



## NANDA KAUL AS AN ALIENATED, MENTALLY DISTURBED AND SELF-DESTRUCTIVE CHARACTER IN ANITA DESAI'S NOVEL FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

**ANSUYA CHAUHAN**

Research Scholar  
Chaudhary Charan Singh University  
Meerut. (MS) INDIA

### ABSTRACT

*This article observes one of the most popular characters in the Indian English Literature namely Nanda Kaul which has been portrayed by Desai brilliantly in her novel Fire on the Mountains. The concept of alienation and the issue of existentialism have been skilfully employed by the novelist in this novel. As far as Anita Desai's heroines are concerned Kaul is the oldest. She has the conflict in her mind because of her desire to live alone. However, the world around her never leaves her alone. The central character Nanda Kaul is shown having some self-alienating characteristics that lead her towards self-destructives. So, the zeal for the calmness and peace of mind leads her to the loss of self-identity, depersonalisation and mental trauma. However, the character of Nanda call is one of the most alienated, self-destructive and mentally disturbed characters of Indian English literature.*

**Key words:** Alienated, Mentally disturbed, Carignano, Detachment and Attachment, Society, Situation.

### INTRODUCTION

*Fire on the Mountains* is the most popular and the unique novel of Anita Desai. The concept of alienation and the issue of existentialism have been skilfully employed by the novelist in this novel. The two central characters named Raka and Nanda Kaul are shown having some self-alienating characteristics that lead them towards self-destructives. The literally fail to make any decision on their own or to take any responsibility to lead their lives in a concrete manner. However, they adopt compounded solutions to cope with their problems. Both the female characters, Nanda Kaul and Raka, take refuge in the proximity to nature by avoiding

ANSUYA CHAUHAN

1Page



or by rejecting the societal and familial ties. They, in their lives, maintain an attitude of resignation and alienation from the society. However, the zeal for the calmness and peace of the mind lead these characters like Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das, to the loss of self-identity, depersonalisation and mental trauma. All of them are somewhat the representation of the people with psychological dilemma. The novel has its main theme in the solitude and contrast between the two diverge generations and their emotional outlooks by the characters while to problematic marriage wife of the husband and wife is set in the background to make the readers realise the reason of Nanda Kaul's alienation is shrewdly put into the background only as the reply it with the fresh one of the difference between two generations is done in order to avoid the temptation artistic repetitiveness. Their situation is more or less the same and it truly represents the women of the society with mentally disturbed states.

Unlike, Desai's earlier novels where the young people are shown to have faced this problem, here all the age group are covered by Desai. The alienated soul of an old lady, her friend and her great granddaughter is presented. It makes pretty clear that not only the young that we have seen in her earlier navels but also the old ones are shown being alienated in this novel and thus it is different than other novels. Every character has its oven quality and they more often than not shuttle-cock between attachment and detachment. Similarly, their involvement or withdrawal is fatal and futile.

*Fire on the Mountain* deals with the lives and stories of three characters Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das. However, mainly it focuses upon the agonised soul of Nanda Kaul who happens to be the wife of a former vice-chancellor of Punjab University. Nanda Kaul is highly sensitive and introverts lady because of the essential dilemma and the way her mentally disturbed state is shown by Desai. She seeks withdrawal and searches a new meaning of life but all these things make her feel alienated. She has been caught in the web of self-contradiction. However, it is not realise by Kaul that she has a split personality disorder caused by her desire of the self to recoil from all contact and yet attempt to reach out to the other. She finds herself stuck between two contradictory forces: withdrawal and involvement, detachment and attachment. Carignano, the place where she finds her solitude, privacy and idealistic view of life, is the one she always seeks to go. In her old age, she tries to find out the real meaning of life as it is believed that this age is the time when the push away of the past takes place. In the Indian tradition, this period calls for the self-assessment by leaving aside materialistic things and the people too. The people seek solitude and detachment. Like others, Nanda Kaul's mind-set is something of this sort. She leaves everything in order to achieve these things. In the earlier chapters, Nanda Kaul tries to do this by giving up all the heaped up responsibilities but fails. However, finally she gets success in doing so. Her wish to be alone has been fulfilled as withdraws to Carignano, a lonely House situated in Kosauli, Shimla. Unlike traditional Indian seminar citizens who seek peace and divinity in the old age, Nanda Kaul goes to Carignano because she likes the tranquillity of that place and she enjoys

ANSUYA CHAUHAN

2P a g e



the 'Starkness' of the of towns. Nanda Kaul's idea of staying alone with peace is brutally hurt when she gets a letter from his daughter Asha that Raka her granddaughter is being sent to Carignano because of Asha's illness in Geneva. She sees it as an assault on her peace as Anita Desai says, "She struggled to suppress her anger and disappointment, her daughter's meddling busy-body ways, Raka's arrival at Carignano. Have I not done enough and had enough? I want to more. I want nothing can I be left with nothing? But there was no answer and of course she expected none." (Desai, 17)

As far as Anita Desai's heroines are concerned Kaul is the oldest. She has the conflict in her mind because of her desire to live alone. However, the world around her never leaves her alone. Being a wife of Vice-Chancellor, her life is "full of people." There are so many servants and so many guests, meetings and parties all the time. Her own family, children and relative all make her furious. Though she is raised financially and socially, she is fed-up all these emotionally. She regards her life with her husband as a 'boring affair' and her life is 'meaningless' with him because there is no involvement of 'herself' in it.

Nanda's voluntary alienation is the result of her past experiences. She has been sick of all the duties. Her husband's long affair with Miss David also makes her believe in the meaninglessness of life and the importance of attachment has been gone from her life. Her flash-back reveals that she has bargained with her fate. Her belief in doing good leads her to unbearable mental traumas and sufferings. She wanted to be a queen of her husband's house that ended up being mere a servant. Thus, she quietly engaged herself into the duty of family.

Nanda Kaul and Ila Das from the novel *Fire on the Mountain* are quite similar in every matter as they are from same period, they even receive same fair share of western education and both of them feel that both the cultures, the Indian and the western drug them. They do not know to which way they should go. They are brought up in the privileged class only to find afterwards as Ila said to Nanda,

*"How helpless our upbringing made as Nanda... We what we were being equipped with very best French Lessons, piano lessons English governesses- All that only to find it left as helpless, positively handicapped." (Desai, 127)*

This also snows the helplessness of Nanda Kaul as she has been quite alienated from all the members around her. However, the novelist poses a question which is constant throughout the novel as it shows that if Nanda Kaul recovers from her swoon, the life of this mentally disturbed character would be a complete different affair. According to the novelist, the recovery of Nanda Kaul would bring the greater resignation. The novelist has tries to put one incident after the others by putting them in the mode of layers of greater corrosiveness in emotionality and enhance the poetic appeal of the novel as well. Thus, the character of Nanda

ANSUYA CHAUHAN

3P a g e



call is one of the most alienated, self-destructive and mentally disturbed characters of Indian English literature.

## REFERENCES:

1. Bhatnagar, Manmohan K. Rajeswari M. (Ed.). *The Novels of Anita Desai: A Critical Study*, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd., New Delhi, 2008.
2. Bourdeau, Ph. *The Man Nature Relationship and Environmental Ethics*, The Journal of Environmental Radioactivity, 2004.
3. Desai, Anita. *Fire on the Mountain*, Random House India, 2008.
4. Tandon, Neeru. *Anita Desai and Her Fictional World*, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors (P) Ltd. New Delhi, 2008.