Gautama's treatment to his wife, Maya. She cries, "Keep her still! Keep her quiet ! Keep her indoors! What nonsense you will talk at times Gautama" (CP,P.156-157). She also does not like her daughter who lazily sleeps all day. She impartially, holds responsible Nila, for her stain relationship with her husband. When Nila complains about her husband and desires to take divorce, her mother quickly replies : "Except lead a sensible life--- for she hated this matter of divorce in the family and children going fatherless " (CP.P,162). Gautama's mother shows warm and love to Maya. Naturally Maya. impressed and says:

"Her own children teased her.... lived with her....but they did not caress her....'And yet I Yearned for her to hold me to her bosom. I could not remember my own mother at all. My throat began to swell with unbearable self-pity." (CP.P,163).

As a social worker, Gautama's mother is concerned with the troubles and sufferings, hunger and unemployment, illness and helplessness of the people in the society. Maya is attracted by these good traits and exclaims:

" If she was a figure of old age, she was as much a figure of fire and energy .The gods might one day, erect a monument to her, though human beings would not. She awed me and attracted me, at the same time". (CP,P.158).

Being economical, Gautama's mother does not want to spend money unnecessarily. Whenever she goes to the market with Nila and Maya, she prefers to go by bus instead of by taxi. Even she denies Nila's suggestion of taking lunch in restaurant. Maya says:

"though not a penny on herself, and she led us into a queue, which was no queue, but a straggling group of

people tired of waiting in the blazing heat"  
(CP,P.160).

Thus Gautama's mother is clever in running a house.

## **2. Nila :**

Nila is Gautama's sister. She is a long-fingered and slender-necked woman. She lives at Calcutta with her husband and children. She takes proper care of her children. She prefers to remain with her children instead of going to visit places. Nila dislikes her husband. She used to abuse him: "After ten years with that rabbit I married I have learnt to everything myself" (CP.P,162).  
She wants freedom and to be independent, by getting herself a job. She decides to take divorce from her husband perhaps she comes to consult Gautama regarding her divorce. But he refuses to deal with her case. She goes to another lawyer.

Nila wishes to live a happy life. She is more interested in collecting things. She spends a lot on good many things. When she goes for shopping with her mother, she purchases bangles, clothes and absurd things for her children. She wants to take lunch in a restaurant and desires to go by taxi which is more expensive than that of a bus.

Being helpful, Nila helps Maya in her work. Regarding Nila Maya says: "She helped me remove the skin from the milk"(CP.P,157). Nila's relation with Mays is good .

### **3) Leila:**

Leila is Maya's friend. She is a teacher in girls school. She teaches Persian literature. She is gloomy and ascetic, wearing no jewelry or bangles. Her attitude towards life is fatalistic. She falls in love with a tubercular

man and marries him, against the wishes of her parents. She lives in a single room, with her sick husband. She takes proper care of her sick husband in curing illness. In her fatalism, there is a masochistic strain. Anita Desai aptly comments, "Leila was one of those who require a cross, cannot walk without one"(CP, P. 58). If Maya is obsessed with the albino prediction Leila has accepted her destiny and does not grudge or complain against: "It was all written in my fate long age"(CP,P.59). If Maya is pampered child, Leila's parents have broken all relations with her. They "had not seen her, written her, of in any way communicated with her since the day of her elopement" (CP,P.58 ).

#### **4. Pom :**

Pom is another friend of Maya. She is pink, plump and pretty girl. Her attitude to Life is different than that of <sup>Leila</sup>~~Pom~~

and Maya. She is a wife of Kailash. She is more fashionable woman. She spends much time in front of the mirror:

" Prinking before her mirror tying up her hair in pigtails with enormous ribbons or twisting flowers into chignons of astonishing intricacy, painting her mouth, the outlines of her black eyes, her finger and her toe-nails " (CP.P,60).

Pom is more luxurious and happy woman. She is also good humoured. She spends her all day, gayfully, by cutting jokes. She is extravagant. She creates a dream world in herself. She desires to live in a flat, in a new colony, like other rich women in the society. When her husband thinks about saving money, she mimics him: "Bah! save money for what? To live here like two mice in one small room." (CP.P.61).

Pom is against the family tradition and superstitions. She likes tea, sweetmeats, to go to cinema and drive in the new car. Pom is a religious woman. When she is pregnant she goes to temple every Thursday and offers flowers to god that she wants it to be a male child. She says: "I'm to have a baby in November. I take flowers to the temple every Thursday I want it to be a boy." (CP, P.63). The lives of Maya and Pom are two polarities.

### **Where Shall We Go this Summer?**

#### **1. Miriam :**

Miriam is seen in the very first part of the novel. She is a wife of Moses. She is a beautiful woman round thighs, yellow eyed, encased in a pink skirt and an orange blouse. She matches Moses inch for inch in height and breadth. She loves small children very much: "Miriam cackled and made pinching, snatching gestures at Karan's shrinking

bottom, pursing up her lips and making wet, kissing sounds as she did so." (WSGS,P-25).

Miriam is a maid servant in the house of Sita at Manori. She is sincere in her duties. She cooks food and fetches water from the well. She is not a traditional woman. She smokes cigar. And she also provides cigarettes to her mistress, Sita. When Sita sits so desolate Miriam asks: "Amma, you've no cigarettes left, I shall make you some!" (WSGS,P.107). Miriam takes proper care of children. She knows the art of solacing the crying children. Once she tries to make happy Karan by singing a song:

" Don't cry, baby, don't cry,

Mama making chill fry,

Papa catching butterfly,

Don't cry, baby, don't cry ( WSGS,P.118)

After all Miriam is a good maidservant.

## **2. Menaka:**

Menaka is a daughter of Sita and Raman. She is supercilious, self-contained and beautiful young girl of ten years. She resembles her father in her ability to cope with life. She is enthusiastic. She makes up her mind to become a doctor.

She comes to Manori with her mother and Karan. She does not like the house at Manori, island. She complains stumbling in the knotted monsoon grass. "I can't see," .... "there's no light ." (WSGS,P.25). She cannot bear the inconvenience at Manori house. She seems to spend happy and comfortable life. She keeps high aim in her life. When Sita asks her about the screaming and combating of the children, Menaka simply says, "They are only playing" ( WSGS, P.44) . Though Menaka is a small girl her thoughts are matured.

Menaka is self-confident and able to take decision about her education. She does not bend to her mother's persuasion in studying Arts and painting. According to Menaka Arts and painting are merely hobbies. Simply, she says: "It's only a hobby" (WSGS, P.115). Menaka firmly decides to study because she wants to achieve her goal in her life. Often Menaka loathes her mother. She supposes that the discussion with her mother is fruitless: "Arguments with her mother always ended in this kind of haze, of obscurity and nonsense that her trim and practical self loathed instinctively. That's all nonsense" (WSGS, P. 116).

Menaka plays a significant role in reuniting her father and mother. She is aware of her study. She wants to take admission in a college, at Bombay, as there is no college on the island. Menaka is shrewd enough to call her

father to take her to Bombay, without intimating her mother.

### **3. Rekha :**

Rekha is an elder sister of Sita. She lives with her father on the island. She takes part in devotion with her father. In her childhood she never plays any games as Sita and her brother do. Rekha is a good singer. She likes music most.

She sings religious song in the sound of *tanpura*, everyday, in the morning. Sita can hear at daybreak : "her sister's voice spinning out the silken thread of a morning *raga* in that quiet hour before the *chelas* had risen for prayers" (WSGS, P. 77). Invariably Rekha has been called as the Nightingale of the AIR, as her songs are displayed on AIR, in the every evening. Rekha lives in the center of a ring of young fanatic, brilliant eyed *chelas* who also

wear homespun, bare footed. Rekha always thinks for liberty. When her father falls ill and near to death, she goes away, as though : "She had waited for and planned for this moment of release from the old man's love" (WSGS, P. 98-99).

### **Fire on the mountain**

#### **1. Raka :**

Raka, the great grand-child of Nanda Kaul is the only child-character we meet in the novel. Raka is the girl who draws our attention. It is difficult to guess whether the novel centres around Nanda Kaul or Raka. No doubt, the novel begins with the flash on Nanda Kaul but in the course of the novel the focus shifts on to Raka. The title also refers to her, as she herself sets the forest on fire, therefore, "Fire on the mountain". If Nanda Kaul defends her privacy, Raka too is completely independent. Raka is satisfied herself and never bother her Nani (Nanda Kaul ).

She is defiant and mistress of herself. She murmurs herself: "I don't care – I don't care – I don't care anything " (FM, P.73).

As a child Raka does not like to play any games. She dislikes to listen to the fanciful tales told by Nanda Kaul. She prefers to go for wandering on the hill. Her childhood life is traumatic. Her father is drunkard. When he beats his wife, Raka hides herself. She remembers:

“her father, home from a party, stumbling... through the curtains of night,... beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse... that made Raka cover under her bedclothes and wet the mattress in fright ... and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes and wept” (FM, PP. 71-72).

She becomes introvert. Generally small children often attract towards the beauties of existence, fairy tales, adventure stories, flowers, toys, butterflies, the colourful

and fantastic aspect of the world. But Raka seems to be different child. Like grown-ups she prefers privacy and seclusion. She wanders all alone in the valley without intimating her grand mother. She does not care for her :

"She ignored her so calmly, so totally that it made Nanda Kaul breathless. She eyed the child with apprehension, now, wondering this total rejecting, so natural, instinctive and effortless when compared with her own planned and willful rejection of the child" (FM, P. 47).

According to Anita Desai's view Raka is a natural recluse and she compares her with Nanda Kaul :

"If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, her great-granddaughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct. She had not arrived at this condition by a long route

of rejection and sacrifice-she was born to it, simply"  
(FM, P. 48).

Raka has an experience of glamour and diplomatic society in Madrid, New York, New Delhi and other big cities and a dirt home as weird as New York dance club in Kasauli. Raka's horrible experiences deprive her innocent trust and feeling of joy in the company of others. Raka never gets any love and affection of her parents. William Walsh observes :

"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 corresponding bringing discomfort." <sup>1</sup>

Like Sita, in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Raka is a victim of emotional deprivation. Hence she

turns against the safe, cosy and civilized world and becomes fascinated for the ugly, lonely, rugged and desolate aspect of nature :

"It was the ravaged, destroyed and barren spaces in Kasauli that drew her...the skeletal pines that rattled in the wind the seared remains of the safe, cosy, civilized world in which Raka had no part and to which she owned no attachment." (FM, P. 91)

Perhaps Raka's unfortunate home leads her to psychological alienation. She has lost her interest in living, in any achievement. She is unable to get any kind of impulsion, at the "wish" level, and fails to find the deeper roots of her own thrust into life. She never allows anybody to intrude into her ivory tower of privacy. The novelist says : "Raka had all the jealous, guarded instincts of an explorer, a discoverer...." (FM. P. 61).

Raka's setting the mountain to fire is a destructive act. It is a girl's pyromania. Psychologists consider fire : "the objective phenomenon of an inner rage, of a hand which has become irritable".<sup>2</sup> The destruction of Raka's action is sadistic in Horneyan terminology. Raka lessens her conflicts by violence. This is a kind of an avenue of escape. By her action of setting fire Raka saves her ideal life from annihilation.

## **2. Ila Das :**

Ila Das is Nanda Kaul's childhood friend and schoolmate. She is a ridiculous spinster, starving on her pittance. She is a social worker. Often times she comes to Nanda Kaul for tea. Ila Das's voice is harsh and loud. She is generous, humble, painfully cheerful, uncomplainingly courageous and unbearable irritating. Despite all her sincere involvement she encounters a tragic end. Though

Ila Das and Nanda Kaul are close friends their likings are different. Nanda Kaul's attitude towards Ila Das is rigid. Besides Ila Das talks about things which Nanda Kaul dislikes. Hence Ila Das feels : "Darling, I am growing o-o-old!" (FM. P. 117).

Ila Das's childhood life was happy and comfortable one. She welcomes the childhood memories for it is : "a little bit of the past come alive" (FM. P. 32). Ila Das and Nanda Kaul think about the past from entirely different point of views : Nanda Kaul resents the claim it had made on her, while Ila Das romanticizes it with her memories of the badminton game, the music and the Jam, it is piece of heaven. Her past memory makes her present situation tolerable. Ila Das lives in the world of fantasy and hope.

Ila Das is a prompt and efficient social welfare officer in the Garkhal division. It is her passion for justice, change and reform that brings her trouble. By facing many

difficulties she tries to reform the society. Her sincere effort of preventing child marriage brings her tragic death. She is attacked, raped and killed by the anti-socialists. Ila Das is a pathetic figure. She is helpless and destitute, and evokes our pity. Her powerlessness and ineffectuality are the causes for her end. She has seen many vicissitudes of life. There was a time when the family could afford “honey for tea”, Piano lesson, badminton and other luxuries of anglicized rich classes of India. Grilled by fate she seems to understand life. She says to Nanda : “ We must do the best we can .... We must simply shoulder our responsibilities and do what we can” (FM. P. 132).

In fact, Ila Das overacts to surmount her insecurity and loneliness. It indicates her failure. There is no choice and escape from the futility of existence. In the broad sense if we observe Ila Das, she falls under the category of the perfectionists. She tries to fulfil her high ambitions and

responsibilities well. She attempts to impose the same standards upon the villagers, but in vain. Ila Das's life suggests another dimension of misery and meaningless existence. Hence is an admirable character.