CHAPTER – V

TOWARDS A NEW ETHIC

The contribution of the women writers fixed the Indian English fiction in its proper mould and brought it to a good shape to survive. The English education in India opened the doors to the slave Indian women who for ages had to be content with playing only a subordinate role in the social life of the country. They started having opportunities for playing new roles. When the feministic wave came, they also wanted to vent to the world their own bitter experience as women. Their ideas of social reform, turned them as established writers. K.S. Ramamurthi observes:

They tried to tell the world the obstacles women faced and the disadvantages they suffered in an orthodox Hindu world. These women writers struggled to give form and shape to their autobiographical accounts, which attracted publishers both in India and abroad¹.

The novelists found the novel as a means of communication and as a means of expression for the benefit of Indian Society. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar rightly points out as follows:

It was ultimately born of understanding and love. The novelists understanding (of man, of Nature, of God) has to be
as total, and as integral, as possible, and his love or (or compassion) has to be a total power too.... the novelist’s understanding and love will make his writing transcend the merely local and controversial and attain the vitality and dignity of creative literature².

Anita Desai is well known for her valuable contribution to Indian English Literature. As an introvert, Anita Desai is interested in depicting the mental state of her characters. Portrayal of psyche and mental anguish appear as the strength of Desai’s fiction. She has given a new dimension to Indian novel in English by shifting the emphasis from outer to inner reality.

Her artistic skill lies in the delineation of the psychic conditions of the characters who often indulge in self-analysis. Her characters alienate themselves from their surroundings. Sometime they grow neurotic, psychotic or schizophrenic. Her women protagonists opt for the illusion rather than reality. They revolt against the existing patterns of life.

It is due to excessive sensitivity or so, Desai’s women protagonists suffer from neurotic fears. Their bleak and sinister vision of life, alienation, hopelessness, despair due to the neurotic suffering make them revolt. All this create marital disharmony, matrimonial crisis in the life of Desai’s women protagonists.
Anita Desai seems to have derived inspiration and influences from British women novelists in respect of art and device in writing novels. She resembles, to a great extent, to Jane Austen, George Eliot, Bronte sisters, Mrs. Gaskell, Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf, in the art of characterization and portrayal of psychic mind of women. Like these British women novelists, Desai surpasses her male novelists both, qualitatively and numerically in exploration of inner mind of women and thereby asserts their own identity. She further differentiates herself categorically from the group of British women novelists in the thematic exploitation of Indian life, scenes, culture and externalization of interior region of Indian women’s mind.

As a novelist, she is an innovator and is more involved in depicting the mental than physical experiences of her characters’ mental anguish rather than pang of hunger. The problems she has presented are existential. Her women protagonists opt for the illusion rather than reality which seems to be horrible to them. Thus, story, plot and style are subordinated to the character portrayal. The themes of rootlessness, alienation, anxiety, marital disharmony and interpersonal relationships are successfully dealt with by Desai in her novels.

As an novelist, Anita Desai has established her own views. She is very glad to be writing in a language as rich, flexible, supple, adaptable, varied and vital as English. Prema Nandakumar in her
article on Desai asserts:

..... she has in her fiction sensibility adhered to the
Lakshman-rekha, culture and created her own distinctive
imaginative world

Desai is the painter of the inner world. She is not so much
interested, in registering the surface realities as in the probing of inner
truths lying under the surface level. The world is full of violence and
destruction for Desai’s female protagonists. They are lonely and alienated
in such a dark world. They are hopeless and full of despair. They are
acutely aware of the emptiness and absurdity around them. Almost all her
protagonists revolt against the existing patterns of life. They reveal a bleak
and sinister vision of life. Through their attitudes the also exhibit perception
set out in quest of meaning.

Desai, like Joyce and Woolf, is widely recognized as the pioneer of
psychological novel in Modern Indian English Literature. The most
conspicuous feature of her art is, the portrayal of characters. She
penetrates psychologically deep into inner working of women and
externalizes their passive reaction. In this respect, she approximates to
Dostoevsky, Proust, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and Henry James.

Anita Desai’s first novel Cry, the Peacock (1963), can be
considered as a trend setter. It deals with the psychic aspect of its
characters. The heroine of the novel, Maya is a spoiled and pampered
child of a wealthy Brahmin family. Maya, the central character of this novel, undergoes considerable traumatic experiences obsessed by forebodings and mental tension. Maya is the most sensitive woman suffering from neurotic fears and marital disharmony and finally kills her own husband.

In the second novel *Voices in the City* (1965), Anita Desai psychoanalyses the inner mind of three characters – Nirod Ray and his sisters Manish and Amla. These characters are tortured by their meaningless and hollow existence. They feel utterly frustrated like Maya from *Cry, the Peacock*. They all are from an upper class society. Nirod has no financial problems or burdens. Being a typical Bengali youth, he goes bitter against the entire affluent people. He is obsessed with failures in life.

Like a true existentialist, he keeps on experimenting with failures in search of an abiding meaning in life. Although, he achieves nothing, except for a couple realizations in the end. This existential search of Nirod shows his intellectual inevitability engineered by emptiness.

In *Bye Bye, Blackbird* published in 1971, Anita Desai deals with the theme of frustration and loneliness which an immigrant feels in an alien country. Inspite of all efforts to adjust to the new world, the immigrants are overtaken by feelings of estrangement, racial hatred and homesickness. Desai explores the effect of racial hatred on the sensibility of three character. Dev, Adit and Sarah. Dev, a new comer to England, feels
humiliated in the beginning. The callous and ignorant Englishmen hurl insults at him. But gradually he finds English life as enthrallingly rich.

Where Shall We Go This Summer? marks a return to the autonomous world of inner reality. The theme of alienation and in-communication in married life is described in a very fine manner. The protagonist, Sita, is a woman of aggressive and unadjusting character. She is married to Raman. Though, Raman and Sita remind us Rama and Sita of the Ramayana, they are ironical names. They are mentally separated beings under a same shelter.

The title of Desai’s fifth novel Fire on the Mountain (1977), perhaps taken from the William Golding’s famous novel Lord of the Flies, where the second chapter is entitled “Fire on the Mountain”. It symbolizes fire which burns in the heart of an old lady, a great granddaughter of Nanda Kaul, and her emotional world is the theme of the novel.

In this novel, the title refers to the world of Raka, the great granddaughter of Nanda Kaul, who says at the end of the novel, “Look Nani, I’ve set the forest on fire. Look Nani-look, the forest on fire”. 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.
Anita Desai draws a picture of the tragedy of Nanda leading a segregated life like a recluse in a lonely hill hut. Desai makes use of the flash back technique in describing the central theme of the trauma of a housewife in the novel and the novel centres round the character of Nanda Kaul.

The fire on the mountain becomes the emblem of destruction and purgation, the destruction of an unkind world of many Nanda Kauls, and Ilia Dases, of an unequal situation in which women suffer from the slings of misfortune, social inequalities and injustices committed on them by a savage society of men. The title of the novel is emblematic of the revolt of the new generation of women against the male chauvinistic society.

Desai’s *Clear Light of Day* (1980), is four dimensional, as it is about time as a destroyer and as a preserves and about what the bondage of time does to people. It highlights the theme of the effect of the remembrance of the past on Bim and Tara. The memories of the past are a jubilee, a source of wistful joy to Tara. They strike like a knell of sorrow to Bim. This novel shows the importance of family and home which are the springs of vitality.

It is a novel about the growth of four children in a dismal, dirty household where life has been only dullness, boredom, waiting etc. In tender childhood, the children experience the ordeals of life – indifferent
and disintegrated parents, a diabetic mother and a mentally retarded brother. The death of the parents leaves the children emotional destitute.

In this novel, Anita Desai paints the backdrop of the major incidences exclusively with the support of her characters. Desai penetrates into the hidden depth of mind of her characters who are obsessed by nostalgic reminiscences of their past life and events.

Anita Desai is trying to write a four dimensional masterpiece in which a family’s life moves backwards and forwards in a fixed span of time. It indicates the main theme of seeing the light. Desai explores two sisters’ very different positions within the home, the family and the post independence upper middle class Indian society, which lead to one woman’s leaving and the other woman’s staying in the homeland and the domestic sphere.

Desai’s The Village by the Sea, subtitled “An Indian Family Story”, shows issues of family relationship. The story in this novel is the story of a family disintegration under the pressures. It is not of alienation and self brooding: it is poverty, illness and drunkenness. This is conscious presentation of childhood, and adulthood. The novel begins in a natural surroundings of a village, Thule which is situated on the sea-shore.

In the mid 1980’s, Desai started to look more closely at the life of the unprivileged. In Custody (1984), Desai’s ironic study, is about literary traditions and academic illusions. The central characters are Nur, an Urdu
poet has fallen on hard times, and Deven, a Professor of Hindi, who realizes that, the beloved poet is not the magical genius he has imagined. The novel unfolds the story of credulous and worldly Deven Sharma, who is swayed by an idea of creating a work of his lifetime, but is unfortunately defeated by his own helplessness.

Desai’s **Baumgartner’s Bombay** (1988), depicts human nature quite at low. That she does not have much faith in human goodness is clear from her earlier works, but this one perhaps touches the lowest. It is a portrait of loneliness, alienation and immigrant’s existential predicament. Race, caste, blood, country, language and religion are tools of discrimination, hatred and savagery. Baumgartner is an outcaste of outcastes, a double outcaste. He is a Jew in Germany and a German Jew in Indian. A failure from all sides, Baumgartner questions the development of human consciousness.

Desai, who has admonished V.S. Naipaul for dangerously feeding the Hindu fundamentalist agenda drew on communal violence against Muslims in India to re-imagine 1930’s Germany and Kristallnacht in this novel which is her first novel written outside India. Her most solitary character, the German Jew Hugo Baumgartner is killed by a young German drifter whom he shelters.

Desai remembers a tension in her home during the war – her mother waiting for news that never came, — and uses her mother’s German
nursery rhymes to paint Baumgartner’s idealized helmet. But reality breaks into the myth, the curiously stilted letters from his mother are found to have been sent from Dachau.

Desai’s *Fasting Feasting* (1999), short listed for the Booker Prize, adds a laurel to the already established versatile genius of her. In many ways, it is a continuation of her earlier themes such as the pangs of loneliness, the silence pronouncing louder than speech, changing trends in the final ties and psychological concerns. This novel presents a striking deviation from her earlier works both at thematic and the structural level. For the first time in the fictional world of Anita Desai, the reader experiences a complete family atmosphere prevailing over the world of Fasting Feasting.

In almost all the her earlier novels the protagonists had to suffer the limitations caused by only single parent; the other parent either being expired, or ailing or estranged or being totally infective. In this novel, the very influential presence of both the parents mama-papa, side by side makes a complete whole not only physically but mentally also. Throughout the pages of the novel, they remain mama, papa, always together.

They never talk of individually or separate identity. They always have similar views, identical expressions and their decisions too are always the same whether aired by mama or papa; they both form a single identity. The first striking feature of the novel is that the plot is laid bare in
the most simple lucid manner without any trace of complexity. It appears a simple long story in a straightforward narrative structure divided into two parts. Part first deals with a family in India – Mama and Papa and their children. The second part deals with the Patton family in the U.S., the link with past.

Desai’s latest novel *The Zigzag Way* (2002), paints a subtle, miniaturist portrait of 20th century Mexico as experienced by a young American man. It is a very short one – no longer than a novella really – but suggests far more than what is compressed within its 182 pages. It is a magical novel of elegiac beauty. This novel is set in Mexico and Cornwall and focuses on the history of Mexico’s silver mines which for a time employed large numbers of Cornish miners. The places they lived in are now ghost towns and the only signs they were there are the local parties and a rumour that the Cornish brought football to Mexico.

All these marriages in her novels bring out the qualities and vices, abilities and weakness, plus points and minus points of brides and bridegrooms and which in due course, cause marital disharmony and matrimonial crisis. Similarities between the attitude of both husband and wife to life and things in general play important roles in making their conjugal life successful.

Marriage is a union of two souls. It is to be woven very carefully and thoughtfully. General situations in society are such that no proper time or
thought is given to these affairs. Then its results are the clashes, desperation, separation and loneliness. Women who are treated casually become victims of these clashes. Their dependabilities and traditional approach cause alienation in their lives.

They struggle against strong, negative soul-killing circumstances. They become hopeless, desperate and nervous. They find solutions in committing suicide or running away or living separately. The fact that ultimately Maya turns insane and kills her husband, may contain an indirect comment on their different values of life.

The concept of marriage which is related to a delicate union of two different minds has not been properly realized in most of the Indian male dominated families. Because women's individual identity has not been positively and open mindedly realized in Indian social life. Woman has never been accepted as a full human being. She is taken for granted on number of fronts. This casual attitude causes her consistent suffering and miserable life.

As marriage is a union of two different minds, some adjustment is bound to be there. This adjustment should naturally come from both the sides – the husband and the wife. In Indian social situation, if a marriage is successful, then credit is rarely given to a woman 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.
When a marriage becomes unsuccessful then the woman is held responsible. But a self conscious, self-respecting woman will never accept this in the present situation. She, being fully aware of her capabilities and weakness, is also aware of her own career and the individual needs, and her desire to perform in life.

All the marriages in the aforesaid novels of Desai are more or less business transactions. A marriageable daughter is handed over to the male partner without considering the delicacy of her mind and feelings. She has to fulfill either the parents’ responsibilities or the relatives’ demands with different intentions. Maya’s marriage with Gautama has been settled out of her father’s friendship with him and Sita’s husband, Raman, was her father’ friend’s son. This was also settled as the compromise between these two elderly friends.

But sometimes this peaceful order is caused violent, the shadow batters its head against the iron fists of its owner and manages to leave a few bloodstains, a wife revolts, runs away, commits suicide, becomes a murderer, finds a great deal of freedom in blessed widowhood and the message is given and received the “Great No” is said at last.

Being alienated from family and society and to keep the baby unborn, Sita finally runs away from the main land taking her to children, Karan and Menaka to the Island. The Island house deserted for twenty
years symbolizes her temperamental condition. As Vimala Rama Rao aptly suggests,

The Island concretizes the feeling of isolation of Sita. She retreats into it, as into a Womb, with an obsessive desire to recapture once again her childhood innocence and purity... Obviously, her own frustration with her life in Bombay driver her in her desire to provide her unborn infant with a world that is incorrupt?  

She foolishly hopes that her father’s magic Island will provide a sanctuary to her. The Island has become a symbol of Private refugee and is only routine of escape and the everyday world had grown insufferable to her that she could think of the magic Island again as a release. Her return journey allows her to see the face to reality in this world of illusion. She realizes that in essence there can be no running away from reality.

The magic of the Island if it had ever existed was now buried beneath the soft grey green mild dew of the monsoon chilled and chocked by it. She alienates herself from the society and her unconscious self wants to disobey the social norms and restrictions totally. But even on the Island she cannot lead her life according to her wishes, since her mind could not be released from the burden of responsibilities.

Sita’s trip to Manori is a trip to back to her childhood. She relives the past. But this is a trip of self discovery and recognition of reality for her.
The Island home which she saw as a child is different to her now. The house is almost in a ruinous stage and the welcome they receive a shabby one. She realizes that she is equally on 'outsider' there, as she was on the main land. She remains an Island on the Island.

When Sita accepts and comes to a conclusion finally that her father had been ‘a wizard on the Island of Manori, she loses all hopes of keeping the baby unborn. Sita thought that her father’s ‘legend was still there in this house’ and he might work another miracle posthumously”. She had come on a pilgrimage to beg for miracle of keeping her baby, unborn. Now she realizes that her escape to Island is madness. She could not find the magic of Island that she had promised herself and to her children. She now feels that there was no magic here the magic was gone. She was very disappointed and in a desperate mood of isolation she felt alienated. Her second visit to the Island ends in “an utter fiasco only because of her inability to evaluate her past with detachment.

Sita’s tormented life, loneliness and boredom represent modern married woman’s existentialist predicament. The agony and unhappiness in Sita’s soul spring from her inability to float with the general current of society. So she takes a strong decision and refuses to accept the cruel dictates of society to which average people submit so uncomplainingly.

Her mental, moral and emotional issues begin to oscillate between two polarities of “Yes” and “No”. As Atma Ram observes, the novel
dramatizes two kinds of courage; a struggle between the positive ‘No’ and a potent ‘Yes’: Sita’s anguished soul cries out “the great No”

From the depths of her memory, Sita brought out a poem of Cavafy that she kept there like an amulet; she reads the lines of the poem when she is afraid of:

….He who refuses does not repent
should he be asked again
he would say no again
And yet that no – the right no crushes
Himself for the rest of his life.

(Cavafy’s Poem, T. 27)

Realising pretty well the literal meaning of the line of Cavafy’s poem, she takes challenges to face the ferocious assaults to existence’. She is quite aware that rebellious attitude towards society and her great ‘No’ would certainly shatter her and crush her. Yet voluntarily she welcomes ‘a bewitched life’ for herself and for her unborn child. She wants to stop the birth of her child by stopping the very flux of time on Manori. Her journey to Manori is in search of a Miracle.

She sees the Island as a piece of magic, ‘a magic mirror’ where, she thought, could be sane and peaceful. Her wish to hold back the birth of
magic is an outcome of her sick mind. According to Feurlicht Ignace “Total self alienation may also be another experience for Insanity”.

Sita is a picture of the much dependent Indian wife. Her place and status in her house begin to weigh on her. She becomes restless. What was she to do other than just work for the husband and children, who obviously do not need her any longer? It is after liviling for nearly twenty years with her husband, that Sita realizes that she cannot take of life as it is.

The routine existence and her own inactivity begins to pressurize her mind. The initial restlessness as a wife turns into a quest for the meaning of life. What exactly is she? A mere wife and no longer a woman? As a wife, she was bound to her husband and children, and consequently her life had become one of service and devotion. In the process of which, she realizes that Raman and the children had forgotten that she is a woman and an individual as well.

Raman had married her “… out of pity, out of lust, out of sudden will of adventure” and not of out of an over whelming desire or love. Living with Raman was like living with a Robot. For, Raman was indifferent, calm and passive all the time. He never gets flustered about anything be it a minor or major incident. This irks Sita. She protests against his calmness, wears the drabbest of sarees to provoke him. But it fails to affect Raman who takes gestures of Sita as the artificial and uncalled for. There is
nothing that would shake him out of his plaid behaviour. To all the incidents no matter how painful or traumatic they are to Sita, he reacts with a terse “Don’t make too much of if... He closed his mouth, closed the incident”.

For Sita, intense and sensitive as she is, it is not possible to forget and be distracted by a book “.... ripped open, the wound remained open”. It festered and added to the pains. She continued to think of various episodes around her. The almost inhuman behaviour of the suburban Bombay life pains her. As their marriage continues to add on years, Sita continue to get pains and frustrated with too much of violence outside and the perfect passivity and indifference inside the house. To Raman nothing was more important than his work. The family he felt ought to be happy and contented with the luxuries he piled on them.

Sita was comfortable enough, but not happy. Even the comforts around sometimes irritated her: Of what use, she felt, were the luxuries without love, understanding and a feeling of empathy? were they not artificial and pompous? To the outside world her marriage would seem perfect-yet, there was no co-ordination between Sita and Raman. Where Sita was sensitive and emotional, Raman was cold and indifferent.

Raman’s lack of comprehension, of her desires and yearnings pains Sita. Yet she continues to accept his indifference till the moment when revulsion throws her off balance. Was she merely procreating machine and
nothing else? In her revolt, she seems grotesque to Raman. Does any good Indian wife ever react in this way? More important is what is that she is revolting against? It is perhaps complicity of Raman that puts her off. Her revulsion that takes the form of flight as though the resentments, disappointments, fears and rages were brimming within her and could no longer be contained.

However when Raman comes later to take her back, from the Island, she decides to return with him. She was not in fact deserting any one, she had left in search of some magical solution. But when she realizes that there cannot be solution to man’s indifference or the pervading menace and around, she chooses to return and face life. For life itself is a conglomeration of opposites, which cannot be altered.

Sita is able to understand that Raman could never be able to understand her sensitiveness. He was the kind of man who would always regard her to be theoretical and slightly mad. She probably is both, for she could never fit into the norms laid by the society for a wife. She realizes that despite his being unable to understand her, she loved him, or else why would she feel “such a tumult of life and welcome” at the mention of him. She loved him and that was enough to sustain her, no matter how disappointed she may be. Yet she made people understand that she was not a meek or docile wife.
Anita Desai in her interview observes, that in order to survive in the world, one has to compromise with his wife in life:

Of course if one is alive, in this world, one cannot survive without compromise – consoling herself. With the thought that she is compelled to make this tragic choice because she is a part of this earth, of life and can no more reject it than the slumberous egg can or the heifer or the gain.\(^9\)

This compromise with life is gained after a prolonged period of intrapsychic conflicts. Sita shifts form compliance to rebellion and then to withdrawal, again coming back to compliance. Sita reconciles herself a lot. She strikes a balance between her inner self and the outer world, her prosaid self and her poetic sensibility, her individual self and the societal consciousness.

Sita’s move from fragmentation to self discovery reminds one of E.M. Foster’s phrase, only to connect which might also have been buried in Sita’s consciousness for a longtime. In Foster’s *Howard’s End*, Wilcox remarks:

Only connect the prose and passion and both will be exalted and human lose will be seen at its higher live in fragments no longer. Only connect, the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die.\(^{10}\).
Sita’s voyage to Manori is also a voyage of self discovery. She realizes that the Island is no place of refuge for her nor does it have any magic of its own. She learns that running away from the realities and responsibility is not the answer for her problem.

Whether Sita manages to lead a healthy life after her return from Manori to Bombay or she simply strides back into her former neurotic rages and fears we are not told. When asked about the child, in an interview, with Atma Ram, Desai affirms that the child is born and learn to compromise:

It is born. It lives. It adjusts. It compromises. It accepts dullness, mediocrity, either closed its eyes to or else condones destruction, ugliness and rottenness. In other words, it leads an ordinary life of the kind its mother tried so desperately to change to find she could not. The above words convey acceptance, one has to “accept acceptance”

Later Sita realizes that escapism is no answer to life’s problems: ‘She had escaped from duties and responsibilities from order and routine, from life and the city’. She also admits that ‘destruction may be the true element in which life survives, and creation merely a freak, temporary and doomed event. But now she is convinced that life must flow on and she, must have courage to flow on with the current of life. ‘Life must be continued and all its business – Menaka’s admission to medical college
gained, wife left to Hospital, new child safely brought forth, the children reared, the factory seen to, a salary earned, a salary spent etc.

Sita neither dies in the end nor kills any one nor does she become mad. She simply compromises with her destiny. But married life is a perpetual compromise and any compromise or sacrifice for a greater good vindicates one’s victory and greatness, only by ‘connecting’ extremes one can arrive at an acceptable path in life’. This is the positive solution that the novel offers to the present day temperamental maladjustments.

Anita Desai reverts to her favourite them of probing into the consciousness of an introvert and sensitive woman who is bored and frustrated by her common place and hum-drum life and tries to escape into purposeless and unproductive loneliness owing to her strange and unusual childhood experience. Sita, the protagonist of the novel, develops certain complexes which turn into an alienated and, morose character and in deliberate to face the realities of life boldly. She is unable to grow to maturity and turns into a complete social misfit.

As the ordinary life and the every day world grow insufferable to her, she desires to release herself from them and seeks refuse in the magic island of Manori where her old father is believed to have performed several miracles. “If the reality were not to be borne, then illusion was the only alternative she saw that Island illusion as a refugee, a protection”.

Sita is the daughter of a political, celebrity a well known freedom fighter, whom many of his disciples consider the second Gandhi. As her father was mostly in jail and she had no mother to look after her, she was denied the regular life of a normal child. Sita has thus, “lived a strange life, an unusual life”\textsuperscript{12}. After Independence her father comes to settle in beautiful natural surroundings of Manori Island accompanied by his disciples and his family. He calls his house Jeevan Ashram, “the Home of the soul”, and tries to put on the Island his social theories about simple life untouched by the comforts of machine age into practice.

Having no opportunities for schooling, Sita loiters about the island sometimes alone and sometimes in the company of her brother Jivan, playing with clay and mud. With the passage of time, she finds her father turning a veritable legend on the Island as its simple and gullible villagers and fisher folk respect and admire him for his miracles – “magic cures” – providing them sweet water of the well to drink, teaching them how to grow a rich crop, and giddying the land of snakes and scorpions.

To Sita her father remains an enigma. Not being able to communicate with him, she forms uncertain and vague impressions about him. She doubts if he cures by magic and not by medicine and faith. She also discovers that her father’s day light, practical Charisma” has its undiluted night – time aspect”. 
Once claiming to his attic, the prayer room, secretly in the dead of night, she finds him pounding pearls and gold to be distributed to villagers with their medicines. She learns later from Jivan that the Jewellery belonged to their mother, her father’s second wife, who had left him perhaps because he had a mistress, and gone to live in Banaras in obscurity.

Sita is also suspicious of her father’s relation with her step sister Rekha across shoes should he place his arm while walking and whose fingers he squeezes fondly while sitting by her side. All these experience make Sita lose her grip on life and develop in her mind uncertain and unrealistic attitude towards life$^{13}$.

After the death of her father, Sita is taken to Bombay by Raman, the son of her father’s old friend Dedal. She leaves Manori with relief, worn out by its drama, “longing for the same, the routine ridden main lands as for as in sanatorium”. Raman arranges for her education and later, drawn by her beauty, marries her. Even though Sita has four children from him “with prides pleasures – sensual, emotional, Freudian, every kind of pleasure – with all plain serenity that supposed goes with pregnancy and parturition$^{14}$.

She remains restless and dissatisfied with her settled and dull domestics life. She never gets used to anyone on anything, small, common place incidents like crows praying on the wounded eagle lying the street of
Karan scratching his leg by the spoke of the railing while climbing the gate, or children enacting a fighting scene witnessed in a film, or her daughter crumbling a sheaf of new buds unconsciously or stealing her painting strips for being no good, obsess and terrify her. Bored with her dull life she often sits alone smoking as if waiting for someone: “Bored? How? Why? What? And could not begin to comprehension her bore dom”\textsuperscript{15}.

When Sita in her forties and graying, conceives for the fifth time and is an advanced stage of pregnancy of seven months, she is haunted by a strange idea?

by giving bith to the child now so safely contained, would she be performing an act of creation, or by releasing it in a violent, pain wrecked blood bath, would she only be destroying what was, at the moment, safely contained and perfect?\textsuperscript{16}.

She therefore tells her husband that she wants to keep the child, “I don’t want it to be born”; when stupefied by her abnormal desire her husband calls her a “mad child”, and she retorts:

I think what I am doing is trying to escape from the madness here, escape to a place it might be possible to be same again\textsuperscript{17}.

Sita considers her visit to the Island as “a pilgrimage” to beg for the miracle of keeping her baby unborn”. She also treats it as a place of refuge
from the boring life of the town. When earlier she had left the Island after
the death of her father and gone with Raman, the mainland implied to her
life of “Solidity, Security”. She had their not realized that “living there would
teach her only that life was a crust of dull tedium of hopeless
disappointment” under the oppressive weight of which she would break
apart. She is reminded of C.P. Cavfy’s lines:

He who refuses does not repent, should be asked again, he would
says no again. And yet the no-the right No-crushes him for the rest of his
life.

The hardship of Island, however disillusions Sita about her life
on it. Gradually, however, she becomes to enjoy the slow
moving life of Island “a lulled life, half-conscious dream like”.
But Menaka and Karan get bored with her life on the Island.
Menaka who has had enough of “her mother’s disorder and
non-sense” loathes with bitterness her “Proclivity for drama,
for theatre, for emotion.

The fear that her stay on the Island may take her lose her admission
in Medical College, make her restive and so Menaka sends a message to
her father secretly to take them to Bombay”18. When on Raman’s arrival
Sita learns of it, she feels herself like “a woman unloved, a woman
rejected” and betrayed her children.
She does not wish to go back, realized that it would be very hard to make compromise when one didn’t want to. She is, however, moved by the eagerness of her children. She remembers D.H. Lawrence is “Another Home Holiday:

Nay, even the slumberous eggs as it
Labours under the shell

Anita Desai makes a symbolic use of white colour to show the present condition of the house and what it can offer to Sita. White is the symbol of lifelessness and death, for the impact of death a person withers and grows pale and white. The novelist uses white colour to communicate the fact that the house, as existing in Sita’s memory of the bygone days, is dead now:

Its white walls gleamed chalkily above the waves of this dark of foliage and Sita took the children resolutely towards it – at least it stood… a steep flight on stone stairs led them to a deep varanda with a balustrade and white pillars like many painted, leafless palm trees. All the things in the house look, life less. Sita discovers that the old magic of the house, which had brought her to it is gone for ever. What remains in the dead house is only coldness, white ashes and waste; it is shrouded in death: “... The cold remains of the bonfire her father had lit her to blaze. Ashes, white and waste. Dust lay
as casually as sand on a beach, spider webs spanned the corners of the unfurnished rooms like skeletal Palm leaves."

As a matter of fact, the house is symbolic of the condition of the Island itself. As the house is dead and forlorn, so is the magic which was once associated with the Island. The wonderful charm and greatness of his father have gone to waste like white ashes. She realizes that the magical effect of the house and the Island has vanished, and consequently she feels guilty of visiting it and or bringing her two kids to such a withered and dead place.

Sita feels the need for staying on the Island away from Bombay because she finds the violence of the big city intolerable. Bombay is the symbol of modern materialistic civilization, while the Island represents natures. Patently, she feels in the lap of nature on the Island she can fulfill innermost urges and desires, she finds the life in Bombay so full of violence that she wants to keep her unborn fifth child away from it, and hence she tells her husband": I mean I want to kept it – I don’t want it to be born. “She thinks that if she goes to the Island, she will be able to achieve her goal.

She believes that civilization is growing more and more cruel and violent, while nature is still very tender and loving things which seem natural to her husband and children do not look so to Sita. This indicates the wide gulf existing between the urban culture and nature. Sita is a part
of nature, the wild, free life, while her husband and children belong to industrial civilization. She represents heart and feeling, while her husband and children symbolize mind and reason. Thus, the tussle between her family and her is actually the conflict between heart and mind.

The incident in which the crows try to make a meal of an eagle is very evocative. The crows are symbol of civilization, particularly of the city people who rejoice in exploiting the weak and innocent. Human beings have become symbolic interpretation of it. The machine world destroys nature.

The crows are machines, while the eagle is nature. Since Sita represents nature, she tries to save the eagle. But she does not succeed in protecting it, and this means that nature cannot be saved from the cruel clutches of heartless human beings who have become machines in the company of machines. The crows are the symbol of violence in the world. Apropose of this Ramesh K. Srivastava observes:

The incident in which a number of crows assault and kill an eagle becomes symbolic of Sita’s own plight a mild violence so much prevalent in the society\textsuperscript{20}.

Another incident, which upsets, Sita and is pregnant with symbolism, is the fight between all types of ayahs in the cul-de-sac which is another form of violence surrounding human life. Violence which is the most characteristic feature of animal life, and not of civilized human beings,
terrifies Sita. She is convinced that life is not safe any more: “It is like living in the wilds, she said to her husband at night. One may be attacked- one’s children may be attacked in the streets”. This incident indicates the increasing insecurity pervading human life.

Sita is a symbol of nature and so she is unable to adjust to mechanical life. This is the reason why she is not able to mix with her husband’s relatives and most of the people. When they start living separately, she symbolically chooses a flat near the sea, “the sea was to have come surging up and washed the city away, for her”.

The sea is a symbol of nature, rather powerful nature that can overpower the mechanism of the world. However, soon she feels that even the sea does not help her. Another symbolic layer of meaning can be disoriented in it. Since her father’s house was near the sea, she wants to have the touché of the same. As she is obsessed with her father and his magic land of her father, it turns out to be the sea of reality and reminds her of sordid, mechanical realities of life. No wonder “she shuddered to think what else it might reveal”.

As Sita grew up in the mysterious magic atmosphere of her father’s house, she is not able to face the hard realities of life. Thus, her act of running away to the island becomes symbolic of this. The island is a symbol of the dream world, and the mainland of the reality like; when Sita was young, she lived in her dream world. But it is …… black magic,
its subtle glamour had grown too huge, had engulfed her at a time when she was still very young and quite alone. She had grown afraid of if, been relieved to leave it and come to the mainland with Raman.

All this seems to suggest that from the dream world one wants to come to the realities of life. But when a man confronts the realities he wants to run away from them. And this is what Sita intends to do: to run away from their bitter truths of life to the dream world. Also, she had father-fixation in her young age. When she realized that her father was going to die, she felt relieved and secure when she came in contact with Raman.

But as on the mainland she does not experience any deep, emotional relationship, security and love, so she wants to revive her fathomless love for her father in whose presence she felt almost complete security as a child. She also believes that by the sheer magic of the island she will be able to restrain the child from begin born.

The house on the island was a gift to Sita’s father from one of his devotees, Mr. Dalwaala, the richest and the latest of his admires. Her father accepted it because he needed a village to put his social theories into practice. Her father took an active apart in India’s struggle for freedom and after the independence he wanted to settle down somewhere. When they came to the island they found it very lovely.
Sita remembers “the island as a piece of magic, a magic mirror – it was so bright, so brilliant to her eyes after the tensions and shadows of her childhood. Her father would begin his day on the island by praying to the God for hours together, and soon his disciples would start coming to his prayer room which was filled with talks, laughter and devotional songs.

The whole environment croaked an image of the temple. When he came to know that there was no water, he decided to dig a well. He drew out the first bucket full of water from the well and gave it to each of those who had helped in diggning’-‘sweet! They cried, ecstatic, as they cupped their hands beneath and draw in mouthful of water sweet! Sita also came forward and her father, after hesitating for a second, gave water to her. She drank and pulled a face, for it was not sweet. The incident is symbolic.

What the author succeeds in calling is that national attention is focused on the central characters. In her journey from the mainland to Manori, from Raman to her father, from the harshness of reality to the safety of the women, Sita learns that life is but ‘a crust of dull tedium, of hopeless disappointment’. Her attempt to acquire meaning is only a pathetic imitation of her vain efforts to save a young eagle from the rapacious crowded on the city’s rooftops or the jelly fish which her son pokes.
Does Sita succeed in her endeavours? She makes desperate efforts, and is perhaps nearer her goal when she prepares to welcome her husband on the island despite herself.

Everything stirred, tumbled, rose around her. Strange, she thought ..... the man is so passive, so grey, how could the very mention of him arouse such a tumult of life and welcome. She felt it herself..... Unwillingly, unexpectedly ..... but she felt it.

The emotion, however, proves flimsy, temporary. Raman notices only the dress of his wife, and has in fact come to the island to take Menaka to Bombay. He is not inclined to give a detailed account of his children and experiences in Bombay. Sita, with utter dismay, realises the sad fact of being betrayed by all. Says the novelist:

Sita feels it is difficult to compromise: “very hard this making of compromises when one did not want to compromise, when one wanted - to-to²².

The novel thus dramatises two kinds of courage; a struggle between positive ‘No’ and a current ‘yes’. The conflict is resolved poetically in Lawrence’s verse. Sita ultimately recalls the verse in full and understands everything in proper perspective. She feels that the gap of communication between her and her husband can be bridged. She has discovered a formula, gained an insight.
REFERENCES


15. Ibid., p.42.


17. Ibid., p.23.

18. Ibid., p.43.


22. Anita Desai, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, p.87.