

A Study of Anita Desai's Novels Fire on the Mountain

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Abstract – *In Fire on the Mountain (1977) Anita Desai depicts the psyche of Nanda Kaul, who has withdrawn herself from all movements and echoes. Initially, she had led a perturbed busy life as the Vice-Chancellor's wife, looking after several children and grandchildren and arranging for interminable get-togethers. But now she, as a widow, is living in isolation in a secluded bungalow in Kasauli along with her male servant. She wants no contact with outside world. The other important character is that of Raka the great-granddaughter of Nanda Kaul. The novel is obviously a study of feminine sensibility about Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das the bare mountainous terrain and a desert-burnt-out bungalow at hill top, which fascinates Raka, symbolizes her psychic void character which is an outcome of her emotional deprivation since she comes from a broken home with a sick mother and an alcoholic father who beats his wife. The pathetic story of Ila Das, who fascinates as well as repels Nanda Kaul's delicate sensibility, is faced with acute financial problems, becomes a welfare officer and is posted in the hills. Once she gives a sane advice to a villager from marrying off his seven year-old daughter to a farmer who is a widower with seven children.*

Key Words: Anita Desai, Mountain, Ila Das and etc.

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INTRODUCTION

All across the world, especially in the Indian sub-continent, the act of writing is for a woman essentially an act of breaking her silence because her repressive patriarchal/racial society has taught her to be culturally silent. Feminist movements have struggled to confront abuse of power and control within our very movements, even as we critique and resist the abuse of women within the sexist society. On a theoretical level, at least, we now know that not all women's experiences are the same nor necessarily similar, that claiming universality of women's experiences inherently functions to privilege white, middle-class, and otherwise already privileged women by making their participation in these systems of oppression invisible. We now know, for example, that fighting racism requires not only the obliteration of personal prejudices against people of different races, but also the active **disloyalty** to white supremacy and all of the structures that perpetuate systems of oppression and privilege. The feminine is essentially the marginalized consciousness that operates on the periphery of patriarchal discourse.

A sensitive and conscious writer like Anita Desai seems to grapple with the identity crisis which arises out of ill-matched marriages in her works. She

employs her writings as a vehicle to probe into women's lives and experiences. Although she is preoccupied with the theme of incompatible marital couples yet we come across different kinds of women characters many studies have come out on the subject. Many critics have address themselves to the theme of broken marriage and ill-matched couples in her novels but this does not mean that her exploration of feminine psyche ends here. Besides the hypersensitive types verging on neuroticism, we also have several other kinds. Such characters may be minor ones in her novels but they represent woman's mind and psyche in its varied moods and nuances.

Fire on the Mountain, Published in 1977 in London, placed Anita Desai's reputation as one of the best Indian English novelists. She was awarded the Royal Society of Literature's Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize and the 1978 National Academy of Letters Award for this novel. The title of this novel is perhaps derived from William Golding's famous novel, **Lord of the Flies**, of which the second chapter is entitled **Fire on the Mountain**. It symbolizes fire which burns in the heart of an old lady, a great grandmother, Nanda Kaul, and her emotional world is the theme of the novel. For this purpose R.S. Sharma rightly says that, "the words are expressive of Raka's resolve to destroy a world where a woman cannot hope to be happy without

being unnatural. What is remarkable about Anita Desai's psychological probing of the women in that she confines herself to the middle-aged. She has also perceptively explored the psyche of a girl in *Fire on the Mountain*.

The novel has been planned in a clear pattern of three parts. Each of these three parts is concerned with the three women characters in the novel, as is indicated by the three subtitles : *Nanda Kaul in Carignano, Raka Comes to Carignano, Ila Das leaves Carignano*. The subtitles, simple as they are, unambiguously highlight in the respective foci.

Fire on the Mountain (1977) awarded the Sahitya Akademi and also the Royal Society Award, Anita Desai's fifth novel, deals with the gentle mind of the young child Raka, the great granddaughter of Nanda Kaul. Although four generations have been delineated in this novel, but the focus is primarily on Nanda Kaul and her great granddaughter. Nanda Kaul lives alone on her own in a little cottage called Carignano in the Himalayan village of Kasauli. She has always longed for peace, without anyone demanding anything of her. Anita Desai tries to convince of Nanda's happiness, but in the course of the novel with the arrival of Raka and the final disaster of the murder of her life-long acquaintance Ila Das, the foundation of her supposed happiness collapses. Nanda's life as a semi-hermit was not self-chosen. The novel is written in three parts. The first part mainly presents the Nanda Kaul who had lived her life in a grand style. She had a highly enjoyable childhood and a glorious married life, but the maggot of somberness had been biting her all the while.

The circumstances were not propitious to her living in the family as the opulence, position, and fondness of the children were not having bonds. Nanda Kaul, the widow of a Vice-Chancellor is reluctant to live in a secluded old bungalow but she is compelled both by the choice and situation to do so. She was born of a rich and gifted father. Naturally, her childhood days were spent in substantial bliss and calm. Her house was on the banks of the Dal Lake, so they rowed about in Shikaras. Her father had varied interests and was fond of making experiments in horticulture, traveling and exploring. Nanda Kaul's married life was equally happy. Her husband was the Vice-Chancellor of the Punjab University. Hers was a very busy scheduled. She had to be on her toes from morning till noon.

Mrs. Desai sincerely broods over the fate and future of modern women more particularly in male chauvinistic society and her annihilation at the altar of marriage. It is but natural for a writer like Anita Desai to make family the centre of her novels and this applies to her almost every novel. Her women protagonists have been daughters, wives, mothers and mistresses. These are the roles that demand different kinds of responses from women in the name of honor, dishonor, right, wrong, but always in the context of men's lives. She makes a sincere attempt

at reinterpreting the meaning of different roles that a women plays in life. In the novel like *Fire on the Mountain*, Desai presents the family of Nanda Kaul who is a loveless wife and a responsible mother.

As the novels opens we see, Nanda Kaul, as an aged women standing under the pine trees at Carignano, her home on the ridge, her hill-top house on Kasauli. She is aged but still very beautiful, self-consciously graceful and straight in her bearing. Carignano is apparently a barren place; it is precisely this barrenness that appeals to Nanda Kaul probably because of its resemblance to her own barren life. The starkness of the Kasauli range, along with its rocks, and pines, its light and air, with its vast expanse and sweeping view towards the Northern peaks and the Southern plains pleases the old lady.

At this stage of her life she seems to want nothing more. She, however, is not pleased with the seen in her garden, where the bird-mother feeds her nestling. Their shrill screams seem maddening to her. Perhaps, it brings back unpleasant memories. She turns back to the opposite direction and walks to the topmost point of her garden. Thus, the very first chapter introduces the keynote of the novel, and simultaneously let's loses a number of ideas which will be gradually crystallized in course of the novel.

But even at this stage it is quite evident that Anita Desai's primary interest is not the description of landscape but the psychology of the protagonist and the landscape is used only to reflect symbolically the mindscape of Nanda Kaul. The opening chapter also subtly introduces Nanda Kaul as a person as well as her present situation. Apparently, the lady has withdrawn from the plain, from friends and relatives, from all mundane superfluities of daily life, and also from her own past. She is determined to love her loneliness. She feels sunny in the futility and emptiness of the house.

All wanted was to be alone, to have Carignano to herself, in this period of her life when stillness and calm were all that she wishes to entertain. It indicates that she begs to live a life without any attachments. She wants no one and nothing else. Whatever else came, or happened here, would be an unwelcome intrusion and distraction. She has lived a very busy and tiresome life and so she desires to enjoy full peace in her old age without any pressing demands or distraction from anywhere. She prefers her lonely isolated existence guarding her privacy fiercely and the news of Raka's arrival description on Part I a comparison has been shown between her and a tree. She was grey, tall and thin and her silk saree made a sweeping, shivering sound and she fancied she could merge with pine tree and mistaken for one.

She looks like a tree, unemotional and still. She resembles herself to a tree because she is too in the flames of frustration, disapproval and torture. Thus, the novel presents the organizing cry of Nanda Kaul, the wife of a ViceChancellor. In part I of the novel, present juxtaposed with past. Nanda Kaul feels both angry and disappointed at the arrival of Raka. This hour of grievance gives a clue to Nanda Kaul's withering and decisive withdrawal as the veil over the past gets slightly rippled and a quick glimpse into past is presented when Nanda was a busy housewife.

This past is not remembered by her as some shining vistas, instead it seems to be like a gorge. She recalls the house and life of a housewife in her Vice Chancellor husband's house in a small town in Punjab. Through the family life of Mr. and Mrs.Kaul, Desai presents the problem of manwoman relationship which is a basic component part of uninteresting family life. She initiates with Nanda Kaul who discharges all her duties to her unloving husband and his world. The thought of the veranda of their house in the small university town in Punjab, the Vice Chancellors house over which she had presided with such an air as to strike awe into visitors who come to call and leave them slightly gaping. She had her cane chair there too, and she had sat there, not still and emptily, but mending cloths, sewing on strings and buttons and letting out hems, at her feet a small charcoal brazier on which a pot of 'kheer' bubbled, snipping threads and instructing the servant girl to stir, stir, do not stop stirring or it'll burn, and then someone had to be called to hold the smallest child from falling into bubbling pot and carry it away, screaming worse than if it were scalded. Then she recalled the visits of guests and thought of that hubbub and of how she had managed and how everyone had said, pretending to think she couldn't heart but really wanting her to, Isn't she splendid? Isn't she like a queen? Really ViceChancellor 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, waiting to cut them. However, her own people failed to appreciate her beauty and dedication or nor had her husband loved and cherished her and kept her like a queen. The lifelong trustlessness of Mr. Kaul to Nanda Kaul and the hypocritical situation forces her to accept alienation. This wedding was quite based on physical passion and circumstantial convenience.

Nanda Kaul becomes a mother of many unwanted, uncared children. Mr. Kaul, keeps his beloved Miss Davidson, a teaching staff. He invites her for badminton parties, drops her back at night and comes back secretary to his separate bedroom. But Nanda Kaul shows the frozen smile on her face. She looks after the family, his children, servants, and his house with commanding confidence.

Mentally she stalked through the rooms of that house- his house never hersvery carefully closing the

wire-screen doors behind her to keep out the flied, looking sharply to see if the dark furniture all rosewood, had been polished and the doors of gigantic cupboards properly shut. She sniffed to make sure the cook was not smoking **biri** in the kitchen and to verify that all the metal ware smelt freshly of Brasso. She seemed to hear poignant shrieks from the **canna** beds in the garden – a child had tumbled off the swing, another had been stung by a swap, a third slapped by the fourth- and gone out on the veranda to see them come wailing up the steps with cut lips bruished knees, broken teeth and tears, and bent over them with that still, ironic bow to duty that no one had noticed or defined. Thus, in Nanda Kaul's case familial relationship is not genuine although it may appear to be so.

The above quoted passage depicts the liabilities of a housewife and the trauma of Mrs.Nanda Kaul. Externally everything appears to be free from harshness but internally Mrs. Kaul burns with the fire of frustration. She feels lonely and neglected. This relationship shows that wedding, a union of two souls and two bodies, is to be established very consciously and carefully. General situations in society are such that no apt time or notion is offered to these affairs. Its outcomes are the clashes, desperation, obsession alienation and loneliness. In Indian society, if a marriage is successful then credit is seldom given to a female for her contribution to make it successful. In fact, it becomes successful because of her grace, love, wisdom and a sense of understanding, tolerance and sacrifice. If a marriage becomes unsuccessful then the woman is sometimes held responsible for the same. But these notions are not accepted by the self-consciousness and self-respecting woman in our society. Here, in case of Nanda Kaul, it is to be noted that there is no Hindu wife who could endure such an illicit relationship between her husband and another lady. In spite of this she appears as smooth and free from heart breaking agony. Mostly traditional women are seemed as insane ones immolating their lives in such a critical and pitiable plight.

These are the situations which have forced her to get such a dreamed house at Kasauli. Several houses have been introduced in the narration- some real, some imaginary- among which Carignano emerges as the most important location in the story. Carignano, Nanda Kaul's hill station house, is structurally pivotal in serving the function of unifying the three parts of the novel, as the subtitles indicate. Carignano has been, furthermore, envisioned and fore grounded as a very special **space** in both the literal and metaphorical senses. As the novel opens, Nanda Kaul has already arrived at Kasauli, and settled in her hill station house 'Carignano' and she seems to have found a sort of contentment. Further, there is a reference of dream house when Nanda Kaul tells Raka stories which are supposed to be of her own

past she also gives her pictures of imaginary houses. The most fantastic of these houses is the one of her childhood in Kashmir. It is a house encircled by a Paradise garden with apple orchards, plums and peaches, almonds and walnuts, pistachios and **chilgoza**, apricots and raisins. The house contained a private zoo. She tells Raka including a great Himalayan bear, and leopard cats and lorises, and a pangolin. In order to impress Raka Nanda Kaul conjures up a 'wonderland' or Disneyland while attempting to describe a plausible yet attractive house. At the same time, it may also be noted that her dream house is a bit different from the Disneyland or from Alice's wonderland. As she adds there were hunting dogs, big wild mastiffs could not stand the sight or smell of bear and would have to be locked upstairs whenever the bear was let out, because otherwise there would have been a massacre.

There was Persian carpet his father had bought in Iran when he was with the ambassador there. There was glass his mother has bought in Venice. There were Moghul miniatures my husband collected. the narration about this idyllic house is, however, concluded with the information that the house had been 'given up' to the next Vice-Chancellor, and the wonderful collection had been distributed among Nanda Kaul's children. When Ila Das comes to visit Carignano she adds her own splash of gaudy color to the picture Nanda Kaul has already drawn off the Vice Chancellor's house. In her characteristic tone of enthusiasm she hammers on: Oh, the Vice Chancellor's house – that home away from home for me. All the old customs, the old way she paints her fabulous picture of the welcoming home- Tea waiting in winter, lemonade in the summer, pets running free everywhere, the children and their friends playing cricket on the lawn, and all cares could be forgotten for an evening.

It is perhaps natural that whereas the dream houses are drawn elaborately, with eye too minute details, the real houses are mentioned similarly with just a few brush strokes, bold, strong and merciless in their harsh honesty. In the real houses of the past Nanda Kaul had never been the proprietor, but the housekeeper. Those were the houses of others, her father's house, and her husband's house. Carignano is the only house which has offered her **a room of one's own**.

Nanda Kaul's experience of motherhood and wifehood only serves to explore the traditionally celebrated myths about the **venerated** roles of a woman as a mother and wife-cum-housekeeper. The memory of bearing and rearing the many children thus brings no solace to her. It only brings back feeling of the great discomfort, and the annoyance and botheration she had to bear with during these occasions. And all the time, with so much to do regarding the supervision of the daily household chores, in addition to huge quantity of washing and ironing, she had to keep up appearance as the proud

possession or show piece in the house- as the elegant wife of the Vice-Chancellor: There was such a deal of washing and ironing to do and Mr.Kaul had wanted her always in silk, at the head of the long rosewood table in the dining-room, entertaining his guests.¹¹ Years later, in the afternoons in her mountains house, Nanda Kaul would sometimes remember the badminton court in her husband's house. It is not herself as a player that she remembers. The past floats down to her as the memory of one evening when, after people had finished their play, she alone had been pacing the abandoned court: Walking faster and faster back and forth, back and forth over the lawn, she had stayed out till she heard the car her husband had been to drop some of the guests home- no, she corrected herself with asperity, one of the guests home.

She silently watched him from her shade going up to his room, and stays on alone. The badminton court figures again during the 'memory making' game which Ila Das takes over from Nanda Kaul during her visit to Carignano. Ila Das goes ecstatic as she fantasizes the memory of the past for Raka's consumption, and describes the delightful summer evenings in Vice-Chancellor's house in those grand old days: How all the teachers waited for an invitation to play badminton at the Vice-Chancellor's house. He used to organize matches, you know- your great grandfather, my dear. We'd play mixed doubles I remember playing with one of your great uncles, my dear, against the Vice-Chancellor and Miss David. Miss David was an ace player- ooh, she was good- and they beat us hollow...the badminton court- mixed double – Miss David- and here were Ila Das and Nanda Kaul, both beaten, silent.¹³ In *Fire on the Mountain* Anita Desai captures a woman's dream of a 'space' of her own. All along her life the protagonist had been denied a space of her own, but in the last years of her life she is allowed the expanse of a mountain. The hill station resort to Kasauli, to which Nanda Kaul retires in her old, is a real empirical space, and at the same time it is emblematic of Nanda Kaul's silent protest and assertion. At last she gets 'a room of one's own' on this mountain. It is a contrast to the male spaces she had lived in the past, spaces which were occupied and controlled by her father and husband respectively. Coming here "on the ridge of the mountain" she feels she has reached "the place she had wanted and Prepared for all her life" it gives her a **great, cool flowering of relief** and she wants no one and nothing else. Nanda Kaul at Carignano is the recluse who has apparently done away with the demands of life, and now she wants to be left alone. She does not even want to receive letters or massages. Even the sight of the postman fills her with annoyance and she only hopes that the postman will not stop at Carignano : because the postman suggest a connection with the world below the mountain, along with its various

demands, calls, impositions, botherations, which she thinks she had left behind forever.

Nanda Kaul prefers her lonely isolated existence guarding her privacy fiercely and the news of Raka's arrival unsettles her. Raka, Nanda Kaul's granddaughter, is not a normal child. She avoids all tenderness viciously. Children of her age always attract towards the beauties of existence: fairy tales, stories of adventure, flowers, butterflies- the colorful and gay aspect of the world. On the contrary Raka possesses a queer imagination and is drawn to mysterious places and things. Even as a child she loves privacy and seclusion. Anita Desai calls Raka a natural recluse and thus compares her with Nanda Kaul: If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long line 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.¹⁵ Their marriage has been on the rocks all the times. Asha, thus, writes about Tara "as a result of his ill-treatment of her, the affairs he had, his drinking and brutality, Tara was reduced to a helpless jelly, put away out of sight and treated as an embarrassment, who could, if she tried pull herself together Raka's traumatic feelings have deprived a child's innocent trust and experiences of joy in the company of others. William Walsh lays stress on the importance of love and care for the wholesome growth of a child, and remarks, "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.

To a child the parents are the models. Apropos of this very observation Caroll Davis points out, "In psychological term Raka gets no room to grow Asha has been introduced in the novel through Nanda Kaul's point of view, as the mother remembers her daughter. Still it is not a very pleasant impression anyway. Whereas Tara suffers from a loveless marriage and would cling only to her sick daughter, Asha Complains, "All she does is sit by Raka's bed and read her stories". Asha Does not seem to understand her daughter's feelings or sufferings. Even Raka's knows better. She has "Known her mother ill for most of her life, mysteriously ill, mostly in bed, under a loose pink blanket that smelled of damp, like the lilies." In her nightmares she would wake up imagining her mother crying under the torture of an abusive husband. But Asha would rather side with Tara's husband. Asha cannot simply understand why she (Tara) shouldn't be happy. She is true- The main this was for Tara to rouse her and make another try at being a successful diplomat's wife. And since Tara's husband would be getting a new posting at Geneva, Geneva would be an excellent place for such an effort.

Raka often remembers her mother with a feeling of miserable, helpless, sadness, while Asha is impatient with Tara for the very reason for which Nanda Kaul remembers Tara with empathy. The reason is Tara's inability to blunt the edge of her sensitiveness, and thus put up with life however gross and brutal it may be. Nanda Kaul herself had to put up with much in her own life, and behind the facade of her dignified posture as the Vice Chancellor's wife there was also a trampled self like Tara hiding all the time, which has been finally suggested by the image of a crumpled shuttle cock in the deserted badminton court in the Vice-Chancellor's house. It is perhaps of this reason that Nanda Kaul feels so sympathetic towards Tara; at one point she even thinks of leaving Carignano to Tara who, Nanda Kaul feels, might need the shelter someday.

A mode of Tara's neurosis comes out clearly through Asha's letter. Like Monisha in *Voices in the City*, she must have been an incurable romantic girls forced into a wedding with diplomat, a practical, worldly-wise rich man, who have pushed himself up on the ladder of success. He has vices which are avowed as virtues in a polished society: Rakesh is not so bad as Tara might make you believe, she simply does not understand him, doesn't understand men and she really is the wrong type of wife for a man like him,...it is true that he does drink. She is unable to adjust herself and becomes a victim to her husband's brutality and starts to drink Orgies. Her negligence of the child, who is just recovering from an attack of typhoid by sending her to her great grandmother, while she herself goes to join to husband in Geneva, produced bitter experiences in Raka's heart. Tara has often instigated her mother to take things out of her hands, to make decisions for her, to bind her to send her child away and surrender ones again to the corrupt atmosphere of her husband and his society. Except Tara, there was another dire and despised marriage of Ila Dass. Nanda Kaul is, directly, related with their problems and these are the traumas of her life. Ila Das was pathetic and slightly comical character in the novel. Her father spends all the money on the sons' education, which turn out to be worthless and irresponsible. Ila Das gets an education which comes to no use when earning becomes a dire necessity. Still she shoulders the responsibility of her mother and sister. Ila Das is pathetically unconscious of her own unattractiveness – her ugly appearance, repulsive voice and ridiculous gestures. Nevertheless, she suffers from the knowledge that she is a laughingstock for everybody, big and small. Even Nanda Kaul, who has known her so long, finds her company unbearable.

The street **urchin jeers** at her and feels pleasure in teasing these hapless, ugly deformed old women. Finally she is raped and murdered just because she had tried to prevent a child marriage. Yet she

is just an innocent well-meaning frail and simple women. Ila Das represents a fragmented life. She is an individual, and at the same time she represents a type, the origin of which can be traced back in the colonial past of the country, she was born and brought up in apparent affluence. But eventually all this affluence and Anglicized upbringing proved to be sadly illusory and useless. And Ila Das ended up in a life of hard struggle and bare survival. That too was finally terminated by rape and murder of the helpless woman. It is only Nanda Kaul who can remember Ila Das as the small girl, the child of an affluence and upper class family, brought up in the typical Westernized fashion of those days as were supposed to be appropriate for a girl child in such a family. But now she is doing a job with very small salary.

Nanda Kaul one day asks Ila Das if Ila Das is managing to make both ends meet. Ila Das candidly admits how hard it has been in the recent years, with less people going for piano lessons, and Reema (Ila Das' sister) getting increasingly more helpless with her cataract, and Ila Das has to support both her sister and herself with her meager income. She realizes it is their upbringing- supposed to be one of the best in its time- that has made them especially helpless. This hones heart-to-heart talk becomes punctuated with silence, which is weighed down with the sadness of shared memories of frustration and betrayal, failure and bitterness.

Ila Das with her indomitable spirit, quickly recovers herself, and even tries to laugh at the thought of her comparative well-being when seen side by side with the life of the poorest, who are also victims of horrid superstitions and evil customs. In this context Ila Das tells Nanda Kaul about her attempt to stop child marriage and how this has angered some people with vested interest in the locality. She speaks of one Preet Singh who has turned hostile of her because of her effort to prevent the marriage of his child daughter to an aged widower with six children. It is the shock of this perception that finally kills Nanda Kaul when she is summoned by the police station to come and **identify** the mutilated body of the dead woman. With the brutal death of Ila Das, the violent world outside which she had carefully pushed back from her consciousness at Carignano, bounces back once again and shatters her shell. Now she can **identify** herself with Ila Das. Again, there is another vital kinship between Nanda Kaul and Ila Das; both are myth-makers. Both Nanda Kaul and Ila Das try to construct a make belief world of 'memorymaking'.

Nanda Kaul clearly perceives the similarity as well as difference between Raka and herself vis-à-vis Mountain. They are similar in the sense that both want "only one thing – to be left alone and peruse her own secret life amongst the rocks and pines of Kasauli". At the same time, Nanda Kaul is also conscious of the difference in their respective responses to this space to which both have come for shelter. If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of

vengeance for a long line of duty and obligation, her great granddaughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct. She had not arrive at this condition by long route of rejection and sacrifice- she was born to it, simply. Nanda Kaul understands the difference and she appreciate and admires the child for being what she herself could not be. The relationship between Nanda Kaul and Raka, the elegant old lady and the semiorphaned emaciated child, the great grandmother and the great granddaughter- can be considered in the light of this emerging paradigm in women's writing across the globe, connecting generations of women along a matrilineal matrix. The story centers round Nanda Kaul who is compelled both by choice and circumstances to live in seclusion in an old bungalow in Kasauli.

The reality about Nanda Kaul's husband is that he had never loved or cherished her. He had carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David. Nanda Kaul appeared face to face with this reality when she was informed of her friend Ila Das' rape and brutal murder. Ila Das had been stripped before being killed. Nanda Kaul strips herself of all the delusions, all the dream houses, all the myths she had so carefully adorned her stories with. She stands face to face with naked truth, and dies holding the receiver. In the meantime Raka has come to tell **Nani** that she had set the forest on fire. This is the first time that Raka insistently calls her **Nani**, but she gets no response.

Thus, the fire on the mountain had destroyed everything for her. From the above thematic survey of the novel of Anita Desai we find that man woman relationship plays an important part in her fictional world. But what is remarkable is that these relations are not harmonious whether it's a case of Nanda Kaul and Dr. Kaul or Asha and her husband. We cannot find a single relation in the novel which can be called good, if not perfect.

This implies that Anita Desai writes realistic novels and though in the world of institution of family continues to exist yet we seldom find a harmonious family. When a woman with brains and beauty from a wealthy background decides to take her fate into her own hands and challenge the restrictions of a male-oriented, conservative society, the consequences can be devastating. Following the divorce, she felt she had to tell her story. We can conclude that marital disloyalty is one of the most traumatic of all life experiences. Disloyalty by the husband is also a type of domestic violence against woman. Woman has to resist against this violence, raise her voice and break the silence in order to maintain her esteem. However, we believe that the identification of the emotional, character and spiritual conflicts that contribute to marital disloyalty can be uncovered and resolved. **Such healing is not possible** unless each spouse has an understanding of and a loyalty to the sacrament of marriage and to the goodness in his/her spouse.

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