CHAPTER VI

EXPRESSION OF FEMININE SENSIBILITY
Anita Desai's use of words, phrases and images contributed to her popularity as an English novelist. Since she writes psychological novels, she is more interested in the 'inner world' of her female characters. Her aim is to explore their sensibility and her writings reveal the inner truth, the psychic and mental state of her characters. Most of her novels, as we have seen, present the tragic condition of hypersensitive and introvert women effectively.

The recent decades have witnessed the emergence of a fresh awareness of the plights and predicaments of women which has brought about an unprecedented shift in our appraisal of human condition. Generally, the ways of speaking and writing are related to ways and patterns of thinking. For several years, the human thinking, writing, feeling and speaking have been synonymous with those of males. During recent decades, however, the approach has significantly changed and the importance of woman has been recognised.

Woman is generally misunderstood and wronged in the world dominated by males. This discrimination has left an indelible mark in the world of literature as well. Linguists like Stanley have posited a theory of "negative semantic space for women". When women move outside their traditional roles of mother and wife they

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add, they enter the semantic space "already occupied by
the male sex". 2 From the beginning of their life women
are made to feel handicapped and dependent upon men.
"Women are taught their place along with other lesser
breeds, by the implicit lies that language tells about
them". 3 This unfortunate state of affairs has been
responsible for many problems and confusions which women
have been forced to face.

Anita Desai has made remarkable efforts to go
beyond the traditional narrative devices and linguistic
techniques used by male novelists. She has given a new
turn to the delineation of female characters' psyche,
their relationships with men, their drives, responses and
their sexual repressions. Being a woman herself, Desai
has tried to look at these essentially from the woman's
point of view. She is fully aware of the possibilities of
her medium and makes efforts to explore its
possibilities. She has continually tried to add new
verbal domains of thoughts and knowledge.

While going through Desai's novels, one feels
that she tries very sincerely to transcend the limits of
ordinary language. It is worth mentioning here that while
referring to Rushdie, Desai, in her review of Amitav
Ghosh's book, approves of the "ungaily, ungrammatical
language" which not only possesses "an earthly gusto and

2 Ibid, p.91.
3 D. Bollinger, "Truth is a Linguistic Question"
verve" but is also "peculiarly suitable to convey the Indian character and spirit, atmosphere and condition". 4 A writer to her, has to forge his language. In an essay entitled "Flight of Forms" she further says that a book, in its finished form, "continues to live a life and spin a web of its own." 5 This can be done only by wielding a real mastery over the idiom.

II

Language is the human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, feelings and desires by means of a system of sounds and sound symbols. Anita Desai's novels are purely Indian and thus are associated specifically with Indian culture and surrounding. Some of her female characters might not be purely Indian e.g. Sarah, Emma and Mrs. Roscommon James of Bye-Bye Blackbord, but being a woman herself she very well understands their predicament and can therefore portary it successfully.

Anita Desai uses in her novels, a language suitable for projecting isolation and alienation, which are the main themes of her novels. The language she uses for her female characters fairly depicts their psychic state and struggles they go through.

4 Quoted in R.S. Pathak, "Beyond the He-Man Approach: The Expression of Feminine Sensibility in Anita Desai's Novels" In Sushila Singh (ed.) Feminism and Recent Fiction in English, p.92.

While going through Anita Desai's novels, one occasionally feels that the novelist is at times irked by linguistic constraints and aims at transcending the limits of ordinary language. In her novels, through her characters, the novelist has given expression to her need of an effective mode of communication. For example, she pertinently says: "The things we leave unsaid would fill greater volumes; what we do say, only the first few pages of introduction" (Cry, The Peacock, p.105); and "Beginning to pace up and down, up and down, she (Sita) would try to catch the precise language of this invisible unquiet" (Where Shall We Go This Summer?, p.127).

For Anita Desai, writing is not an act of deliberation, reason, and choice; it is a matter of instinct, silence and waiting:

It is the movement of the wing one tries to capture, not the bird. That is, it is the image that matters, the symbol, the myth, the feat of associating them, of relating them, of constructing with them. Whether one does this in one's native or in a foreign tongue is not essentially important. It can be done in any language at all; only it must be done spontaneously, compulsively, subconsciously, only connect. That is what a writer's existence is all about—he connects, he connects, all the time he connects. It is a process that does indeed employ language but also transcends it.6

In his book The Mind and Art of Anita Desai, J.P. Tripathi observes: "Nature has endowed her [Desai] with an overdose of sensitivity. Shapes, colours, sounds, odours, hues and tints—all strike at the sensitive chords

and inspire exuberant effusions. Her Mayas, Monishas, Sitas, Bims are all keenest poetesses, although they are not termed as such by Anita Desai". 7 Tripathi further writes, that "Anita Desai possesses a greater mastery over her stylistic and lingual resources...", and she "conveys the thematic complexity through a language really lyrical and copious in vocabulary.... Her prose style is marked by elasticity, dynamism and profundity. At times it is emotive, at others realistic and matter of fact and objective. But mostly it is subjective utilising empathy, personification and humanising". 8 This quality has enabled Desai to put the English language to an economical use. For a long time the language did not receive its due significance in the novel. But the situation has now changed. As David Lodge has said, "In the study of prose fiction, character, theme and arguments are generally considered more important, but the great artists have always acknowledged the place of verbal artistry in the overall artistic achievement of their work". 9 The process of externalising the subtle experiences of human soul, or the conversations of the mind, require both ingenuity and personal integrity from the writer. The justification of Maya's murder of her husband, sympathetic responses evoked on Monisha's suicide, Amla's affair with Dharma, Sita's sudden awakening to the facts of creation and Nanda kaul's confession are all a result of exquisite

8 Ibid, p.92.
artistry and audacious sincerity. The kind of novels that Desai writes can only be the work of someone for whom art and reality, beauty and truth are one and inseparable.

Anita Desai's competent employment of words and phrases is established by the study of her novels. Each novel presents a unique aspect of life, handled in a masterly manner demanded by the theme. Her novels being mostly psychological studies, the narration is aimed at delineating character through an interplay with the objective world.

III

Cry, the Peacock for example, consistently employs a beautiful, effective language. As D.S. Maini says that it is "a story rendered through the consciousness of Maya and in her own agonised idiom". The depressed state of Maya is conveyed through the objective correlative of dull nature and atmosphere. R.S. Sharma feels that Cry, the Peacock is the first psychological Indian novel in English:

Cry, the Peacock, Anita Desai's first novel, is also perhaps the first step in the direction of psychological fiction in Indian writing in English. Initially the novel shocks us with its neurotic and near morbid obsession with death, but on a closer study, we admire the writer's skill in capturing the psychic states of a woman haunted by an awareness of death. 

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10 Darshan Singh Maini, "Anita Desai's Novels: An Evaluation", in K.K. Sharma (Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakashan 1984), p. 120.

Maya herself admits: "Something slipped into my tear-hazed vision, a shadowy something, that prodded me into admitting that it was not my pets death alone that I mourned today, but another sorrow, unremembered, perhaps as yet not even experienced" (p.8).

Words concerning the once alive and loved Toto, now dead and rotting, are notable. There is an unknown fear which Maya cannot clearly recognise. "And the liquid brightness of the mirror blurred, the picture went out of focus" (p.8).

Maya, wide awake sees visions at times, but her visions"... vanished - like the liquid mirror...." Maya wants to be still hopeful and asks Gautama if the vet could have helped Toto, but Gautama answered that it would have been "hopeless". She finds "Gautama's voice echoing", her silent knowledge being "like a support to whatever wavered and shook weakly in my wind-swept mind..." (p.14).

Colours are presented in the novel to show life and liveliness in flowers. Maya's pet's body may not be there the next day, but the flowers will be there, "some beds of petunias, floppy white and faint mauve petunias - sentimental, irresolute flowers" (pp.18-19). Maya's mental condition is expressed through words like death, dark spaces, distance, separation and loneliness. At night, when she sees darkness she thinks of death. "Death lurked
in those spaces, the darkness spoke of distance, separation, loneliness. Loneliness of such proportion that it broke the bounds of that single word and all its associations..." (p.22).

'Stars' are also used to show how alienated Maya is. Sky being 'dimly lit' by 'April Stars' (p.12), stars seem to 'surge towards us', pushing 'their whole diamond weight' (p.22). Stars are 'isolated from each-other' (p.22) and are justifiably compared to 'hearts'. This kind of writing exemplifies evocative language used by Desai. Maya thinks that "... if one bright star were to be shattered and fall now I could not have borne it - no" (p.23). Then she concludes that depending upon and imagining about stars is of no use for "The stars were a failure" (p.24). But again she depends on the newly "discovered splendour of stars" and finds it better to "cling to the stars instead" (p.25). When Maya thinks of the prophecy she names it 'Fate', which is also described as a 'black and evil shadow' (p.23). She remembers the prophet's eyes, 'pale, opaque', he himself being just "a sluggish white worm" (p.28). The pale colours are used to convey his dark and sinister presence. To cheer up her dull thoughts, Maya opens the door for 'daylight and sanity'. But the light was 'subdued, grey' because of the huge tree outside (p.30).

Maya had no mother, so her father had taken care of her since her childhood. Now she searches for a
father figure in Gautama. The words 'grey' and 'white' stand for the aged and mature Gautama. To Maya, Gautama 'is like a silver oak himself' with his 'silver-white hair' he is 'dressed in white' (p.39). Maya finds a meaning in the peacocks' cry, for her own sorrow is parallel to their sorrow expressed repeatedly. "Agony, agony, the mortal agony of their cry for lover and for death" (p.96), exclaims she. Sometimes, Maya's unbearable and protracted solitude is depicted through words with sounds like b and g: "...often I came across a single majestic peacock trailing over a bronze boulder its long, burdensome tail, glittering and gleaming in a thousand shades of carbon-blue and green and lamp-black" (p.96).

The Novelist has also used symbolic words to juxtapose absolutely opposite objects, which indicate the unstable condition of Maya's mind. She constantly looks into the mirror to search for answers. Looking away, she concentrates on the "crystal bottles of perfume and attar, sindoor and kum kum". Then all of a sudden she sees that in her "white handkerchief, ... lay a heap of white jasmine buds..." (p.106). At night, she sees the purple shadows of a dreadful night", but then focuses her attention to a "single white streak of cloud" in the "black masses of sky and shadow" (p.107). In her utter loneliness, she often feels that "the night fell still, the little cricket beside me fell still, and my heart fell still inside me" (p.107). Maya tries to search for something in "those mysterious lights in the night sky...". She even wants to depend upon a star for comfort, but no star gives her that, and
she feels that she is betrayed by "those vague, ethereal
dimnesses of the night" (p.108). Maya considers herself to
be very pure and innocent when she looks at herself but is
reminded of the fact that "All white flowers, chaste sweet
white flowers", lure "the snakes to their hearts of scent"
(p.126). Colours also mean a lot to Maya. When she looks at
flowers, she searches for meaning, and she sees the 'white'
buds "tinged with the green of new birth; and, best of all,
the red ones, so deeply red that they seemed black at their
hearts, wickedly, ravishingly black" (p.139).

Words have special importance in the novel. When Gautama leaves Maya 'in silence', the expressions
'scratch and scuttle, scratch and scuttle. Slash, Slash
and scream' are used (p.170). Maya is eagerly waiting for
the rain to come, because the heat had become unbearable to
her. She is looking forward for "that first spitting,
spiteful, longed for and passionately blessed fall of
rain", which would mean a break in "the dust-choked
passage of heat-struck days" (p.172). All these features
have made the language of the novel expressive and
resourceful.

IV

Voices in the City is a novel painted on a
large canvas. Linguistic devices are more fully exploited
in this novel by Desai. The language of the novel shows
"the predicaments of various artists, groping for a
vision, an aim, a path, conducive to the development of
healthy art in a city which destroys as it creates. Since
no metalled high-way exists for the artist's journey, the
writer has shown different wandering ways and tortuous
lanes the artists of various shades and temperaments take
and the relation they have with the society".9 Meena
Belliappa, the first critic to write a monograph on Anita
Desai's fiction, has also taken note of the influence of
city life on human psyche and Desai's use of an
appropriate language for this novel,"Through the impress
of the city on these individuals and their associates"
Says she,"and the interplay of their particular emotional
disturbances, is evolved a complex of experiences that is
Calcutta".10

How appropriately linguistic divices are used
can be seen if we look at the novel carefully. Nirode's
mother becomes friendly and quite attached to a major
and Nirode cannot bear this fact. He dreams his mother
"smiling a slow, sensual smile" (p.28). Monisha, who
becomes used to her in-laws, feels 'familiar' with them
and 'their smells, their silence'(p.109). But is tried of
the 'mindless, meaningless monotony of empty sound' of
children's recitation (p.110). Her husband, Jiban,"remains
sitting' with them but mentally is never with them at
all'(p.111). Such expresssive lines show the mental
qualities of the characters portrayed by the novelist.

10 Meena Belliappa, *Anita Desai: A Study of Her Fiction*
In Section II of the novel, Monisha hears repeated sounds, and comes to know that children are preparing for their exams. She pertinently asks, "What kind of examination could it be that exacts from a child this mindless, meaningless monotony of empty sounds..." (p.110). Her anxiety is expressed in the following passage:

I look about and wonder where that Nirode is gone. There is nothing left of him but this small, shrunken shell—no, shell is the wrong word, because it is the shell that is gone, the protective covering that one could touch, stroke or knock without fear, it is gone, and what is left is this snail inside, transparent fragile, something so bare and irreducible that I start back, I cannot possibly touch anything so exposed, it might bruise (p.110).

Thinking about life and its meaning and not reaching at any conclusion, Monisha thinks that"... such a life cannot be lived—a life dedicated to nothing" (p.122). She feels 'confused' in that house. Many times she contemplates on life. Her short expressions are expressive of her frustrated quest: "It is over. Who has won? Who is defeated? What was the question? What the reply? Is this what life is then, my life? Only a conundrum...? Only a conundrum — is that, then, life?" (p.125).

The novelist evokes the desired atmosphere through words. Amla is introduced to us in the 'cold', 'dusty' and 'visibly darkened' room (p.142). The practical nature of Aunt Lila obliges her to use short, crisps, matter-of-fact sentences. She advises Amla not to let her spirit
spend itself on fun: "Don't let it dribble away, don't let it all empty out, because that isn't worth very much in itself" (p.144). Monisha has no independent life. Only once she suddenly utters her first independent sentence when she asks Amla to "always go in the opposite direction" Monisha's 'colourless face' has been compared to "that of a stuffed rag doll with a very white face nodding insecurely on its neck, its eyebrows and mouth painted unnaturally dark" (p.160).

The masterly strokes of the novelist infold the full story of Monisha's suffering. Her over-sensitiveness is Monisha's real problem. But, unlike common people, she is not capable of "responding to passion with passion, to sorrow with sorrow". Consequently, she stands "apart... too perfectly aloof ... alone and apart" (p.238). She is now afraid of touch. Then she tries to remember if she was once like them.

Do I recall a time... when I understood as well as they ...? I have lost touch... I could bear to have her [aunt] touch me....I could not bear to touch... this appalling exhibition of a passion... I have never been touched by it... they cannot touch me... I have never touched anyone (pp.239-40).

The repetition of the word 'touch' and abhorrence of the tactile experience indicates the unbalanced mental state of Monisha.
The novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* has provoked varied critical responses, ranging from praise to disappointment. While some critics for example, have traced "the complex emotional raltionships of the characters with the two countries of their births and adoption", others have seen it as a novel with wooden characters... [and] challenging theme. To some scholars it is "a novel exploring existentialist problems of adjustment, belonging and ultimate decision in the lives of the three major character". Seema Jena, however, has written that it is study in crisis of identity, and conflict between nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

Sarah, in the novel, is 'a stranger'in her own country. She is said to have a 'secret'. Her 'anguish had struck' Adit, who is "shocked by that anguish. An anguish, it seemed to him, of loneliness..." (p.31). Sarah wishes that she may not have to play many roles "... if only she were allowed to keep her one role apart from the others, ... she would not feel so cut and slashed into living, bleeding pieces. Apart, apart. That enviable, cool, clear quiet state of apartness" (p.37). The sharp-edged expressions convey Sarah's predicament succinctly. Repetition is used by the novelist to convey

Sarah's problems pertinently. Adit longs to see "anything, he prayed, anything different in colour, tempo, sound, flavour, anything individual and eccentric... anything Indian at all" (p.192). The use of the word 'anything' and its repetition is notable here.

The marriage of Sarah and Adit is threatened by chaos. Sarah would not allow it to disintegrate and "she knew its fragments would not remain jingling together but would scatter, drift and crumble" (p.200). The novelist also gives a vivid description of the flat of the Sikh to which Sarah goes for advice: "its heat, its swaddling odours, its monotone of din, its curious bareness that somehow combined with an appearance of lavish untidiness, all struck her together..." (p.218).

No matter how excited Sarah is for her trip to India, when they reach the air port, the gloomy atmosphere daunts Sarah. She finds everything "in film shades of grey, black and white. Even the tea in the cups was grey, its steam white. Women in white mackintoshes, men in grey overcoats" (p.225). The stress on the word grey intensifies the dullness of the atmosphere. Adit and Sarah's talk about 'peacocks in the Indian jungles' (p.161) and Adit's thought about 'the raving of peacocks...that make the Indian night loud with reminders of the emptiness, the melancholy of everything' (p.78) remind us of Desai's Cry the peacock.
VI

Anita Desai's novel Where Shall We Go This Summer? won her the Federation of Indian Publishers' Authors' Guild of India Award for Excellence in Writing. The novel presents two totally different kinds of personalities in Sita and her husband. Her excellence in using linguistic devices to express Sita's character is noteworthy. Ramchandra Rao rightly regards the novel as a dramatisation of "the conflict between two irreconcilable temperaments, of two diametrically opposed attitudes towards life". He concludes:

The tragedy in Where Shall We Go This Summer? arises out of the inability of the characters to connect the prose and passion in their lives. They have lived only in fragments. The novel ends with a defeated and despondent Sita unable to rediscover the passion of life and deciding to accept the prose of life.15

M.K. Naik is of the view that "The novel is tightly structured..."16 Madhusudan Prasad studies the novel as her shortest existentialist novel and finds it "reminiscent in more than one way of her first novel, Cry, the Peacock".17

In the very beginning of the novel, Sita is presented with a gloomy appearance. The details are highly expressive: "...the woman came slowly, clumsily out of the back seat, sighing, ...and her face too was drawn up into a lined frown of perplexity" (p.14). After reaching the island, she goes through fields which are only 'pits of mud and slush' disregarding "its filth, solid green layer of germs and disease" (p.23). Later on, the sky and the water turn to "a toneless shade of pearl, then grey then darkness" (p.24). Sita and her children see trees "rearing up about them like columns of darkness, their black fans closing together above them...", and Sita feels "her hands impeded by the dense darkness onto from the trees ..." (p.25). The darkness of the atmosphere follows them even inside the house. The white doors of the house swing outside, "revealing the crowded darkness inside", below them being "the shifting, sighing darkness of the palm leaves..." Sita cries out: "Everything is dark" (p.27). Repeated references to darkness here are important.

When Sita tells her husband that she is expecting their fifth child, she does so with a 'paranoic show of rage, fear and revolt'. Her husband tells her that it is improper for her to behave with such a total lack of control, but "control was an accomplishment that had slipped out of her hold" (p.32). The effect of Sita's unstable mental state can clearly be seen in her children, specially Menaka. She carelessly "crumbled a sheaf of new buds" of a plant which Sita had been "labouring to grow:"

Even to Menaka, "Destruction came so naturally that was
the horror" (p. 45), and "The creative impulse had no chance, against the overpowering desire to destroy" (p. 46). The tenuousness of the language used by these characters unfolds the tension in their life.

Instead of adjusting with the other women of the house, Sita takes to opposite ways for mental release. "She took to smoking instead of eating, to staring about her in silence, to speaking provocatively". She is 'suffocated' by the 'vegetarian complacency of Raman's family and so 'could not grow used to them' (p. 49). Sita sees her boredom "stretched out so vast, so flat, so deep, that in fright she scrambled about it, searching for a few of these moments that proclaimed her still alive, not quite drowned and dead" (p. 50). Sita is hurt by Menaka's declaration that art is senseless. She says: "... if only I could paint, or sing, or play the sitar well... I should have grown into a sensible woman. Instead of being what I am... I should have given my life some shape then, some meaning". But Menaka has had enough of her mother's 'disorder and nonsense' (p. 117). The approaches of the mother and the daughter are reflected in the language used by them.

VII

Fire on the Mountain brought recognition to Anita Desai and made her stand among R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and Bhabani Bhattacharya. G.S. Balaram Gupta has studied the novel as fictionalisation of existentialism. "Philosophically", says he, "Anita Desai's
Fire on the Mountain is a lyrical fictionalisation of the quintessence of existentialism..."18 Usha Pathania works out the influence of childhood on the future development of an adult's personality, especially the influence of filial ties, which can be seen, besides this novel, in Cry, the Peacock, Voices in the City, and Where Shall We Go This Summer?19 The alienation of Nanda Kaul and Raka is suggested through a language full of expressive words. When Asha's letter reaches Nanda, she feels "an enormous reluctance to open this letter". The letter shrieks out loud "an aggressive assurance and aplomb". It makes "dark tunnels of disapproval" on Nanda's face (p.14). Nanda is not at all excited about her great granddaughter's arrival, as is clear from the fact that she "folded the blue sheets firmly, as if suppressing the hurry and rush of her daughter's excited plans, and slipped them back into the envelope". Nanda has to struggle hard 'to suppress her anger, her disappointment and her total loathing...' (p.16).

It is very difficult for Nanda and Raka to live together, and yet they have no choice. So they work out the means by which they would live together, each doing her best at avoiding the other, and find that it is "not so simple to exist and yet appear not to exist"

(pp.46-47). Nanda watches Raka as she studies a pine cone, and thinks that "she was the finished, perfected model of what Nanda Kaul herself was merely a brave, flawed experiment" (p.47).

VIII

In Custody presents a pessimistic view of life. R.S. Pathak observes that the novel "reveals individual human nature, the relationships between people and the relationship of the individual to society".20 The two wives of the poet Nur, and their behaviour and language make an interesting study in contrast. Nur's second wife is young and very dominating, while the first wife is homely and an elderly woman. The language used by them and about them presents a clear contrast between the two. Deven's wife's dissatisfaction is also conveyed through the language used by her.

Nur's wife loves him and cares for him but her concern shows in an overdominating way. She scolds her husband for drinking and insults Deven for being a 'drunkaard friend' of her husband's. She says to Deven: "He was a poet, a scholar, but is he now? Look at him! ...Do you call that a poet, or even a man?" (p.59). Deven notices in particular, "the outrage that the woman exhaled as though she were a fire-eater in the middle of a performance"(p.60). She yells: "Did he marry me to make me

live in a pigsty with him?" (p.60), and "D' you think I entered this house to keep company with swine?" (p.61). Deven is all the more confused when he hears the voices of the husband and wife, "the one accusing, the other placating; the one harsh, the other helpless"(p.61).

Nur's second wife, Imtiaz Begum, is a terror for everyone except Nur, who loves her very much and obeys her commands. She asks him to stop reciting his poetry, and he does so. She is curious as to why Deven visits Nur and she strictly tells Deven that Nur 'will not recite' Nur reassures her: "Dear heart, I will not, no, I will not recite, I am giving no recitation again, ever, please don't think I am". She, however, does not believe him and goes on to hurt him: "Yes, you will. ...Call your friends.... Sing, let everyone clap and dance while I -- while I lie here, dying' (p.119). Nur's first wife knows only too well the ways of his second wife. She is, naturally, jealous of his second wife, and says: "More tantrums going on up there? ...A fine actress, that one....She used to be a dancing girl out there-- and she knows all the dancer's tricks". She tells Deven that Imtiaz pretends to be ill if she wants something from him (p.122). The subtle use of words and phrases helps the reader form distinct impressions about the two women.

IX

Anita Desai is a master artist who uses images effectively according to the situation and the mental state of her protagonists. She uses animal images, bird
images and other images from nature. These evocative images help reveal the psychological state of the women concerned. Desai's novels convey, through images, a wide range of experience. These images also add a vividness to the situations, characters and events in the novels. Imagery enables the novelist to project the psyche and inner states of her female protagonists' mind.

Most of Desai's women characters are doomed to live in a surrounding which instills in them a feeling of insecurity, a fear of the mysterious, and the dread of living in a world that does not understand them. This consciousness is expressed through a range of images of birds, insects, reptiles and other animals. Snakes, eagles, hawks, bats, owls, jackals, lizards, apes, peacocks are also mentioned frequently in her novels. It has rightly been pointed out that:

Verbal expressions and their connotations have immediate and total appeal and it is always difficult to dissect and analyse them....The novelist uses the devices of imagination and its various shades such as fantasy, reverie, dream and still more complex states of consciousness as nightmares, illusions, delusions, hallucinations. The traditional devices of impressionism, expressionism, imagism and symbolism are also used..." 21

Cry, The Peacock, for example, uses evocative images from the world of birds, animals and other aspects of

nature.

The evening sun seems ugly to Maya today as she has lost her pet. Maya finds hanging pendent from the topmost branches of the trees, swelling like "a purulent boil, until it was ripe to drop" (p.6). Maya's uneasiness is conveyed through the expression-- "... liquid brightness of the mirror blurred, the picture went out of focus" (p.8). Only darkness seems to give her some relief, the balm of darkness acts on her "like a strong and effective medicine on a wound still fresh" (p.11). Lonely nights are to her like "the gentle herbal balm rubbed into the hot temples and fevered bruises inflicted by the long frustrating day" (p.25). However Maya's experiences with Gautama being what they are, after listening to his answer about the facts of life and death, she finds the reality of existence collapsing "like a worm-eaten fruit, at my feet" (p.18). Colour images have been effectively used by the novelist:

Down the street the silk-cotton trees were the first to flower: their huge, scarlet blooms, thick-petalled, solid-podded, that made blood-blobs in the blue, then dropped to the asphalt and were squashed into soft, yellowish miasma, seemed animal rather than flowerage, so large were they, so heavy, so moist and living to the touch (p.34).

Maya who likes to spend her free time in the garden viewing and admiring nature, feels: "The world is like a toy specially made for me, painted in my favourite colours, set moving to my favourite tunes" (p.36).
Nature images are beautifully used. The moon is shown as a living human organ. "But there was a moon. A great moon of hot, beaten copper of molten brass, livid and throbbing like a bloody human organ, a great, full-bosomed woman who had mounted the skies in passion, driven the silly stars away from her, while she pulsed and throbbed, pulsed and glowed across the breathless sky" (p.51). Maya feels suffocated at Mrs. Lal's party, and everything there seems very dull to her: "The vegetables were all colourless and slimy, the rice was cold and lumpy..." (p.71). This kind of projection of her characters' mood in nature is a regular feature of Desai's style. The rain clouds present Maya's unstable mind. "And the rain-clouds, emerged again from the horizon that was eternally pregnant with promise at one end, and at its opposite pole, was an eternally hungry and open grave" (p.96). Maya's agitation finds an apt expression in the following lines:

Wild horse, white horse, galloping up paths of stone, flying away into the distance, the wild hills. The heights, the dizzying heights of my mountains, towering, tapering, edged with cliff-edges, founded on rock. Fall, fall, gloriously fall to the bed of racing rivers, foaming seas. Horrid arms, legs, tentacles thrashing, bold flowing, eyes glazing. Storm at sea, and land! Fury. Whip. Lash. Fly furiously... Danger! The warning rings and echoes, from far, far, far. Run and hide—if you can, miserable fool! Ha, ha. Fool, fool, fool (pp.180-81).
Maya sees in fruitless vines a replica of herself (p.207). Thus Desai has used beautiful images to present Maya's state of mind. Her sadness, her loneliness, insecurity and suffocation, all are successfully conveyed through imagery. Voices in the City also contains very apt images. 

Monisha misses her brother, Nirode, in her lonely hours. She thinks of him as the 'snail inside, transparent, fragile, something so bare' which had lost its protective 'shell' (p.110). Calcutta, with its 'uneasy lassitude of conscience' is equated with the goddess Kali and is conceived of as holding "its head between its knees and grins toothlessly up at me from beneath a bottom black with the dirt that it sits on" (p.116). To helpless Monisha the city is like an old witch (p.138), or a devil with two faces:

I see another face of this devil city, a face that broods over the smouldering fire-a dull, vacant, hopeless face. The rickshaw coolie, the street sweeper, the tanner, the beggar child with his limbs cut off at the joints, the refugee who litters the platforms of Sealdah Station with his excrement and offspring - they share one face, one expression of tiredness, such overwhelming tiredness that even bitterness is merely passive and hopelessness makes the hand extend only feebly, then drop back without disappointment. Two faces—one rapacious, one weary-gaze at me from every direction. How to reply-with loathing or compassion? (pp.117-18).

Monisha's anger "fester like a pus-filled boil" (p.118). She compares herself to a weak old woman
who "stands watching, leans over and vomits" (p.118). Monisha's mental condition makes her look at the sunset as "all ashes and roses poetry and flame. But it is swamped by smog and the stars that follow it are pale with tuberculosis" (p.119). Helpless and handicapped beggars of Calcutta are like ferocious animals which "would spring on me, claw the flesh off my back and devour it" (p.118). Monisha's plight is that of caged doves - "Doves like balls of raincloud, but in each soft breast a great open wound, bleeding, scarlet seeping over tiny feathers in a blot of fresh blood. Wounded and bleeding, but scurrying about their cages ... in flux, and bleeding ... How can they live, eat, work, sing, bleeding through life?" (p.121).

Monisha is reduced to a "shrunken, etiolated, wasted thing" (p.139). To Amla she is just like a statue. Having "wandered away, into some unholy garden of her own, [she] stood there now like one of these lifeless statues..."(p.149). Monisha is 'the lost princess of the fairy tale who sat somewhere in the deepest shadows of this forest, silent and unattainable" (p.194).

Darkness is said to be the true colour of Calcutta (p.220). The atmosphere is not conducive for genuine love. Monisha's mother's love made her swallow her father "like a cobra swallows a fat, petrified rat, then spew him out in one flabby yellow mesh" (p.190). Love here can exist, as Amla says, "In the from of a little sweet, short anaesthesia" (p.193).
The feeling of Sarah's non-belonging, depression and discontent is presented with help of images from the world of music. Despite her efforts to evolve "a pattern, a harmony...Her dreams too were in pieces, tormented, like the night slit and torn by long blades of rain" (p.50). The relationship of Sarah's father and mother is presented as one of salve and master. Unable to bear his snores, the mother 'hissed' at him to keep quiet. The "mole-hill shook mightily as though threatening to erupt, then gradually subsided to its own pre-historic and animal rhythm" (p.151). The novelist has effectively conveyed the embarrassment of Sarah on account of this unnatural relationship of her parents:

She had dreamt she was borne upon the back of mighty water mammoth that suddenly rose out of its underwater lair to start burrowing and digging through banks of black mud that flew back into her face no matter how she fought it off, protesting, and very nearly choked her (p.151).

The predicament of Sita, in Where Shall We Go This Summer?, is also presented through images. She is a very different woman and her thoughts are not like those of the traditional Indian women. The novelist has made an excellent use of images from nature. After twenty years of married life, Sita swells out "like some pendulous jackfruit", the interyugnum having "aged her so, [and]
truned her hair so grey" (.14).

Sita's eyes are in contrast to her stern, expressionless face. Moses saw her eyes stare so exaggeratedly. When Sita bends towards her son, her eyes appear "like huge lamps scanning his face, searching for response" (p.27). Sita's face assumes, before due time, the "aged stillness", and she looks "at the sky as still and rigid as a boil slowly gathering to bursting point" (p.18). Because of their mother's violent eruptions of emotion, Sita's children are "encased in their separate silences like larvae in stiff-spun cocoons"(p.19). Even the dry-leaves of the plum trees clatter together harshly "like some disturbed, vigilant animals" (p.26). Hurt by her husband, Sita feels like a wounded animal, for which, "nothing ever closed" and "rippled open, the wound remained open" (p.44). Sita finds the conduct of the other ladies in her husband's house intolerable. Spending most of their time in the kitchen, cutting vegetables, they are "Like elephants... eating grass, shifting from foot to foot, swaying their trunks, small-eyed, eating" (p.49). Looking at her wedding photographs, Sita sees herself as a shy and quiet bride, trying to adopt herself for the occasion, "the way an insect might adopt certain characteristics not of its own breed for the sake of camouflage and self defence"(p.53). But Sita finds the atmosphere later uncomfortable, and feels "as a moth that has emerged from its cocoon not in sunlight, but into a grey nonlight that does not warm the damp wings or give them strength for flight" (p.76). She struggles like 'a
cripple without crutches'. But disturbing thoughts keep on coming to her 'like small bats flicking through her with sharp cuts' (p.93). The house itself is "so like a jail... surrounded by the barbed wire" (p.118). Having lost the battle to Raman, Sita feels "like a player at the end of the performance, clearing the stage, picking the costumes in equal parts saddened and relieved... she had actually been playing the part here of an actress in a theatrical performance and was now to return to a life of retirement, off-stage" (p.153).

*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is an ironical juxtaposition of the actual and the aesthetic. Sita who is a wife and responsible mother, wants to live in a world of her choice, where things happen according to her wishes. At the end however, when she has to surrender to reality, she feels as if she is going to a life of retirement. Sita's plight has been communicated by the novelist through apt images.

Nanda Kaul, a solitary figure in Kasauli, is seething in her self-imposed solitude. The heavenly bliss sought by her in Carignano, is actually a prison from where there is no escape, unless she redeems herself from her self-destructive attitude towards life. Her past years were "like gorge, cluttered, choked and blackened with the heads of children and grandchildren, servants and guests... clamouring about her" (p.17). Having left that
life behind, she is not prepared to bow again, to let that noose slip once more round her neck (p.19). Nanda conceives of herself in terms of "a charred tree trunk in the forest, a broken pillar of marble in the desert, a lizard on a stone wall". Since "a tree trunk could not harbour irritation, nor a pillar annoyance, she would imitate death, like a lizard" (p.23).

Raka is compared to one of those "dark crickets that leap up in fright but do not sing, or a mosquito, minute and fine, on thin, precarious legs" (p.39). Even to Nanda, she is "still an intruder, an outsider, a mosquito flown up from the plains to tease and worry" (p.40). The 'mosquito' is repeated once again (p.45). She is also likened to a rabbit conjured up by a magician - drawn unwillingly out of the magic hat" (p.47).

We also find rain and fire images in this novel. Raka imagines the landscape to be a sea and sees herself to be shipwrecked. "To the north, the soft, downy hills flowed, wave upon wave, gold and blue and violet and indigo, like the sea... I'm shipwrecked, Raka exulted, I'm shipwrecked and alone..." (p.61-62). The clouds drop from the sky, "swollen and heavy with cold, like a great polar bear crouching, hurrying over the hill-tops" (p.81). Raka again exclaims: "We could be shipwrecked, water, water everywhere" (p.82).

Ila Das lives a miserable life. It is hardly better than "a bit of crumpled paper" (p.112). Nanda, Raka and Ila, although so different from each other are very
much alike, alienated and lonesome. The images used to
delineate their characters are interestingly enough, from
the same 'field' - of nature and animal world. While Nanda
is a "charred tree trunk" or a "broken pillar", Ilia's life
is a "piece of gravel" or a "bit of crumpled paper", and
Raka is like a "dark cricket" or a "mosquito" or a
"rabbit".

In *The Village By the Sea* Lila's mother looks
like a "crumpled grey rag" (p.10). Although the story is
simple and the language easy, the novelist employs
beautiful images which add reality and life to the story.

In *In Custody*, Nur's second wife shouts at him
with fury. She shakes with outrage and resembles "a fierce
and infuriated apparition in white and silver" (p.59). Her
behaviour presents her "as though she were a fire-eater in
the middle of a performance" (p.60).

Deven goes to meet Nur without informing
Sarla, When he comes back, she is upset, and he knows
that:

This manner would be his punishment for many
days to come. The tedium of it settled upon him
like a grey, crumbling mildew. He felt aged
and mouldy. He was sure his teeth had loosened
in the night, that his hair would come out in
handfuls if he tugged it. That was what she
might well do, he feared, to teach him not to
venture out of the familiar, safe dustbin of
their world into the perilous world of
nighttime becchanalia, revelry and melodrama. Now he would sink back on to the dustheap like a crust thrown away, and moulder (pp.66-67).

Deven and Sarla, both facing the hardships of life, understand the secret truth about each other. They nevertheless stay aloof from each other because they know that "two victims ought to avoid each other, not yoke together their joint disappointments. A victim does not look to help from another victim; he looks for a redeemer" (p.68).

Imtiaz Begum's high-pitched voice grates on Deven's ear "like a fingernail on a glass pane" (p.80). The spectators listening to her poetry are "like puppets or trained monkeys". Deven finds her unattractive; "She could be fifty, painted to look like a summer rose" (p.83). Nur's wives, busy with furious fights are not unlike "jealous tigresses" or "ferocious felines" who would "devour the helpless quaking flesh of the poet" (p.117). Deven regards himself as "a caged animal in a zoo... a trapped animal... Marriage, a family and a job had placed him in this cage; now there was no way out of it". He also realises that his friendship with Nur is "just a cage in a row of cages. Cage, cage. Trap, trap" (p.131). Deven is not sure as to when, and if at all, he will be able to "clear all these heaps of rubbish" and feels apprehensive that it might "lead him to yet another pile of refuse" (p.146). He fails to take a proper interview of the great poet and pen down his poems. He finds everything, "beyond his grasp, his control" and wondered whether, in this process, he
will be able "to gather up the stained, soiled, discoloured and odorous rags of his life" (p.158). Deven is in a confused state, "He had imagined he was taking Nur's poetry into safe custody, and not realized that if he was to be custodian of Nur's genius, then Nur would become his custodian and place him in custody too" (p.203). The story and the repeated use of the word 'custody' reveal the symbolic significance of the title of the novel.

There is powerful impressionistic evocation of Desai's characters' emotions, madness, love and hatred. In her novels, R.S. Singh notices the use of stream of consciousness technique and the ingenious management of symbols... 22 Desai's novels have evoked favourable comments on its apt use of imagery, rhythm, language and style. Meenakshi Mukherjee believes that her style shows a "strong individuality". Madhusudan Prasad also is of the opinion that her lyricism and her symbolism make her novels"...a complete mingling of structure with texture, technique with language, theme with intent". 23

Language and imagery are devices of character delineation in Desai's novels which make her novels more realistic and her characters more lively.