Chapter 2

Literary / Critical Analysis

Anita Desai is a good blend of Indian and European sensibilities. A vivid reflection of this unique blend finds spontaneous expression in her novels. She is an “instinctive” writer. She herself stated that writing is almost a compulsive need to realize and express her through language. She is gifted with a sensibility, which suits her aesthetic goals. She is a self-conscious artist, forging a different world out of the mundane things of the day-to-day existence of an Indian woman. It is very difficult to categorize her novels, for; they do not fall into any category. Her novels seem to suggest what she has attributed to most woman writers in India, writing without a tradition. “An effect obvious in all that is written today, of wandering aimlessly through wild, uncharted tracks, unsure of where one began, unsure of where one may end.” (Anita Desai “Women writers” Quest p41) in spite of it we observe a conscious attempt to bring this waywardness to a definite aesthetic end, to turn into a pattern in her novels.

Anita Desai is an Indian living in the US; what kind of style or theme does this kind of background produce? We may put forth this question. She does not find any school of Indian novel writing in English. To her, novel writing is a highly flexible literary genre that can
include all kinds of things such as psychology, philosophy, comedy, tragedy, criticism etc. There is hardly an aspect of the complex model life, which does not find expression in her writing. According to Anita Desai writing is not an act of deliberation, reason and choice. It is a matter of instinct, silence and waiting. Thus she creates an existential framework where a man’s work is measured not by all the incidents of his life, but by the determined action and creation. Her novels have simple plot elements, leading to complex situation. For her, reality consists of the raw material of existence. “The passing mood and attitudes” that keep disturbing us from moment to moment. Hence she does not apply herself to social problems. She creates a private world of her own; her creative effort being part of her private effort to seize upon the raw material of life- its shapelessness, its meaninglessness, that lack of design that drives one to despair. (Vinson-“Contemporary Novel” p348)

Anita Desai- within the limited milieu creates, is able to achieve remarkable depth and intensity her characters have a near neurotic quality about them. Her narrative focus is limited. Her novels normally employ the protagonist to narrate the story. The main character while telling the story presents her own viewpoint. Since she creates a small world and a small milieu, her narrative focus is restricted. It however
provides her with an opportunity to observe what is around her. She has an extraordinary sense of detail, of graphic observation, of noticing things that mostly go unnoticed. She writes almost with the skill of a painter. Things and objects however small and insignificant, acquire large importance in her novels. When not observing these mundane realities Anita Desai turns reflective, going deep in to psyche, going to those places in the heart and mind where things acquire a different character. She then dwells on moods on feelings, on emotions, on all those things that impress the mind and leave their imprint there. In these moments her prose acquires the nature of lyric poetry for in these moments of heightened awareness Anita Desai reveals her delicate sensibility, her sense of sounds, of colours, of smells, of beauty, of lyric intensity, exquisite in form and evocativeness render her fiction a peculiar poetic quality, though they do not always serve her fictional ends.

There is a sustained effort in her writing to evolve a set of symbols, images or myths (Vinson—“Contemporary writers p348) but they really do not have the power and the intensity we generally associate with them. The symbolism of dance, for example, which appears in all her novels in some form or the other, does not have the same intensity in all its appeal. The use of iterative images and symbols, however, lends
density to her fictional world and compensates for the absence of action or variety of character. Her fictional canvas is narrow but it has tremendous depth and intensity. It does not extend, instead it sinks deep into the complexity of human experience. Her symbols and her private mythology bring her closer to the existential philosophy.

Says Anita Desai on creativity “I think theories of the novel are held by those of an academic or critical turn of mind, not the creative. A writer does not create a novel by observing a given set of theories- he follows flashes of individual vision, and depends on a kind of instinct that tells him what to follow and what to avoid, how to veer away from what would be destructive to his vision. It is these flashes of vision, and a kind of trained instinct, that leads him- not any theories.”(Atma Ram- “An interview with Anita Desai” World literature written in English Vol 16, No: 1)

The poetic quality of Anita Desai’s fiction has now being acknowledged and it is apparent that her reading of novelists likes D.H.Lawrens, Virgina Woolf, E.M.Forster, Henry. James, Raja Rao, Proust, Dostoevsky and Kawabata have had a great impact on her technique and style. Her desire of innovation and experimentation is apparent in all her novels and this lends her work a touch not to be found in other Indian writers.
Anita Desai’s views on English as a medium of creative writing for Indians are neither “apologetic” nor “defensive” for she regards the choice of English language a personal matter. To put in her own words: “It is not my intention to either apologies or defends my position is after all a personal matter. It may have some historical reasons but chiefly they are personal. According to the rules laid down by the critics, I ought to be writing half my work in Bengali, the other half in German, as it happens I have never written a word in either language. Possibly I found English a suitable link language, a compromise. But I can state definitely that I did not choose English in a deliberate and conscious act. If it did not sound like a piece of arrogance I’d say perhaps it was the language that chose me but I am not aware of any act of choice. I started writing stories at the age of 7 and have been doing so for thirty years for now without stopping to think why. (Anita Desai- “The Indian writers problems” p12)

According to Leech and Short “Stylistics tries to explore for pattern and system below the surface forms of language to search for principles of meaning and language use which activate and control the code. The function of literary stylistic is to explain the relation between language and artistic function. The motivation questions are not so much “what
but why and how”, why a particular writer chooses the word phrases, and structure for his works and how he uses them to achieve the results is the main enquiry of stylistics.”

Form and Structure, in the novels of Anita Desai, 'take the shape of an exquisitely designed tapestry”.6 "The story and the novel, the idea and the form, are the needle and the thread",7 says Henry James, "the cultivation of this success, the study of this exquisite process form to my taste, is the beginning and the end of the art of the novelist. They are his inspiration, his despair, his reward, his torment, his delight. It is here in very truth that he competes with life; it is here that he competes with his brother the painter in his attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle.”8

The novels of Anita Desai reveal her unique world view, but at the same time confirm to the existing tendencies in modern fiction. Her novels are technical innovations which "combine features of both novel and lyrical poetry and shift the reader's attention from men and events to a formal design".9 She herself prefers the word 'pattern' to plot.
"I prefer the word 'pattern' to 'plot' as it sounds more natural and even better, if I dare use it, is Hopkin's, word 'inscape' — while 'plot' sounds arbitrary heavy-handed and artificial, all that I wish to avoid."\(^{10}\)

Ralph Freedman in his book the lyrical novel has enumerated the typical features of modern novels based on the inner drama of human psyche. He calls these novels, lyrical novels. Anita Desai's main concern in writing too is the quest of truth. She writes,

"Writing to me is a process of discovering the truth — the truth that is nine-tenths of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath one-tenth visible portion we call reality. Writing is my way of plunging to the depths and exploring this underlying truth. All my writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things.""

For Anita Desai, it is not the theme, but the inner and outer rhythms of human psyche which are all important.

"My novels don't have themes — at least not till they are finished, published or read, do I see any theme. While writing, I follow my instinct, I follow flashes of insight, I veer away from or even fight anything that threatens to distort or destroy this insight, and somehow
come to the end and look back to see the pattern of footprints on the sand."\(^{12}\)

According to Irwin Howe: "The modernists anticipate the preoccupation with psychic inwardness, by means of which the self is transformed into a cosmic centre and mover, as this will later become characteristic of certain modernist writers, but they still seek to relate this preoccupation to transcendental values, if not sources, in the external world. For them the universe is still alert, still the active transmitter of spiritual signs".\(^{13}\)

In the light of the above observation, Anita Desai is a modernist who shares some common features with other prominent writers of our times. Some salient features peculiar to this kind of writing have been discussed in detail by Ralph Freedman: \(^{14}\)

"The main figure in the novel is the symbolic hero, a passive purveyor of visions, who in quest of meaning of life absorbs the external world and mirrors it in all its multitudinous manifestations. He is also an aesthetic image who wears the novelist's mask and thus through his contradictory self, in the end, produces a picture of a unified or total self."
This romanticized hero in his quest, reaches a point of recognition which enables him to become an aesthetic abstraction of the universal.

The transcendental or romanticized hero reflects a spiritual image of man's relation to his universe, rising from subjective sensibility and moving to a formal presentation.

The telescopic self of the hero, operates through physical objects which serve as the catalyst, leading him on to hallucinations and dreams, expressed through a succession of image scenes.

The method of ironic juxtaposition is applied for a heightened expression of feeling. The prose poems can take up different forms, they can be ironic or passionate, cruelly realistic, loftily symbolic, allegorical or parabolic.

The past life of the protagonists plays an important role, as the present consciousness of the characters is a result of their past experiences. Therefore, the plot moves with the modulations of memory. The hero becomes a wanderer through space and time.

These novels are psychological dramas, surfacing an inner conflict, through aesthetic objectivity. The poet novelist mirrors himself in the theme, and at the same time remains detached, till he is able to produce a spiritual self-image. This intrinsic relationship between all animate and inanimate objects, becomes the sole subject of the lyrical novelist.
In short, lyrical novels are long prose poems, based on subjective objectivity, expressed through a progression of images in which the symbolic hero or the protagonist is the poet’s mask, engaged in self-analysis, 'his quest which leads him to a moment of recognition, and transcends the temporal and causal, unifying the individual self with the infinite or universal self."

For Anita Desai too "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."\(^{15}\)

In the four novels selected for this aspect of study, the approach of the novelist may vary from novel to novel, but the basic framework of each, fits in the criteria for a lyrical novel like pieces in a jigsaw-puzzle.
Anita Desai has adopted a controlled method of stream of consciousness. 'Internal narration\textsuperscript{16}, a point of view within a character's consciousness, manifesting his or her feelings about and evaluations of the events and characters of the story. It is used extensively in *Cry the Peacock* and to a limited extent in *Voices in the City*. Major part of these writings include 'free-indirect-discourse',\textsuperscript{17} indicating an internal perspective, in which the subjective feelings of protagonists are transformed into third person narration and are interwoven with, and framed by the author's account of the character's inner state.

The first novel of Anita Desai,\textsuperscript{18} can almost be taken as a model of a poetry novel.

The chief protagonist is Maya, who wears the poet narrators mask and portrays the poetic vision through her public monologues.

The plot moves with the modulations of memory. The scenes from Maya's childhood alternate with her present condition and her concern for the future, tattooed with the albino astrologer's predictions. Maya is a passive purveyor of visions whose awareness of self is merged with objects surrounding her. The novel has hardly any action, and the reader gets the feeling of movement in the plot due to the progression of images, one after the other.
The novel begins with an image scene, in which the names of the characters are not revealed right till the end of the chapter, and the reader is unconsciously drawn to the inner world of Maya's psyche. The symbolic self-portrait of Maya is painted step by step by the juxtaposition of other characters and scenes like Gautam, Lila, Pom, Maya's father, Gautam's mother, sister, the image scenes *viz.*, the scene of the meeting with the albino astrologer, Cabaret dancers, the dinner parties and storm scene in the end, which intensify Maya's inner state of turmoil.

Maya as the symbolic hero, absorbs the animate and the inanimate world around her. She, as the mask of the author deforms these experiences, in order to mirror an aesthetic image.

The antithetical technique adopted, is clearly visible in the two different worlds, in which the consciousness of Maya vacillates, *i.e.*, the dream world of her childhood and the world of solid reality of Gautam's house and family. Maya describes her childhood days:

"The world is like a toy specially made for me, painted in my favourite colours, set moving to my favourite tune." *(Cry the Peacock, p. 36)*

A doting father, who looked after this dream-child Maya, is remembered with special tenderness.
"He has looked after me alone and his beam is especially tender, his attention especially loving. I think, that he is like a silver oak himself, with his fine silver white hair brushed smoothly across his bronzed scalp." (p. 39)

Maya's after-marriage life is a complete change. Her husband Gautam holds:

"Reality and idealism are one and the same thing. Life is not a matter of distinguishing between the two but of reconciling them."

(pp. 20-21)

Gautam's mother is entirely different from Maya's father.

"....like some busy rhinoceros charging through the forest, to her dispensary, or her crèche, or her workshop for the blind, the disabled, the unemployed." (p. 47)

Maya's married life is juxtaposed with that of Lila and Pom, the self-contented beings, representing compromise in life.

"....what hated me was not a remembrance of Leila bitter, but a memory of Leila resigned. Had she raged, revolted, I should have rushed to her now." (p. 59)

"It was natural, afterthoughts of Leila, to turn down a line of friends, sift them through my mind and come to Pom, the pink,
plump, pretty Pom who did not speak of fate, who had never been ill, or overworked or bitter." (p. 60)

Maya is searching for the right colored sari for that day in her cupboard, while thinking about her friends. In this symbolic scene, in the end, she gives up the search, torn by her internal conflict and quest for peace and solace.

"I ceased to hunt then, ceased to plan, and merely laid my face into those cool cloths, odorous with camphor and lavender, that recalled mountain waters to me, ferns, and nights full of stars, for I found myself alone with them after all. There was not one of my friends who could act as an anchor any more, and to whomsoever I turned for reassurance, betrayed me now." (p. 64)

The very delicate vibrations of Maya's thought dominate the novel.

"Values were distorted in that macabre half light with its altering tints at an hour when those values could have been all important. What was true? What was lasting? What to believe in? What reject?" (p. 86)

Maya has been shown as the aesthetic abstraction of the universal self.
"Lying here in the dark? he said, and drew a finger down my cheek. Fall, fall, long fall into the soft velvet well of the primordial, of original instinct, of first formed love." (p. 11)

Maya reflects a spiritual image of man's relation to his universe.

"It was not only for his presence, his love that I longed for but mainly for the life that would permit me to touch him, feel his flesh and hair, hold and then tighten my hold on him. And not on Gautam alone, but on all the pulsating world around him, from the frieze of stars silently exploding in the summer sky to the faintly fluttering owls making covert hidden love in the crotch of the fig tree — All that suggested life, and the great entrancing world to me who was doomed not to live." (p. 102)

Just before she carries out her unspoken decision, Maya has the experience of oneness with nature almost transcendental in nature.

"I continued to mount, step by step, to the roof, looking up to see the evening sky lowering itself to descend upon me till suddenly when I had burst out into the open we were one — the blue intensity and I." (p. 205)

This spiritual experience is the natural outcome of an inner conflict, which resolves itself gradually, through a series of probes and questionings and recognition of truth from time to time.
"Here lay the catalysis of my unrest I had grown too involved." (p. 67)

"I entered a new vista of knowledge. I forced myself into believing that I could see now what must be the reason for my hating it so, for my hating it so, for Gautam's spurning it — visible to our subconscious only." (p. 106)

Maya detaches herself in order to reach this knowledge. "Murder

Shocked as though I had truly found a blemish in my unscarred skin. I drew away from the mirror with a shudder I could no longer bear to see that clear, ignorant and insane face, and looked away." (p. 106)

Anita Desai not only follows the trends of lyrical novel but even makes the protagonist use the very words which express this lyrical process.

Freedman says, "This process of telescoping self and world is based in the main on the idealistic epistemology of the time."19

Maya reverberates the idea:

"My suddenly sobered mind affirmed it a certainty, as the telescope affirms the certainty of the physical substance of these mysterious lights in the night sky, the planets. No fairy tales those, but proven." (p. 20)
In the words of Freedman again.

"The hero as an aesthetic image of nature leads to the technique of mirroring. Since the self is the point at which inner and outer worlds are joined, the hero's mental picture reflects the universe of sensible encounters as an image."\textsuperscript{20} This very subjective process is described by Maya objectively.

'I saw my body detach itself from it and float away, to rest upon the dim mirror where I could gaze upon it from a cool distance I studied it absorbed.' (p. 105)

'The unique personage of the poetic hero (Maya) moves in worlds transformed by her own hallucinations; her temperament, in her deformations lies the unique reality.'\textsuperscript{21}

"Swiftly I turn, swiftly I ran. I feel my heart throbbing madly. Why?

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 and legs tentacles thrashing, blood flowing, eyes glazing. Storm-storm at sea, at land! fury. Whip lash, Fly furiously.
Danger! Danger! The warning rings and echoes, from far, far, far. Run and hide, run and hide if you can miserable fool! Ha, ha, fool, fool, fool." (pp. 180-81)

Maya redefines love and life in her own way. The lyrical point of view in this particular novel is the justification of the protagonists T. Till the very end, she wished to be loved and understood.

"I was overcome with a desperate timidity, begging him once more to answer to come and meet me half-way, in my own world, not merely demand of me, brusquely to join me in his, which, however safe, was so very drab and no longer offered me security.

Had he done so, all might have been quite different.

But he did not. Less than that, he retreated to the outposts of his flat civilization and asked vaguely, half-interestedly, Toto? who was that?"

The words were as grim as any death sentence absolute and unredeemable." (p. 198)

The poet narrator successfully justifies the emanations of Maya's consciousness. Because of Gautam's half-deadness to the living world, which his dry brain (p. 195) was incapable of sensing, Maya feels justified in her decision. The objects, scenes, characters, all exist in the novel as image figures to objectify and dramatize the protagonists point of view. The
atmosphere of subjective objectivity so skillfully created makes the novel a
work of art.

Voices in the City\textsuperscript{22}, is a lyrical novel with a difference. The protagonists
T is not represented by a single person but consists of three individuals,
Nirode, Monisha and Amla who present a divided point of view, but
combine towards the end. The book has been divided into four sections.
The first three deals with the hero’s quest, while the fourth is attempted
as a spiritual generalization, based on all that has been related in the
previous pages. The plot oscillates between past and present, childhood and
concern for future play a meaningful role in the present lives of the
protagonists.

Nirode in the first part of the book is the editor of a magazine who wants
to cast off all his family connections, contrary to Maya, who was haunted by
an idyllic childhood, Nirode wants to get rid of his attachment for his
mother whom he believes to be leading a life of disgrace. He tells Sonny:

"And you set about teaching me what to accept and what to reject
— after I've thrown off every stinking undergarment of family
fortune and family." (Voices in the City, p. 25)

Nirode is in search of a meaning of life, and a life of detachment, but
at every step feels thwarted and torn by an internal conflict.
"No. The newspaper carries the writer further and further into the impersonal, it only follows the you. The You is everything in the news. There is never an I. It is the I that interests me now." (p. 32)

Juxtaposed with Nirode's search for truth are the portraits of Sonny, the once upon a time rich landlord's son, Jit Nair, whose wife has eloped, with her lover David the foreigner who lives a hand to mouth existence, trying to understand India. Dharma, a queer painter. All these figures have their own personal handicaps, but pose to lead normal lives.

Nirode is a rebel. He symbolizes the contradictions in human nature and as a passive purveyor of visions, wishes to rise higher, towards an ideal self.

"For one drink following upon a day of such intensity had made Nirode transparent, revealed inside him the arterial network that now spread and grew on a plane slightly above that of Calcutta's tumultuous roofs cape, but attached to it by countless wires telegraph poles, chimneys, pigeon-roosts — one vast tangled net of the Bengali loquaciousness, the Bengali's quick emotion and fluency, his natural anarchism, his imbalance and inconsistencies, his dark and demoniac dreams that groveled mostly in the grossness of the city, its shapeless, colourless and grim old houses and slums, then heaved up, like the radio aerials and
pigeon-roosts that collected the fuzz of smog on the roofs, and now and then rose and fled like a scattering of mother-of-pearl pigeons into a forbidding sky. He spoke with conceit and malice, he disregarded his companions with fine philosophic detachment, then noisily crashed into their midst again. He boasted of his various wild experiences, declaring them unique in one of his social class, little realizing it was the city that had thrust them upon him inexorably. Then with unconscious candour, he wondered aloud what to make of it all." (p. 22)

All the subjective qualities, listed in the passage have their objective counterparts, viz., the arterial network in `Nirode has been associated with the countless wires, telegraph poles, chimneys, pigeon roosts etc. Nirode's demoniac dreams, natural anarchism, imbalance, inconsistencies are paralleled with shapeless, colourless grim old houses and slums.

A succession of images to externalize the internal, to make abstract concrete, is a distinguishing feature of lyrical novels and this novel abounds in images and image scenes serving as formal analogues for a private world. In fact the entire novel is a network of interlocking images.

The story begins with Nirode, followed by Monisha's first person account and public monologues, further joined by the experiences of
Amla. Overlapping ruminations are apparent. Monisha mirrors the personality and experiences of Nirode, and Amla does the same for Monisha. In a lyrical novel the protagonists absorb objects and persons in order to achieve aesthetic objectivity. Nirode, Amla and Monisha, three personages, engaged in search of meaning of life cope with it in their own way, confront the moment of recognition, and form their own resolutions which in the end merge with the universal.

The lyrical process makes the protagonists distort the universe, or dissolve it into hallucinations or dream, to reveal the infinite and the organic. Nirode, wishes to brush up with the past but is reminded, or rather gripped by it in his dream.

"Into Nirode's sleep the bright birds of the past came serenely winging, and the wide gestures of their wings ushered into his sleep the gemmed loveliness of a holiday home of his childhood...."

Thinking of the empty miserable life of Bengali women, Monisha is lost in hallucination, when she sees the 'Bleeding Heart' Doves in the zoo.

"What does it all mean? Why are lives such as these lived? At their conclusion, what solution, what truth falls into the waiting palm of one's hand, the still pit of one's heart?
Here is the answer — here, here, here, Look. I will scream. I cannot believe — but here it is. Look through these bars, into this cage of doves — look, look at the terrible answer...." (p. 121)

Amla experiences perfect happiness in the presence of Dharma. She is translucent with joy and overflowing with a sense of love and reward (p. 210), but in her subconscious, is scared of losing it, of being cheated.

"At night in her dreams, Amla believed that they were former models turned into white birds by Dharma, warning and scolding her in their harsh broken voices." (p. 211)

"There were moments when Amla feared to touch a paint brush, feeling it might take wing and swoop out of the window, or the ring on her finger, half expecting to see a caterpillar crawl out of the Tibetan turquoise." (p. 212)

The leitmotif of the novel is journey. The novel begins with an image scene, the very first line of which describes the train in subjective as well as objective terms. The symbolic vision includes journey at every step. Nirode, the chief protagonist, always connects his ideas and experiences with train and journey.

"Nirode groaned, T'd never go, David I never shall'. I pack my bags. 'I arrive at the station,' and when I have one foot in the train, I hesitate. That's my undoing — this lack of faith and this
questioning. I just stand and watch the train rush off, leaving me behind like a ghost in a bloody nightmare."

David : "I find the ticket alone answers all my questions, reassures one completely".

Nirode : "Ah, do you? For me, all tickets are marked with question marks. That is all I ever find on them." (p. 39)

The recognition of truth has also been described in terms of a journey.

'He wondered if man did not lose something of himself in this quarrel with his instincts, and if, in being a victor, there was not also a part of him — a part that had been remote, curious and unique — that was vanquished. And if it was not better therefore to be — to be — what? What can a man be if he is not a freak ? If he journeys, his body and mind will suffer expense, and perhaps the moral of it all is not to avoid the expense, but merely to make the journey worth the expense.' (p. 225)

Amla on the other hand feels weak and exhausted when confronted with truth.

"A combination of all these revelations and inspirations filled her, expanded her, made her rise and float, and on its drift she left the house, feeling as emptied out, frangible and exhausted as if a high fever had drained her." (p. 231)
But she also learns the need for continuity in life from birds, which serve as a catalyst, which changes the finite self of Amla into an infinite aesthetic self. A part of the chain of life.

"These birds they stay in the trees inspite of all those crowds around them, all that shouting and jumping and pushing. They don't give up their trees. They are not afraid. Isn't that strange?" (p. 232)

At the races Amla realises that the world cheers the winner, one who falls and dies is soon forgotten. It is life and living which matters not death.

Monisha on the other hand feels defeated.

"I am turned into a woman who keeps a diary. I do not like a woman who keeps a diary. Traceless, meaningless, uninvolved, does this not amount to non-existence, please?" (p. 140)

It is the recognition of losing the battle of instinct, the essential human in her, which leads her to her final resolution.

"These people know and feel something I do not, they are all nodding in agreement with the singer, they understand what she is singing to them. If I won a war over the mind, then they lost a war to their instincts, and it seems my victory has less value than their loss." (p. 239)
As Novelist suggests, in a lyrical novel, imagination transforms nature from a mechanism into a poetic whole. The artist thus renders an image of infinite nature and his own infinite self, the symbolic hero is the passive instrument of this process.\textsuperscript{23}

Monisha's sense of loss on not being able to have the primeval feelings of love and involvement, is a glimpse of the ideal self she aspires to attain, but fails.

In the end of the novel, Nirode and Amla together present a picture of the transcendental or symbolic hero who is the aesthetic abstraction of the universal. The contradictory point of views are all merged into the ideal self. Calcutta is no more a city stirring with its own marsh bred, monster life that like an ogre kept one eye open through sleep and waking (p. 41), but it is the city which is ever bowed in worship to the \textit{Great Kali}, the mother of all. \textit{Kali}, who is reality and illusion, the world and Maya is one (p. 256).

This awareness of the universal by the protagonists is the point of highest concentration in the novel. The quest is over, the journey of life is no more reckless but directed by an unseen power, omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. The animate and the inanimate are combined into a harmonious whole.
This drama of the voices, with the great palpable city in the background, reveals all the features of a lyrical novel. The passive hero, action replaced by perception, the quest for the meaning in life, the inner conflict in the protagonists to realize an ideal self, the romanticized hero reflecting a spiritual image of man's relation with the universe, expressed through symbols and images including both subjective and the objective worlds.

"A decisive difference between the conventional narrative and the lyrical novel is the treatment of the outer world. In the first, it is placed beyond both writer and reader, imposing between them and the theme. In lyrical mode such a world is conceived not as a universe in which men display their actions, but as a poet's vision, fashioned as a design. The world is reduced to a lyrical point of view, the equivalent of the poet's T, the lyrical self."  

111 *Fire on the Mountain*,  

the self-destructive fire in the heart and mind of Nanda Kaul, juxtaposed with the bare physical surroundings caused by forest fires, decides the lyrical point of view.

...he stopped and kept behind while Nanda Kaul, slit-eyed burned on the knoll. (*Fire on the Mountain*, p. 5)

-The poetic design consists of Nanda Kaul a recluse by circumstance, Raka, a recluse by choice, and Ila Das a born recluse, because of her physical handicaps.
The setting is the symbolic house, called Carignano, which stands alone on a knoll, a meeting place for the three protagonists. The sets are combined both by explicit statements and implicit imagery. Only one more figure interacts with the three main protagonists, that is Ramlal. This sparseness of characters, matches with the sparseness in vegetation.

; Nanda Kaul is the passive purveyor of visions, who had chosen the house to find rest and relief from the mad world of duties and obligations. Through her, the poet narrator makes explicit her poetic vision. "Nanda Kaul, as the symbolic hero, distorts the world in ordef "to create an aesthetic image."

"It was the place, and the time of life, that she had wanted and prepared for all her life." (p. 3)

"What pleased and satisfied her so, here at Carignano, was its barrenness. This was the chief virtue of all Kasauli of course — its starkness." (p. 4)

Kasauli, a hill station, is presented as a barren, dry, unattractive place, surrounded by scenes of past and present forest fires, and always threatened with a new one. Nanda Kaul's choice of a house, at such a place, becomes the focal point of this dry and burnt landscape, which in fact, symbolizes the inner self of the protagonist.

A certain ambiguity of purpose prevails, which is again a characteristic of lyrical novels. This ambiguity is caused by ironical tones adopted to
depict the conflict, between the real and the fleeing, escaping self of Nanda Kaul. Nanda Kaul wishes to break up with the past, but the past continuously impinges on her privacy and distracts her vision.

The protagonist's quest is represented symbolically by a lyrical progression, produced by elaborate picture scenes. The whole novel is interspersed with references to the past, in the fun of the history of Carignano, life at Nanda Kaul's husband, the vice-chancellor's house, scenes from Nanda Kaul's childhood, history of Raka's parents, the history of Ila Das.

The present is mainly represented by Raka, her exploits and adventures, in direct juxtaposition with the experiences of Nanda Kaul and Ila Das, who are three generations removed from her.

• The concept of subjective objectivity followed by Anita Desai is present in this novel also. The experiences of Nanda Kaul, who is in search of a total self, are arranged in a pattern of imagery. This pattern includes both human beings and objects, and are manifestations of the acting thought. Prominent images include Carignano — for seclusion, Kasauli — barrenness, starkness; History of Carignano — the loneliness misery of life, especially of lonely and unmarried women; Postman — animal existence; school boy — life of instincts; Ramlal — servant endowed with a kind and gentle heart; life of Tara-failure of social life; and life at Vice
Chancellor's house — duties and obligations; appearances; letters, messages, telephones — the outside world with which Nanda Kaul wished to have no connection; Eagle — Nanda Kaul's aspirations for attaining higher self, the club-vanity and hollowness of a life of appearances; insects, lizards, crickets, cicadas — low self-esteem for herself and Raka; the climb to the monkey point — difference in age.

These are but a few listed. A single image may symbolise many things at the same time.

Raka is the catalyst in this novel. She leads Nanda Kaul to the discovery of truth. In a lyrical novel, the protagonists wear the mask of the poet narrator. For the purpose of dramatic juxtaposition, the hero detaches himself from the scene of action, absorbs the action, and through the process of perception, mirrors it to create an ideal world. Here in this novel, Nanda Kaul is only an observer, while Raka enacts the moral point of view in symbolic gestures. Raka does not change herself because:

"If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligations her great grand-daughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct she had not arrived at the condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice, she was born to it simply." (p. 48)

Raka is often referred to as an insect, a cricket, a pet insect (pp. 39, 42, 45 and 54), which suggest that she was completely at home with
nature. Unlike Nanda Kaul, she does not dream of orchards in Kashmir (p. 93), but is happy to indulge in the hallucination of becoming a ship wrecked hero.

"I'm ship wrecked, Raka exulted. I'm ship wrecked and alone. She clung to a rock — my boat, alone in my boat on the sea, she sang." (p. 61)

If Nanda Kaul's quest for ideal self spelt calm and peace, for Raka it was complete oneness with the elements of nature. She is ecstatic to set the forest on fire. It is doubtful whether she was left unscathed.

"There was a scratching at the window that turned to a tapping, then a drumming, Nani, Nani, whispered Raka, shivering and crouching in the lily -bed peeping over the sill. Look Nani, I have set the forest on fire." (p. 145)

While Nanda Kaul is full of contradictions, Raka is completely devoid of them. Unlike Nanda Kaul, who discovers her life as a lie (p. 145) in the end, Raka has no compunctions. Nanda Kaul feels she is independent at Carignano, but gradually becomes emotionally dependent on Raka.

"But now Nanda Kaul seemed unwilling to stop talking, to let Raka out of her sight. There she flopped on her chair a small fish gasping for its native air but the old lady had her on the hook — a sharp bright hook — and held the string tight." (pp. 94-95)
Raka's presence is instrumental in bringing about the spiritual awakening in Nanda Kaul. Prior to her confessing being a liar, and her life a lie, she is filled with concern for everyone and everything around her.

...."She well and strong and upright, she ought to protect her. She ought to fight some of the battles." (p. 133)

By rejecting others, Nanda Kaul was rejecting herself. The recognition of her need for Raka, brings about the spiritual awareness which lends her the calm and serenity she was seeking all her life. Her protectiveness for the insect reveals it.

"Then becoming aware of Nanda Kaul’s opaline presence, it lifted itself up on to its hind legs, as if in self-defence, and raised its tiny hands together under its chin, turning its solemn head from side to side as it studied her with exactly the same serene curiosity that marked her face.

She put out her ringed hand and gave the lily a little shake, so that the creature tumbled off into the leaves. There it would be safe from birds." (p. 134)

The encounters of Nanda Kaul with Raka and Ila Das not only determine the movement of the novel, but form the symbolic self-portrait of her ideal self. The recognition of her need for others, the craving for love and
belongingness. is the fire of the spirit which purges her and forces the confession out of her.

Rhetoric in ordinary language can be seen as a set of principles or guidelines for getting things done by means of language.

According to Leech & Short, 'Pragmatics and rhetoric are ways in which users implement the cognitive or ideational code of language.'

Wayne Booth considers rhetoric as the 'technique of non-didactic fiction-viewed as the art of communicating with readers'.

David Lodge states that rhetoric is the vehicle of an argument.

Form and idea are inseparable in any literary writing and as Henry James puts it in his essay the 'Art of Fiction' : 'questions of art are questions (in the widest sense) of execution'.

The following aspects of technique need special consideration: (i) Fictional sequencing, (ii) Discourse and Discourse situation, (iii) Types of narration, the narrative voice and tone, (iv) Speech and thought presentation, (v) Point of view.

**Fictional Sequencing**

It is the aspect of presentation of information in a novel. It can be chronological, psychological, or presentational. While the first two are
self-explanatory, the third *i.e.*, presentational sequencing requires some explanation. As Leech and Short describe it, the best order of presentation, if one wants to facilitate the

Rhetoric of the Novels of Anita Desai

reader's processing of information both in fiction writing and in general expository writing is to go from elements which presuppose the least prior knowledge to those which presuppose the most. In presentational sequencing as well as in the other aspects of sequencing the authors artistic sense often shows in the way information is withheld, rather than in the way it is revealed.\(^5\)

All eight novels of Anita Desai have their own individual sequencing.

Beginning with *Cry the Peacock*, in this novel the sequencing is more psychological and presentational than chronological. The first part of the novel describes an event which reveals the inherent qualities of the protagonists and yet the reader is not told anything about their identities. In other words, the death of a pet is all that the novel reveals in the beginning at a point of least supposition, and ends on a point where the reader feels that he knows all about Maya and Gautam, and hence he is not shocked by the end. The interior monologue, the conversation between Maya and Gautam, the hallucinations of Maya, are all detailed psychological analyses of the innermost self of Maya, and though
chronologically we feel that time has moved, Desai's deft presentational sequencing patterns it all in flash backs and dramatic modes of soliloquy, giving us the impression of a life story.

In *Voices in the City*, presentational sequencing is paramount. The book has been divided into four parts, 'Nirode', 'Monisha', 'Amla' and 'The Mother'. On retrospect, one gets the impression of four different portraits, wrought with great detail but fixed in their places. In fact the presentational sequencing impresses the reader as a study of four lives interlinked and yet compartmentalized in their own way. The psychological awareness is also patterned to reveal the individualities of the three protagonists. The novel does begin promising much but the end is rather abrupt and unconvincing. Amla has had her moment of vision and Monisha is effaced from the scene. Nirode's acceptance of their mother as *Kali* lacks conviction for the reader.

Psychological sequencing in this novel is best traced in the sections dealing with Monisha and Amla. Monisha's journey from self-effacement to self-immolation and Amla's affair with Dharma, captures the impalpable experience of falling in and out of love in very convincing terms. Nirode's personal search surfacing again in the last part of the story does not achieve an intense illusion of reality, including the mental and moral complexities. Prof. Darshan
Singh Maini observes, 'Voices in the City shows a different if less intense Anita Desai.'

Discourse and Discourse Situation

'Discourse means linguistic communication' seen as transaction: even speaker and hearer, in prose fiction it is the author and the reader.

Discourse in prose fiction also has an extended meaning of between the writer and the reader.

"Every writer assumes that he shares a common fund of knowledge and experience with his readers. This general background not only consists of common facts but also knowledge of historical events, literary works and even quotations from the latter. Because the author can assume knowledge which any particular reader might not necessarily have, we have to conclude that the addressee in literary communication is not the reader, but what may be more conveniently termed as the implied reader, a hypothetical personage who shares with the author not just background knowledge but also a set of presuppositions, sympathies and standards of what is pleasant and unpleasant, good and bad, right and wrong."

In keeping with the term implied reader, Booth has used the term 'implied author'.

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"It is a curious fact that we have no terms either for this created second self or for our relationship with him. None of our terms for various aspects of the narrator is quite accurate. 'Persona', 'mask' and 'narrator' are sometimes used but they more commonly refer to the speaker in the work who is after all only one of the elements created by the implied author and who may be separated from him by large ironies. Narrator is usually taken to mean the T of the work but the T is seldom if ever identical with the implied image of the artist."

In other words the views expressed in a writing cannot be automatically ascribed to the author. The arrangement may be arbitrary according to the needs of artistic arrangement. Booth further adds:

"Some aspects of the implied author may be inferred through tonal variations, but his major qualities will depend also on hard facts of action and character in the tale that is told. The 'implied' author chooses, consciously or unconsciously what we read, we infer him as an ideal literary created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices."

Viewed from this angle, the novels of Anita Desai reveal interesting information about their implied authors.
In the first novel, *Cry the Peacock*, the implied author has a separate identity in Part: I and Part III but he is merged with the character of Maya in the II Part of the book, which also happens to be the major portion or the main story. As Prof. Maini says, *Cry the Peacock* is a story rendered through the consciousness of Maya and in her own agonised idiom.\(^{12}\) Although in the beginning the description is impersonal and uninvolved, gradually the implied reader is lead to understand her dilemma and by the time the novel reaches its climax the reader is totally wrapped up in her argument. The first person narration, full of rhetorical questions, are direct addresses to the reader, inviting his judgement on events. As a result the reader feels drawn towards Maya.

‘Why should I love him? I wish I did not! ? But then, what is it there for if not to feel sorrow? There never lived a bird that did not know a storm, a stone, a wound. And I, an adult thinking woman, had no more right to happiness than I had been taught by Gautam, to regard as a privilege.’\(^{13}\)

(*Cry the Peacock*, pp. 201-2)

The implied author's role is to create the contrasting world of sensitive Maya and practical Gautam. Anita Desai consciously filters information so that towards the end Maya's version seems fully justified and wins the whole-hearted sympathy of the reader, or to use Booth's phrase, the
reader is caught in the trap of (Maya's) 'suffering consciousness'. (Booth, p. 383)

In *Voices in the City* the implied author seeks to portray 'the illusion and conflicts that upset modern Indian young people, sensitive, educated and excessively self-conscious, forced by the circumstances of living in Calcutta'.

The implied author is distant from his characters, as well as from the reader, except on the portion titled 'Monisha', where implied author and the character merge. The major part of the novel is written through a third person centre of consciousness. Against the background of Calcutta, the three figures of brothers and sisters stand out helpless and puny, till finally they are merged with the eternal flux of life epitomized in the figures of *Kali* and *Calcutta*. The tacit agreement between the implied author and reader is dubious at this point of sudden religio-cultural conformity in the novel.

Critics have for a long time distinguished between author and the narrator. It is also noticed that the narrator does not always address the reader but may address person or persons in the novel itself.

Two types of narration however are quite common. *T* narration, or the 'first person narration' is the technique adopted by epistolary fiction
writers, and novels with first person account of one's own or someone else's life experiences.

As Leech and Short put it, 'the choice of a first person narrator where the T is also a primary character in the story, produces a personal relationship with the reader which inevitably tends to bias the reader in favour of the narrator/character'.

Wayne Booth remarks that the personal account of T narration makes the narration dramatic, intense and lively.

'First person narration gives perspective, variety and authenticity to the narrative.'

Trollope, however, observes the perils of first person narrative. He writes, "It is always dangerous to write from the point of T. The reader is unconsciously taught to feel that the writer is glorifying himself, and rebels against the self-praise. Or otherwise the T is pretentiously humble, and offends from exactly the other point of view".

Henry James in his preface to the Ambassadors thinks that the first person (narration) in the long piece, is a form foredoomed to looseness.

In modern fiction extensive use is made of first person narration. "The T becomes a de-personalised expression of the suffering modern sensibility. In order to control the fluidity of their more exuberant egotism,"
a story within a story device is used allowing the T self-expression but
confining it within the framework of an outer third person narration”.

'Third person narration', is based on impersonal style of narration. The
presentation is direct. The implied author and narrator are merged. The
implied author claims absolute knowledge and hence an omniscient stance
is adopted. This method allows the writer a large scope for depiction of
objective as well as subjective states, and also facilitates the description of
social and historical events. However the very omniscience becomes a
threat to the economy and architecture of the composition because there are
no limits to the freedom of the author.

Booth envisages certain dangers of this kind of writing. He writes,
"There can be no intensity of illusion if the author is present, constantly
reminding us of his unnatural wisdom. Indeed there can be no illusion of
life where there is no bewilderment and the omniscient author is obviously
not bewildered. The process most like the process of life is that of
observing events through a convincing human mind not a god-like mind
unattached to the human condition".27

/Another kind of narration advocated by Henry James is the 'indirect and
oblique view'.28 This method of story writing gives an account of strictly
selective impressions; from omniscient narrative by concentrating on the
inner reactions to a given situation of a restricted member of characters (sometimes indeed, confining itself exclusively to a single viewpoint); and from the stream of consciousness, by being less interested in the processes to ordinary undisciplined human consciousness than in illustrating the workings of this consciousness when it is directed to a particular end.  

In modern fiction, the indirect mode of narration is considered superior to any other mode. In this method the author renounces the privilege of direct intervention and allows his characters to mould themselves. Such authors agree with Percy Lubbock that the art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of history as a matter to be shown to be so exhibited that it tells itself.

In the writings of Anita Desai there is a combination of all three types of narration. Desai adopts T narration technique in only two novels, Cry the Peacock and Voices in the City. In Cry the Peacock, Part I and Part III serving as prologue and epilogue, are third person narration. The main drama, Part II is narrated by Maya, the primary character of the novel, who traces her own psychic developments from normal longing for love and life to obsessive tendencies with death and destruction.

In, Voices in the City, the section on 'Monisha' is written in the first person, presented as pages from her diary. It is true that both these
accounts tend to gain the reader's sympathy and lend an air of intensity to the description. Self-revealing as the writings are, the account nowhere degenerates into egotism or falsehood but attracts our attention and gains reader's confidence, as the candid confessions of both the characters are unmistakably the very cry of the soul, the sanctity of which only calls for reverence. Anita Desai's, *A Village by the Sea*, is an example of direct telling in which the omniscient author does not explicitly interfere with the subjective world of the characters.

In the remaining writings, Anita Desai follows the Jamesian way 'of standing above the story and taking a broad view of many things, of transcending the limits of immediate scene'. Through the third person stance, Anita Desai is able to evoke a strong feeling of closeness with the characters. This effect is achieved through the device of 'Free Indirect Discourse', applied extensively throughout her works. It is because of this device, the constant presence of the author is not felt, disturbing us with forced commentary.

The distinguished role of narrative voices and the resultant tone in the novels of Anita Desai make an interesting study.

In *Cry the Peacock*, the two separate voices of Maya and Gautam determine the tone. The novel begins and ends with a third voice which may be termed neutral, but the major writing registers two distinct voices
supporting arguments in two different directions. While Maya's voice gains in strength as the novel progresses, Gautam's becomes feeble and feebler, till in the end we hear the triumphant call of Maya after she accomplishes the deed. The voices of minor characters serve as contrast to the dominant voice of Maya, resulting in added justification of her line of thinking.

The feeling evoked by the novel is not univalent but multivalent. The reader is left with a sense of ambiguity. There is a clash between intellectual and aesthetic interests. Even though the reader sympathises with Maya, her final act of impulse is justifiable to a sane mind. Aesthetically, the minute recordings of Maya's sub-conscious and its description in palpable terms is a marvel by itself. The reader is captivated by the beauty of the vivid picture and yet at the same time he does not stop sympathizing with Gautam altogether. As a result the feelings evoked are ambiguous.

*Voices in the City*, as the title suggests is a concourse of voices not necessarily concordant. Fore grounded against the din of Calcutta city, the major characters have their own conflicts to settle through their prominent vocalizations, but the author's voice is deliberate and clear, editing, commenting and marshalling events. An earnest effort to grasp the meaning of life determines the tone of the novel.
While Nirode is trying to seek an identity through his transactions with different people, young and old, Monisha and Amla in their restricted world are also trying to solve the mystery of life. This direct probe into the fundamental concerns of life makes it a novel based on intellectual interests. The aesthetic interest is best catered for in the account of Monisha and Amla. Both of them gain reader's sympathy.

The prevailing seriousness of tone is accompanied by intense dramatic irony, evident from the beginning of the novel.

>'On the platform people loitered in various attitudes of nervousness impatience and regret.'

>'So it seemed to the red-shirted coolies', etc. 42

This free play of irony can also be marked in the description of minor characters, the generic observations on Bengali women, the typical family life of middle class Bengalis, (Jiban's family), the love and vanity of past grandeur (Sonny and Sonny's family). The remarks of Nirode on present day society are all full of satirical bitterness.

On the other hand the candid expression of Monisha, Amla and Dharrna's feelings fills the reader with a sense of awe and acceptance for the unavoidable springs of nature in man.
In the last part of the novel, there is a sudden collapsing of levels of discourse. The finality of tone with which the 'mother' is described as *Kali* is something the reader is not prepared for. Awareness of sudden truth like sudden change is shocking.

The novel ends thus diminishing the effect it had created from Part I to Part III.

The book begins and ends with the visits to give the impression of a tunnel into their ancestors and family history. I believe in going backwards into the past - I felt I was digging a tunnel back to the past. Someone who wants to write should make an effort to write a little something every day. Writing in this sense is the same as athletes who practice a sport every day to keep their skills honed.

India is a curious place that still preserves the past, religions, and its history. No matter how modern India becomes, it is still very much an old country.

Anita Desai prefers simple words to polysyllabic words. A discrete, mixture of Saxon words and Latin words give her English a native touch. Although writing about human psychic, she uses more concrete nouns then abstract. This is to eliminate the disjunction of self and
world. She portrays the cultural and social changes that India has undergone as she focuses on the incredible power of family and society and the relationships between family members, paying attention to the trials of women suppressed by Indian society.

As a result of this, her writing gains an authenticity since man’s two halves- the subjective and objective make a whole. For vividness and visibility, she includes adjectives referring to physical and psychological states. The narrative voice is mirrored in evaluative epithets.

A large number of adverbs of time, place, direction and degree give her writing a pure quality and throw light on the personalities of the characters, so as to render their total image for immediate apprehension. A judicious use of disjuncts, adjunts and conjuncts clarifies the contrast and juxtaposition of which her writing is full. A balanced use of transitive and intransitive words adds speed to the progression of images, which are created in order to dramatize an inner conflict and symbolize it objectively through a situation. The transitive words give the reader an impression of movement and activity and thus add liveliness to the description.

Anita Desai prefers complex sentences to simple once. The passages have approximately a ration of 1:8 between simple and complex sentences. The complexity arises due to both subordination and
co-ordination. Anita Desai prefers clauses, infinitive without to, ing-particle and ed-particle. The use of non-finite clauses is a mark of careful writing. These clauses result in compactness and hence aid fluent reading. An interesting feature of her style is the use of articles she makes stinting use of generic references. However far from attaching insignificance, these serve as foregrounding devices, which make explicit the intensions and the inclination of the characters. In the garb of beautiful words and phrases, Anita Desai has tried to probe deep in to human psychic. She seldom gives vent to anger because that might prove to be destructive. Instead. She leaves the final word to the reader. A fondness for some special images based on light and flight are Desai’s favorites. Birds are symbolically very prominent in her novels. Here is a table on the grammatical devises from some of her major novels.
Grammatical Analysis

Getting up at last, she went slowly round to the back of the house and leant on the wooden railing on which the yellow rose creeper had blossomed so youthfully last month but was now reduced to an exhausted mass of grey creaks and groans again. She gazed down the gorge with its gashes of red earth, its rocks and gullies and sharply spiked agaves, to the Punjab plains – a silver haze in the summer heat- stretching out to a dim yellow horizon, and said it wrong? Have I not done enough and had enough? I want no more. I want nothing. Can I not be left with nothing? But there was no answer and of course she expected none.

Looking down, over all those years she had survived and borne, she saw them, not bare and shining as the plains below, but like the gorge, cluttered, choked and blackened with the heads of children and grandchildren, servants and guests, all restlessly surging, clamouring about her.
Name of the book: Fire on the Mountain (p17)

No. of words: 168
No. of sentences: 8

Total No. of nouns: 24

Concrete: 17
Abstract: 6
Proper: 1

Total No. of verbs: 19
Transitive: 8
Intransitive: 11

Adjectives: 8
Adverbs: 6

Total No. of articles: 12
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Indefinite: 3
Simile: 1
Metaphor: 1
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44. Anita Desai  *Voices in the City*  Orient Paperbags  p.5