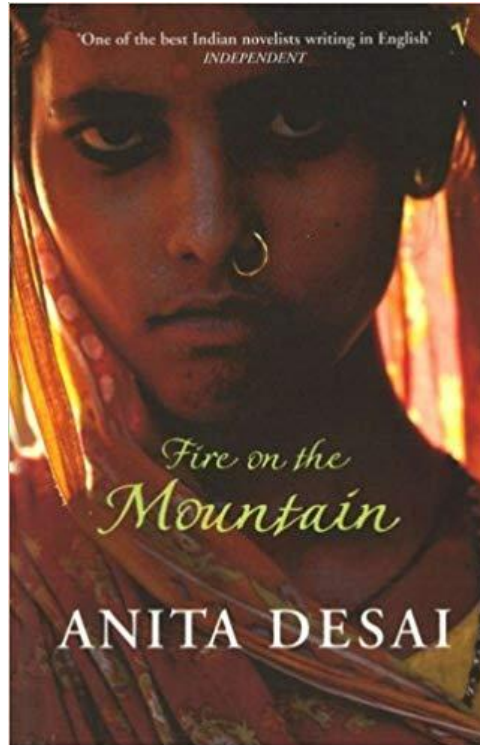


**Amalgamation of Five Elements with Five Senses with Particular
Reference to Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain***

S. Veyilkandhal, Ph.D. Research Scholar and Dr.A. Selva Raj



Abstract

Scientifically it is proved that the universe was created out of the composition of five basic elements which was present in it in a balanced state to maintain the law of nature. When an element began to dominate other that will cause destruction. Every human life and other living organism's life have been merged with these five elements of nature, i.e. earth, water, air, fire and, earth and also known as *panchtatva*. This element is also present in human body, known as *panchaboothas*. The omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent power of these elements are perceived in the forms of five senses such as sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch in human beings. These five senses act as the gross medium for the experience of sensations in human beings. In this paper I would like to focus on the relationship between five elements and how man perceives through his five senses. This paper aims to sort out how five elements played a vital part in human life and how the natural law of balance was maintained among these five elements, with reference to Anita Desai's novel *Fire on the Mountain*.

British writer Micheal Martin refers Anita Desai as, (original name Anita Mazumdar (1937) "one of the preeminent cotemporary Indian novelists" who presents strong women voices in Indian English-language. She hailed as the mother of Indian psychological novel. Being novelist, short story

writer and author of children's books, she is talented in invoking the character and mood through images array from the meteorological to the botanical. As a writer she was shortlisted for the Booker Prize three times individually for her fictions, *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984) and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999). She won Sahitya Akademi Award in 1978 for her fiction *Fire on the Mountain*. She received the British Guardian Children's Fiction Prize for her children's book *The Village by the Sea* (1982). Her novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), won the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize. *In Custody* was made into a film by Merchant Ivory productions.

Everything in the universe is created out of five basic elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Sky (space) are accepted as major components of the universe. Human body structure is made out of these five basic compositions of the universe. Among these subtlest is space and grossest is the earth. These cosmic bodies related to five senses in human body. If anyone property of these elements tries to dominate the other elements in the eco system, it is understood as natural disaster in the universe. In the same way any one element dominates in the human body leads to decease in the body. These five almightiest omnipotent elements rules over human force. A man perceives these elements through the channel of five senses i.e. sight, hear, smell, taste and, touch. Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* is centered upon these five elements which are perceived through terminals of five senses. To explain this association Anita Desai, sets her fiction *Fire on the Mountain* at Carignano which was circumlocated near Kasauli, with an ecological backdrop of five basic omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient elements. Novel starts in the month of May and ends in July.

Earth is the solid and prominent element in the universe. In human being bones and flesh represents the earth element. This element of nature arouses a sense of smell in the human. Anita Desai sketches the ecological landscape of Kasauli with its scent and sound of the land. Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* opens with scent of sibilance. The whole environment of Nanda Kaul's house at Carignano in Kasauli was preoccupied with the scented sibilance of pine trees and with the backdrop atmosphere merged in the sounds of cicadas birds. To describe the cicadas sound Anita Desai uses a "sound so even and so insubstantial that it seemed to emerge from the earth itself, or from the season—a scent of pine needles made audible, a spamming of sunlight or of the globe on its axis" (FM 9).

Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* sketches the landscape of Xanadu, as "So twice five miles of fertile ground/ With walls and towers were gridles". In the contradictory way, Anita Desai sketches Kasauli landscape as a barren, stark, rocky, and occupied by pine trees. In the northern side there was a sweeping view of blue waves of Himalayan hill which looks like ice and snow sketched upon the sky. In the southern side looked down with plunging of cliff to the plains obviously an eagle fly in the clear mass of light and air. Three apricot trees in the northern side of the house grew out even in stony soil and prevent the house form the worst gales. The Clumps of iris had finished its blooming. The previous owners Miss Lawrence and Miss Hughes had planted creepers in the railing of the house which would exhale a billow of yellow roses in the month April in Kaul's stony garden. This scene reminds Wordsworth's Daffodils lines "...I saw a crowd, /A host, of golden daffodils ..."(Shenandoah) down the cliff. From the veranda we can see the view of Sanawar's greenery. And from the back windows get a view of a cliff plunging seven thousand feet down to the Panjab plains.

Desai sketches the ecological atmosphere of the Kaul's house through Raka's observation. Raka slides in her room in Kaul's house from the wall to wall as if a "newly caged animal investigates in her room; she met a spider that groomed its hairs in a corner, saw lizard's eyes blinking out of a dark groove"(FM 45). Then she was attracted by the view of the rock and the ravine

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through the North window.” Pine trees with its charred trunks and contorted branches, striking melodramatic attitudes as on stage. Rocks arrested in mid – roll, rearing up dropping. Occasional tin rooftops, glinting.” (FM 46). A knoll raises next from the kitchen, with its hairy ferns and protruding rocks, at the top pine trees grew in a ring amongst the stones. “here a breeze stirred, cool, dry and resinous.” That makes a window curtain of Pasteur Institute “inhaled and exhaled” which is situated below the knoll. There is a stern stillness everywhere.

Apricot trees, next to that down the path to the gate, hydrangeas, and scattered pine tree produced hissing sound in the breeze. To explain Kaul sad barren state “the yellow creeper had blossomed so youthfully last month but now reduced to an exhausted mass of grey creaks and groans again...the gorge with its gashes of red earth, its rocks and gullies and sharply spiked agaves, to the Panjab plains... all she wanted was the sound of the cicadas and the pines, the sight of this gorge plunging, blood-red, down to the silver plain” (FM 18). Thus, Desai visualizes the landscape of Kasauli with its ecological backdrop.

Desai paints the picture of the midday atmosphere with its languorousness, voluptuousness, causes produce materialistic effect in the humming shrilling buzzing and fiddling of flies and cicadas. When Kaul found tough time in her marital life, she sooth herself from it by taking shelter in the ecological garden of her house where loquat tree, phlox creeper, eucalyptus tree, quisqualid creeper, and waxen moon were all available.

To Kaul, she looks like a long cricket and as if thousands of black mosquitoes. When she came near her she treated her like an insect. To Raka, Kaul appears as if a pine tree in her grey saree like Kaul she was also attracted at first by the sight of a shaggy necked hen pecking under the hydrangeas bush. Raka was also attracted by the silent, bare and still atmosphere of Carignano Garden.

Kaul relaxes herself by looking through the window a hen scratching the mud under hydrangeas. Thus, we can understand Kaul relates herself with the nature. When the crisis arises, her state is described as, the hen drags a worm inch by inch from the ground “she felt like a worm herself” while attending the call of her friend Ila Das. To depict her state after attending her phone, Desai presents the picture of the hen greedily gulping over the worm.

The sky element is considered as subtlest one. This element can be felt but cannot be touched. It represents invisible life particles in human being, which produces a sense of hearing in humans. Desai describes the sky atmosphere of Kasauli. Her description of floating of an eagle in the sky reminds Ted Hughes’ Hawk Roosting, the hawk meditates over the small creature from above. Likewise, in Kasauli hills’ plain sky “An eagle swept over it, far below her (Kaul), a thousand feet below, its wings outspread, gliding on currents of air without once moving its great muscular wings which remained in repose, in control. She had wished, it occurred to her, to imitate that eagle— gliding, with eyes closed. Then a cuckoo called, quite close, here in her garden, very softly, very musically, but definitely calling...”(FM 21). Like that hawk, Kaul meditate over.

Desai describes the night time sky “a waxen moon was climbing over the ghost-grey branches of the eucalyptus trees along the drive, eerily silent. There was a mingled odour of grass, of phlox, of eucalyptus leaves along with lime ...a lapwing started up in the mustard fields beyond the garden hedge, and rose, crying, in the air. That nervous agitated bird, thought Nanda Kaul, watching

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its uneven flapping flight through the funereal moonlight, what made it leap so in fright, descend again on nervous feet, only to squawk and take off once more, making the night ring with its cries?" (FM 27).

Desai describes elegance sight of the afternoon sky of Kasauli in the following lines from Kaul's window" flushed ravine, the molten plains, the sky filled with a soft, tawny light in which the sun floated like a lighted balloon, making the pine needles glisten like silk, like floss."(FM 29). Desai presents unelectable beauty of late afternoon of Kasauli hills which can be painted by even by the talented artist. Here there is no definite horizon "here hills melted into sky, sky into snow, snow into air."(FM 30). This echoes the poem of Edgar Val's, "Sky, Blue Sky":

So blue and sky
So blue and shy
U only appear
When there are clouds to disappear
.....
Sometimes blue and and grey
How he should stay?
May be always blue
Maybe always gray(1-4,9-12)

In the sky, huge vultures circled lazily, stealthily, on currents of air, prowling for game.

Desai describes the evening setting of sun in the western sky as "the cliff which was melting into an orange haze now that the sun was dropping westwards through the dust clouds over the plains" (FM 56).

Some sound kindles happiness, some noise produces fear in the being, some noise causes disturbance. Desai produces frightening sounds through her writing skill, during the nights, the wind had dropped, and the wailings of jackals heard from the knoll along with the howling laughing of Nightjar also available. Forest people of Tibet used to burn the green bamboos that burst out in the joints with a loud explosion to drive away the wild animals like tiger miles away. Crocodiles' bile has the capacity to cure mad dogs' bite carbuncles and pustule.

In the afternoon sleep Kaul imitates death, like a lizard in her bed. Author presents that the parrots alone has courage to disturb Kaul's sleep "a sudden quarrel broke out in the tree-tops, for a moment they all screamed and scolded together, then shot off like rockets, scattering pine nuts, disappearing into the light, disintegrating in the heat"(FM 25). Once again, the stillness falls as if the glue drying in the sun.

Anita Desai pictures the quarrel among a pair of bulbul for apricot fruit. They scold each other until they were distracted by a worm. Hoopoe bird used to feed its young one in the nest in eaves with this apricot fruit flesh. Hoopoe and bulbuls used to feast on apricot fruit and then it fluttered into "the bird bath and plunge and preen and scatter the water in spray" (FM 7). Kaul abhors the shrill screams of these birds. A large white and yellow butterfly crossed before Kaul and diverted her concentration when she was preoccupied with worries. Kaul enjoyed the soothing scene with pleasure and satisfaction.

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Air is an invisible element in the universe. It takes the vital role of breath in living being. It arouses a sense of touch. Wind in *Fire on the Mountain* has played gentle as well as ferocious role. A billow of wind threw a pine branches as if a curtain hides Nanda Kaul from the unwanted intrusion. In Shelly's *Ode to the West Wind*, the wind protects and conceals the seed by its action, here the wind protects and gives shelter to Kaul from her unwanted intrusion. Busy, disorder, unpredictable excess crowd didn't please Kaul. To describe the unwanted intrusion of Raka, Desai uses imagery of ruffling of pine needles by the wind on the knoll and the gate.

It takes the ferocious role when, yellow clouds of dust storm tore across in Kasauli plains. Storm (south wind) the yellow haze of dust storm passes over the mango groves, from the foot of the mountain, mount the hillside begin to engulf the Kasauli, a hen "lifted into the air and tossed past the window...its squawks snatched out of its beak and shattered like glass." The Sun shown in and out of the dust clouds." the closest pine showed, black silhouettes lashing from side to side" "noise of grit and gravel flying and dashing against the stone walls and tin roofs, raucous poltergeists of the storm." The dense mass parted and thinned, began to tuck and tidy itself away like a tantrum that was spent, the air was pale, subdued...dizzy parrots, in a phosphorescent flock, burst out of the pines and spurted away, leaving their shrieks behind...of gay relief, a cuckoo called on the knoll (FM 60). This incident proves that the mightiest force of nature.

When Kaul and Raka take a walk to the monkey point they find that the dust covered all over the place. Geological structure hills were scattered everywhere. There are static boulders in downward motion and tumbled rocks a giant agave, pine needles and tangles of wild raspberries spread everywhere. The sun and the summer dust fused because of that there was no proper light. And the wind ruffled the pine needles. If it were a clear day without dust we can get a clear view of the plains and can find the clearest way to Ambala. There is a grove of chestnut trees with a horde of Langur.

She climbs the hill. at the top of the hill the wind blows that made her feel light that would have lifted her in the air when she opens her arm. She felt as if flying like an eagle in the air. She was higher than all the other hills. Panjab's five rivers and Chandigarh Lake were visible as a silver brooch. Raka felt this view like an ancient scroll unrolled before her feet. Northern side "waves upon waves "of hills"gold and blue and violet and indigo, like the sea" along with the sound of wind much like the sound of the sea. She imitates a ship, "her eardrums thrumming with the roar of the waves, and the wind, till she began to get an ear ache" (FM 68). She was there. When the night fall "the hills were black waves in the night" the village was like many lighted ships.

North wind upon the knoll. the high wind whined, and "the long-tailed rose ringed parakeets;... biting out their sweet nuts." (FM 89). The wind tossed them down. The white butterflies couldn't bear the air they were blown as a "scraps of paper over the bleached grass," once again the flutter together "two by two".

Touching of grass with feet gave a great relief to Nanda Kaul from her marital problem" Herself a grey cat, a night prowler, she watched it till it disappeared in the direction of the river, its cries growing fainter. Then, rubbing her foot in the grass, she relished the sensation of being alone again." (FM 28). Raka stroked a little bronze Buddha, usually she wouldn't touch anything in the house. When the rain showered outside she cleared the window pane with her hand. Whenever she went out for ramble she returns with raspberry juice smeared on her body.

The element of Fire in the universe realized as heat in human beings, which is the major causes for all action in living organism. This represents the sense of sight in human. The omnipotent and uncontrollable power of fire is depicted by Desai. Raka finds a copper glow in the evening, which looks like a moon in the eastern hills, it's identified as forest fire when the sky darkened and exploded. It is quite often during the summer season in the month of May and June. There is no burning smell and no crackling and hissing sound heard. But it's swift, silent and threatening. It begins to spread. Because of water scarcity in the summer fire barricades couldn't do anything to put off." It will reach a dry rocky belt and stop" or by building a counter fire. Fire because of shortage of water in Kasauli during summer no one could put off the forest fire. Next day hills blotted out by smoke fire was also blotted out. The cindery smell comes along with the breeze. Layer of dust deposited everywhere in Kasauli. This forest fire reminds the fire in Emily Pauline Johnson in his *Fire Flowers*:

And only where the forest fires have sed,
Scorching relentlessly the cool north lands,
A sweet wild flower lifts its urle head,
And, like some gentle sirit sorrow fed...(1-4)

Raka is scared of spreading of fire on the hills. Everybody told about that the uncontrollable power of forest fire. Throughout that night she wanders inside the house to update the status of the fire. Anyhow the forest fire put off. The very next day Raka sets an expedition to one of the charred shell of the small stone cottage which was burnt in forest fire at the top of the hill. The roof torn off and hang on to the hillside."the doors swung rotten, the window frames hung skew, shattered glass lay amongst the cinders. The stairs were a tumble of rocks and weeds" (FM 98). On another knoll there was an abandoned unbuilt house with a heap of stones in front of it. Lichen creeper creeps over that house as a shroud. The footprints of jackals everywhere in grey, the demented cuckoos beckoned Raka in that tranquil land. Desai presents the omnipotent power of the fire in her novel

To Kaul, she looks like a long cricket and thousands of black mosquitoes. When she came near her she treated her like an insect. To Rake, Kabul appears like a pine tree in her grey saree. Like Kaul she was also attracted at first by the sight of a shaggy necked hen pecking under the hydrangeas bush. Raka was also attracted by the silent, bare and still atmosphere of Carignano Garden.

The most vital flowing element of water in the universe comes in the form of blood in human cosmic body which flows throughout the body and kindle the sense of taste in tongue. Desai depicts the pleasant effect of rain water on the earth. South wind blows in June. North wind blows in the later part of the year. But now, the north wind begins to blow. In the afternoon, the north wind brings hailstone to Carignano, it covers the pine trees. The heavy downpour deafened the ears when it drummed on the tin roof. Kaul quotes the lines from the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*"water, water everywhere what a storm." It knocked down the hydrangeas from the rails and then a pleasant evening emerged" The hills, fresh and moist and wooded, blue and green like coils of paint out of a tube". In the Northern part snow ranges glittered. In Southern side hundred miles of plains were visible. Next morning hosts of wild pink (lilies) zephyranthes were bloomed after the first fall of rain with their sharp odour of moist earth. Kasauli surrounded by water. Water the pools like Sabathu and Dagshai reflects the lights of Sanawar even in faraway distance. Nagin Lake banks occupied with orchards and saffron fields. We can fish in the lake, ride in the orchard, and picks the riped cherries. Water reflecting the cliffs from there, the view of Sanawar and, Dagshai and Sabath rivers reflects the gleaming golden hilltops. In the same way Wordsworth in Tintern Abbey describe a

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beautiful secluded vision from his childhood memory "... I behold these steep and lofty cliffs, \That on a wild secluded scene impress...". Likewise, this description of lake also impresses the readers.

To Kaul, Raka often disappearances and appearances from house is like a soundless moth or cricket "dawdle up the path nursing a hand swollen and red with nettle stings' stained with rashberry juice"(FM 51).Whenever Raka went out for rambles, she arrives with Rashberry juice smeared on her face. Raka couldn't eat full to her flat belly, during the evening rambles on the hill she used to taste, berries pine nuts and chew oxalis leaves to allay her hunger. In the morning she used to taste the riper apricot fruit which would fall while at night along with Hoopoe bird's jealous eyes, because she tasted its food to its young ones in the eaves.

Jackel chew the mad dogs bone become mad and bite the hamlets dogs these dog bite all the people.The ghosts of those who died of dog bite and snake bite roam near Pasteur Institute.Hoopoe's nest in the leaves is seen, mother and father birds bring mouthful of worms, insects, moth and flesh of apricot fruit. Raka used to eat some apricots in the morning. They fight with bulbuls while food searching.

Manjeswari's Poem *Nature's Five Elements*

Manjeswari's poem about *Nature's Five Elements* describes the nature's vital role in Human life:

Nature's Five elements thrive for Life
Water flows through lands reviving Life
.....
Sun awakens and warms u Life
.....
The Fresh Air we breathe for Life
.....
Mountain, Deserts, Ocean, blooming Earth
.....
High and Broad, all along dense blue Sky
.....
Will be there to guard Earth and Her world
Everything flourishes, cherishes and perishes.(Manjeshwari,pp. 4-5,9,13,17-21)

These lines also prove that unavoidable part of nature. Life of human or any kind of living object cannot be imagined in the absence of these five elements. Water provides contentment in life, whereas Air moves in a body in the form of Oxygen. The space arouses ambition, and earth guides us to be tolerant in life.The characters in the novel perceive the almightiest force of *panchaboorthas* with their five senses. This novel focuses on all the five elements of the universe with their omnipotent power. Especially the wind and the fire resented by the author with ferocious face. Human force is mere and an inactive one before the power of the universe. Thus, Desai depicts how a human perceive the five elements through their five senses. Thus, the life of human as well as other living being was skillfully sketched by Desai in the ecological backdrop of five elements.

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