Chapter 4:
Stylistic Analysis of Language of Anita Desai

Anita Desai’s language is full of innovations. She has coined her expressions to convey the nuances of Indian ethos and Indian culture. Her idiom is full of fresh similes which convey the emotional state of mine of the narrator. Objective co-relative one of the dominant features of her writing. She is one of the finest writers who has affectively portrayed the feminine sensibility in the most appropriate idiom. She has enriched English language to bringing two major features:

a. Code-mixing  
b. Code Switching

Let us study the following passage:

(A) Where Shall we go this Summer: (1975)

This is an intense story of a sensitive young wife Sita, torn between the desire to abandon the boredom and hypocrisy of her middle class existence. She tries in vain to settle in the lifestyle Bombay has to offer. In order to find some peace, she leaves behind her family and escapes to a small village at the sea. She is pregnant at this time. Anita Desai has talked about a very peculiar issue where in Sita- the central character
does not wish to give birth to her child. She runs away from her husband and at the Manori island, where she had spent her childhood, she expects some miracle to happen where by she would not have to give birth to her baby. Her husband is unable to judge her weird behavior. Sita’s world around her, she imagined, was full of violence and lacking in humanity. Hence she does not wish to bring another life on earth to bear all these and hence the queer idea of holding back the baby in her womb. Here again we find the central character, not succeeding in her goal. Her husband comes to fetch her and she follows him back home.

The image of “flight” or birds has being made use by Anita Desai, in the form of violence and a sense of helplessness. Sita is upset by the site of the crows feeding on a young, wounded eagle and tries in vain to protect it from them. This pursuit of the prey by the predator is horrifying enough even in the animal world, where perhaps it satisfies the need for food, but it acquires a new terror when transferred to the human world. There are other images that echo the theme of human vulnerability and the conflicting demands of protection and independence. The island, which reflects this image- Sita looks to the island for protection but all that it has to offer her is a hostile, cold welcome with the islanders wary of taking to her and the palms “hissing and clattering their dry leaves together harshly, like some disturbed,
vigilant animals…” (p26), and the house- “a waste of ashes, the cold remains of the bonfire her father had lit here to blaze” (p28)

Urban life’s view of Anita Desai can be noted from the following incident. “The city”, to Sita “appeared to be a place of madness, where in children enact scenes from movies, fighting on the floor and the servants quarreled in roadside dumps. The city lacks enough open spaces and parks, tempers rise high, every one fights. They are all violent” (p44). “The creative impulse had no chance against the overpowering desire to destroy” (p46).

Scheme of “departure” is a part of this novel Sita moved out of the island first because her father had died and later because her husband had come to fetch her.

Let us make a grammatical study of the first passage of this novel-consisting of 31 sentences. The passage has 9 simple and 22 complex sentences out of which 5 are interrogative, the remaining are declarative. Sentences 2, 7 and 12 are long. Complexity is mainly due to subordination in which adverbial clauses predominate.

Schemes
Hyperbole: - The words monumental, prime, legitimate, precinct, domain, all give exaggerated importance to the character Moses.

Simile: His eyeballs rolled like two porpoises (sentence 21) it is a conventional simile having a synaesthetic effect (cackled) is an example of quasi simile.

The entire passage is written in a mixed style. A combination of Saxon words with sophisticated Latin words is present. 1/3rd vocabulary consists of words of more than one syllable. There is a free use of compound words to denote physical objects and places example hammered out, tin can roof, hairpin, mainland, diesel oil pump.

Nouns and noun phrases mostly describe the village teashop atmosphere, interspersed with abstract nouns and adjectives, almost in nature example prime and legitimate, occupation, righteousness, monumental, mythological, patience, precinct, domain, spirits, contempt, appearance, pace. Proper nouns include Moses, Jamila, Joseph, Ali, Marve (place), Bandra (place). “Market” is the only collective noun. The passage has a number of adjectives describing psychological and physical states example prime, legitimate, monumental, trilling, brilliant, sensuous, known, trusted, favorite, careless, proud, comfortable, brief, - all subjective in nature. The objective adjectives are – heavy, muddy,
narrow, sweet, thick, hotter, muggier, stranger, heavier, darker, smaller, long, new, and colour adjectives are- pink, purple and maroon. There are three major classes of adverbs- of manner, of direction and time. Verbs are frequent in the passage. They refer to actions, events, physical acts, speech acts and psychological states. An equal number of transitive and intransitive verbs balance the subjective and objective activities. The theme words “waited and waiting” have been used five times.

The entire passage is a beautiful piece of art made out of an otherwise commonplace occurrence.

**Grammatical analysis**

“They frighten me – appal me,” she said, folding her arms about her, standing in the middle of the room when their guests had left.

*Her husband looked at her with the family expression – cool, curious, uncomprehending. Their guests had been business associates of his, he had thought them pleasant, tolerable, although he had not given their characters much thought. People were. , to him, friends, visitors, business associates, colleagues, or acquaintances. He regarded them with little humour and with restraint. With some he did business, with others he ate a meal. Some came to see him, others he visited. He found them very like himself and not worth much thought or introspection. Not an*
introvert, nor an extrovert – a middling kind of man, he was dedicated unconsciously to the middle way. So he could not tell what she meant or what she felt when she folded her arms about her and stared at closed door, saying, “They are nothing – nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matter. Animals. “

Name of the book :- where shall we go this summer (p47)

No. of words :- 71  
No. of sentences :- 11  
No. of nouns total) :- 30  

Concrete :- 19  
Abstract :- 11  
Proper :- 0

No. of verbs (Total) :- 
Transitive :- 13  
Intransitive :- 9

No. of adjectives :- 10  
No. of adverbs :- 5  
No. of articles (Total) :- 9  

Definite :- 5  
Indefinite :- 4

Simile :- 0  
Metaphor :- 1
(B) Fire on the Mountain (1977)

This is one of the best-written novels of Anita Desai. It follows in ironical juxtaposition of the actual and the aesthetic. Nanda Kaul, is depicted as the great grandmother who has performed all her duties as a woman, mother, grandmother etc. Now in her 80’s, she decides to live peacefully at Corrigano, a hill station, discharging her duties “She fancied she could merge with the pine trees and be mistaken for one. She like the bareness of Corrigano.” (FOM p2) We can see the traits of escapism in Nanda Kaul. But Tara, her great-granddaughter enters into her life and the peace is shattered. Tara holds her emotionally. The light of escape comes to a grinding haul for Nanda Kaul. Anita Desai is at her best in nature’s description- just a few words and the readers get the slice in their plate.

After the death of her husband, who was a vice-chancellor, she has been so glad when it was over, she is happy to leave it all behind in the plains like a great heavy difficult book that has being read through and was not required to be read again- -. This is how she laments- - - “discharge me,” she groaned, “I have discharged all my duties- Discharged.”
This novel is all about Nanda Kaul who has withdrawn herself from the world of “Bags and letters, message and demands, requests, promises and queries” (p3) in to Corrigano to a haunted house Kasauli. She is seeking an absolute isolation here “She wanted no one and nothing else. What ever came or happened here would be an unwelcome intrusion and destruction.” (p3) Her withdrawal stands for an emotional staticity, a kind of psychic frigidity that refuses to take note of any movement, animate or inanimate. In fact the novel grows out of a contrast between several patterns of movement and stillness. These patterns involve both the human and the non-human. Corrigano minimizes human movements, the movements in nature continue to remind the reader of a reality where attempts at an absolute stillness appear to be completely unnatural. The unexpected arrival of Raka, her great granddaughter, further restricts Nanda Kaul’s desire for isolation. The interaction between the two provides the major focus of the novel. Together they posit a world where the canker of loneliness spares neither age nor innocence.

Anita Desai uses the flashback technique. Nanda Kaul remembers her past days as the dignified wife of the vice-chancellor. Part 1 of the novel gives the setting and depicts Nanda Kaul’s anxiety to meet the intruder in her private world of self-willed isolation. The second part deals with Raka’s experiences in the “Bareness and stillness” of the
Corrigano garden. In contrast to her great-grandmother, Raka, is alive to the movements around her. Nanda Kaul shuns all movements. Raka loves it. “She had a gift for disappearing suddenly, silently, she would be gone, totally, not to return for hours.” (p45) Nostalgia for a lost innocence and awareness of a decaying life are recurrent themes in Anita Desai. In this novel the contrast between the two is made evident in the two characters of Nanda Kaul and Raka. It leads us to the theme of withdrawal.

The third part of the novel picks up the story of Ila Das, who dies in very tragic circumstances. Here, Anita Desai has shown a rape case. The news of Ila das’s death over the phone, shatters forever Nanda’s world of reverie; “But Nanda Kaul had ceased to listen. She had dropped the telephone with her head still thrown back, far back she gasped; No, no, it is a lie! No, it cannot be - - - No, she wanted to tell the man on the phone, no, she wanted to cry, but could not make a sound. Instead it choked and swelled inside her throat. She twisted her head then hung it down, down, let it hang. (p145)

Raka’s final utterance, against the death of two sensitive lives, “look, nani, I have set the forest on fire. Look nani, look- the forest is on fire”, acquires tremendous symbolic significance. It expresses Raka’s resolve to destroy a world where a women cannot hope to be happy
without being unnatural. Anita Desai’s feminist sensibility is as broadly reflected in this, as it is in her other novels. The tragic contrast that she presents in the growth of a women are primarily psychic but also reveal a social reality which moves us and appalls us at the same time. Very few writers since Saratchandra have penetrated so deep in the female psychic to unravel those forces that destroy her within.

In comparison to her other novels, the action in this novel is evenly distributed in the three major characters and does not remain focused on any one of them. The novel also suggests an adroit manipulation of the point of view, for the denouncement comes as a surprise to the reader who is inclined to accept Nanda Kauls projected childhood as a reality. The grim reality of Ila das’s rape and murder completely shatters the unreality of Nanda Kaul’s projected reverie. The contrast between fiction and reality comes as a shock to the reader and the moment he looks back to recollect Nanda Kaul’s unreal world of fantasy, he is confronted with the fire on the mountain.

The fire consumes the fictive world of Nanda Kaul and leaves the reader smoldering under the impact of a tragic awareness that he had never anticipated. The only reality he is finally left with is the reality of fire that symbolizes the funeral pyre- the ultimate consummation. Though pervaded with a sense of doom, Anita Desai’s dark and dismal
fictive world is redeemed by her deep intuitive awareness of a reality that eludes average human sensibility. In it lies her greatest strength and perhaps her greatest weakness. It surprises the reader with its quaint fatalism.

(C) Clear Light of the Day (1980)

This novel can be titled as “the musical structure” as Anita Desai takes us into the world of music and rhythm. In her new “four dimensional piece” (Anita Desai, India Today, December 1980) as she describes “Clear light of the Day”, Anita Desai seems to have moved closer to the aesthetic goal she had been striving at in all her earlier novels.

The anguish of sensitive young women trapped in the pattern of movement and stillness has being rendered here almost into a musical piece. Here she recapitulates in a musical structures the themes and characters that she had explored earlier so that in relation to her entire work the novel reverberates with echoes that suggest points and counter point likes the moves of a subtle musical composition where the artist in her own words, moves “from note to note searching for harmony, experimenting with sequences, till at last he found the right combination,
the sequence that please him by its harmony”. (CLD 179) So that all that had appeared as tentative, seemingly awkward or apparently clumsy earlier seems to have acquired the suggestiveness of finality, of dexterity of movement, making one inclined to say that Anita Desai has finally discovered the right notes, the right sequences and the right tones that none would mind the blend, however, “haphazard” it might appear in perspective of time.

The novel, as Anita Desai says, “About time as a destroyer, as a preserver and about what the bondage of time does to people”, but the philosophy of time that the novel suggests is larger then mere chronology or history. Though localized in Delhi since 1947, the novel touches upon aspects of life that are universal. Anita Desai attempts to see the “The transition from temporarily to permanent acquires a concrete reality in the kaleidoscopic changes that take place in the Das family. The writer is interested in discovering the final pattern of meaning that emerges out of the apparent meaninglessness of life in a small family. In this ability to see meaning in an apparently absurd existence, Anita Desai strikes the strongest note of hope and affirmation.

The novel begins with the song of the koel and ends with the song of old master, thus suggesting a fashion of the rhythms of life, both natural and human. The koel belongs to the eternal world of nature, but
the old master’s voice belongs to age and time. The true sources of an ageless and timeless experience are seen in the discovery of permanence within the change made in the explicit in the contrast between the young disciple and the old master.

The action moves from past and present. The characters moving in the present are constantly looking back at the past, observing and evaluating themselves in the perspective of time. Through a highly controlled use of split narrative and flashback, Anita Desai makes us see the world from the perspective of childhood. The juxtaposition of the past and the present, the near and the remote, the subjective and the objective, while suggesting the theme of continuity in change also keeps us alive to the changing dimensions of reality. The contrasts that Anita Desai suggests between these two perspectives are central to the aesthetic design of the novel.

Unlike the other female protagonists of Anita Desai, Bim who is free from the traumas of a shattered childhood or an incompatible marriage is symbolic of forces that have sustained the foundation of all family life.

After Mira masi’s departure, we have Bim as the foster mother. Here we have three aspects of the mother fictionalized in the novel- the
mother who bears, the mother who cares and the mother who shares. Bim’s life acquires a heroic dimension in this symbolic motherhood.

There are deep images that add to the rich texture of the novel and bring out the hidden pathos of the human drama. The anguish of a thwarted motherhood and the tortures of a widowed existence are most powerfully evoked in Miramasi and her nightmarish existence. There are patters of contrast in themes, characters and incidence that add to the density of the texture. The images of violence and blood suggested in that of a cow drown, (p 107) a horse collapsed under heavy load,(p 16) a dog shot dead, (p128) a bunch of mulberries crushed,(p161) a smashed pigeons egg and the unsightly corpse of a baby bird, (p163) move us to ponder over the ever present phenomenon of death. Anita Desai makes this contrast very vivid, for the entire action of the novel is divided between the house and the garden. To see these minute details is to see the beauty of Anita Desai’s poetic narrative, A narrative supported by a truly verse structure. The large passages of verse that she quotes are not merely ornamental, they bring in tones, suggestions, nuances which are too tender, too profound to communicate in pros, they suggest “the hidden presence”, the “fourth dimension” of the novel.
Aunt Mira was younger than their mother although she looked so much older. She had been twelve years old when she married and was a virgin when she was windowed - her young student husband, having left to study in England immediately after their wedding, caught a cold in the rain one winter night, and died. She was left stranded with his family and they blamed her bitterly for his death: it was her unfortunate horoscope that had brought it about, they said. She should be made to pay for her guilt. Guiltily, she scrubbed and washed and cooked for them. At night she massaged her mother-in-law’s legs and nursed wakeful babies and stitched trousseaux for her sister-in-law. Of course she aged. Not only was her hair white but she was nearly bald. At least that saved her from being used by her brothers-in-law who would have put the widow to a different use had she been more appetising. Since she was not, they eyed her unpleasing person sullenly and made jokes loudly enough for her to overhear. There was laughter, till they grew bored. She stayed with them so long that she became boring. They suspected her of being a parasite. It was time she was turned out. She was turned out. Another household could find some use for her: cracked pot, torn rag, picked bone.

Name of the book: Clear light of the day (p 108)
Thus though a highly artistic orchestration of various notes, Anita Desai achieves a fictional structure, which strives towards the condition of poetry and music.
(A) Village by the Sea:

Village by the sea is intended for the younger reader, has a comparatively simple beginning, the contradictions, contrast and irony present in the earlier novels are not obvious yet a careful study is rewarding. A study of singular and plural nouns and the definite-indefinite articles lends us an insight into the indirect observations on the rural consciousness; the difference is rural and urban worldview and its outcome. In the opinion of Jasbir Jain, the village by the sea appeared in 1982. Intended for the younger reader, the novel has a deceptive simplicity but at a deeper level, it continues the concerns of Anita Desai’s earlier novels. The thematic concerns and the narrative approach remain in the large measures the ones she has used before, and these are the juxtaposition of value, structures, the charm of the remote, the ability on part of time to crystallize issues and explorations of relationships.(p36)

In the story, it is not the individual, but the individual society which is important, rather, it is a study of a particular economic group. Anita Desai has given a vivid picture of a very small village- Thul on the seashore, near Bombay. A striking contrast is made between the fast life of Bombay and the serene beach side life of a poor family- an
irresponsible drunkard father, and ill mother and four children. The
elest daughter- Lila and the teenage son Hari- at a tender age take up
the financial and the domestic burden of the house. Hari is thrilled by
listening to the fascinating stories of Bombay life. In order to get a
livelihood, Hari escapes uninformed, to Bombay. He was sick of hearing
words like “You villagers- you are all the same. Pumpkin heads. Drink
toddy and lie drunk under the coconut trees all day.”

Hari feels very lonely in the crowded city Bombay. Hari struggles a
lot, works hard, and collects some money. His only aim was to earn
some money and go back to his own soil at Thul. His only friend,
philosopher and guide at Bombay, is a watch repairer. In the character of
Hari Anita Desai, successfully, tells us the reality of rural areas charm
and the false glory of urban city. The use of contrast scheme leaves a
deep impression on the minds of the readers. Anita Desai’s nature
description is marvelous in this novel. A birdwatcher comments, “The
birds are the last free creatures on earth. Ever thing else has been
captivated and tamed and enslaved- tigers behind the bars at the zoo-
men and women in houses like matchboxes working in factories that are
like prisons. They have their function, we don’t.” Author’s view on
freedom is a striking note in this story.
“Adaptation” is the central theme of the story. “Adapt- that is what you (Hari) are going to do. Just like sparrows that have adapted themselves to city life living on leftovers and rubbish thrown to them instead of searching for grains. The wheel turns and turns and turns.”

How beautifully Anita Desai conveys her philosophy on life.

**Grammatical analysis**

*The man spun around with the same expression of scorn cutting across his face. “ you villagers – you’re all the same. Pumpkin-heads. Drink toddy and lie drunk under the coconut trees all day. Go fishing and drown yourself in the sea. Leave the women to manage. Old women and girls going hungry in the village. Mongrels howling in the night. Pah ! What a place, your Thul. What a bunch of pumpkin-heads. All alike. I ’ll be happy when I can hand over charge here-“ he waved at the heap of concrete pipes lying on the ground “- and go home To Bombay. Bombay! “ he sang , lifting his arms up in the air , and then dived into his hut and slammed the door shut.*

*Hari stood starting at the shut door, seething with all the questions he had wanted to ask and now could not. He heard the man singing to himself, some loud and rollicking song from a Bombay film. Then the door opened, the man’s face appeared in the crack, shouting, “Pumpkin – head*
! Still standing there, staring? Get away, will you, leave me alone. Can’t stand to see your pumpkin-face. Take it away – go – come back when you’ve learnt what chemicals are, what factories are, what fertiliser is good for! “

Name of the book: - Village by the Sea (p44)

No. of words in the extract : 197
No. of sentences : 20

Total no. of nouns : 33
   Concrete : 28
   Abstract : 3
   Proper : 2

Total No. of verbs : 23
   Transitive :- 12
   Intransitive :- 11

Adjectives : 7
Adverbs : 4

Total No. of articles : 19
   Definite : 16
   Indefinite : 3

   Simple : 0
   Metaphor : 3
(B) In Custody:

Merchant Ivory made a Hindi film based on this novel. It is the best novel of Anita Desai. It is a different novel from all its previous counterparts. In her preceding novels, she has primarily been concerned with hypersensitivity and inner working of women characters. However in this novel Desai has shifted her focus from woman’s world to man’s world.

Nur, a famous Urdu poet of yesteryear is a setting sun existing in immeasurable loneliness. His plight as a secluded person is shown in the changing world. Devan, a college lecturer in Hindi, is inclined towards Urdu poetry, yet for his livelihood he selects Hindi. He is unhappy with his wife. He felt his marriage a trap- from which he could not escape. The feeling of meaninglessness of existence in life detaches him from the people around him. Murad- a shrewd person asks Devan to interview Nur. Devan grabs this opportunity to achieve distinction. But his ambition is shattered. Murad, Safiya Begum, Imtiaz Begum (wives of Nur) exploit, humiliate and even extract money from his meager economic sources. Anita Desai has sketched him not only as a weak person but also a boring teacher who could not command attention in order to abscond reality he tries to enter Nur’s world whom he considers
bigger but he is shocked to see his hero in a pitiable plight. After interviewing Nur’s life, he sees his own reflection in him. Devan gets so entangled with Nur’s life that it becomes difficult for him to come out of it.

Anita Desai has described the downfall of a rich language like Urdu through Nur which is related with the political act of partition. “No book was judged worthy of the award this year - - - because Urdu is, supposed to have died in 1947.” Nur’s poetry did not receive due appreciation when he was alive. Devan wishes that after Nur’s death he would keep alive the poetry of Nur. He had accepted the gift of Nur’s poetry and that meant he was custodian of Nur’s very soul and spirit. It was a great distinction. Anita Desai leaves a positive note that the protagonist who fails in his life has a ray of hope, and is firm to keep the poetry alive. Later he tries to come out of his illusionary world to the real world- he tries to become a realist from an escapist.

Nur’s relationships have been beautifully carved by Anita Desai. Nur’s and Devan, Nur’s and his wives- the relationships creative talent of Nur is crushed by octopus like arms of relationships in the form of exploitation and humiliation at the hands of the wives. Nur is not happy with his wives who almost fought amongst themselves like jealous tigresses. The first wife is devoted to her husband where as the second
one is self centered- more concerned about name and fame for herself. She makes emotional blackmail “Yes you will call your friends, eat, drink, recite your poems and sing and dance while I lie here dying.” She was the main hurdle for Devan.

Murad- friend of Devan makes Devan a weapon- a ladder to reach Nur- to give finance through the publicity of his magazines. Nur relies more on Devan then his wives. After giving him the custody of his poetry, he is relieved and dies a peaceful death.

The other minor themes discussed by Mrs. Desai are those of the education system, the administrations exploiting the teachers, discrimination between the science teachers and language teachers, problems of unemployment etc. Through this novel Desai shows that languages are not given its due importance in our country and that the current trend is towards science and technology. The novel laments the sad decline of an extremely rich Indian language Urdu symbolized by a destruction of a palatial building for a multistoried building.

**Grammatical analysis**

*He stopped, panting for breath, on the canal bank and stared at water that stopped and turned concentrically in a whirlpool at that point. The whirlpool was an opening into the water, leading into its depths. But these were dark and obscure. The sky was filling with a grey light that was*
dissolving the dense blackness of light. It glistened upon a field of white pampas grass which waved in a with a sudden breeze that had sprung up, laughing, waving and rustling through the grasses with a live, rippling sound. He thought of Nur’s poetry being read, the sound of it softly murmuring in his ears. He had accepted the gift of Nur’s poetry and that meant he was custodian of Nur’s very soul and spirit. It was a great distinction. He could not deny or abandon that under any pressure.

He turned back. He walked up the path. Soon the sun would be up and blazing. The day would begin, with its calamities. They would flash out of the sky and cut him down like swords. He would run to meet them. He ran, stopping only to pull a branch of thorns from under his foot.
Fasting and feasting is Anita Desai’s latest novel divided into two parts. The first deals with a family in India; “Mama and Papa” and their children. Eldest daughter Uma, has stayed at home to look after her parents, after two failed dowries and one failed marriage; middle child Aruna has a successful marriage and has almost forgotten her roots; and their third child, a son named Arun (For whom Uma was made to sacrifice her education) has gone to US for further studies.

The second part deals with the Patton family in the US- the link with part 1 being Arun who spends his summer break with his family. Most of the section is written in the present tense. The family is made up of Mr. And Mrs. Patton (who stand in direct contrast to Mama Papa); their physical fitness-loving son Rod and their bulimic and anorexic daughter- Melani. Arun is exposed to this American family and is bewildered by the contrasts in culture where the woman of the house is not compelled to cook and where each member of the family has an individual existence.

Part one opens with Uma packing a parcel containing tea and a shawl, to send it to Arun who is in the US. Then the time shifts to the
past when Papa was in service and then in the next chapter the reader is told that the Mama is pregnant. With Uma, a grown woman by some standards at least and Aruna newly discovering what it was to have a periods. Mama, it was she who found herself pregnant (p 15). The premium on sons in Indian society, even as the world marches into the millennium is very high. This is faithfully portrayed by Anita Desai. The daughters are teenagers (grown up by Indian standards). Mama wants the pregnancy terminated, but would any man give up a chance for a son? (p16) Mama has to accept the pregnancy, has to lay supine for nine months, delivers what everyone’s waiting for, a son! This is Papas reaction, “A boy! He screamed, a bo’oy! Arun, Arun at last!” It turned out that when a second daughter had being born the name Arun had already been chosen in anticipation of a son. It had to be changed in disappointment to Aruna. (p17) Uma is made to give up her schooling to help Mama look after Arun; girls had to learn how to look after babies and that is more then education in the opinion of this Indian family. When Uma protests an says that there is an Ayah to help and points out that they were looked after by the Ayah “Mamas expression made it clear, it was quite different matter now, and she repeated threateningly. Proper attention” (p30) After all the attention the daughters got would not be enough for a son!
Anita Desai, faithfully portrays the traditional upbringing accorded to the girls in the Indian society. Uma and Aruna both have arranged marriages. They have no say in the choice of their life partners. Uma is deceived by her husband and her in-laws and is brought back by her father. But she enjoys no independence of thought or action. Even at the age of almost forty, she still requires permission to take a job or to go to a party. In this novel (As in life) women seem to be protected and cloistered by husbands and fathers. A small exception is made by Aruna after she gets married. She gives orders to her husband!

In part two Arun is shown trying to come to terms with life in the US. He is particularly troubled when he goes to live with the Patton’s during his summer break. Arun visits a supermarket with Mrs. Patton and this is how his thought process is revealed “He had traveled and he had stumbled into what was like a plastic representation of what he had known at home; not the real thing - - - which was plain, unbeautiful, misshapen, fraught and compromised- but the real thing- clean, bright, without taste, savoir or nourishments (p 185). In the Patton family, the women have the freedom to do as they like, but are they really happy? Mrs. Patton seems to find her happiness in the super market, where buying frozen food for her family seems to act as a mood elevator for her. Likewise, Melonie takes comfort in her bulimia, which seems to
give her a kind of relief from the strains of her life. It takes a rehab center to sort out Melonie’s problems. Was she crying out for attention that she never got? The tea and the shawl that Arun’s parents send for him, Arun gives to Mrs. Patton. Mrs. Patton is thrilled by this gesture even though the gift is small and slowly her face spreads into a flush of wonder” (p229). Is Desai trying to debunk the impersonal nature of American society?

The structure of the novel is interesting and I think, takes off from the title. Fasting seems to refer to the first part and feasting is the second being synonymous with Indian society and feasting with the American. In part 1 all of the chapters except one are divided into two sections, one written in the present tense and another in the past. Desai feels that living in the present is a kind of fasting, which you can feast on the past. This luxury seems to be denied to the Patton’s who are condemned to a life in the present, which for them is a kind of fasting. Melonie’s bulimic could be a direct result of too much feasting, perhaps symbolic of American consumerism as a whole.

Gynocritical studies focus on the language used by the women writers. Robin Lakoff uses the term “Women’s language” in her article entitled “Language and women’s place in language in society” in 1973. Here she stresses the double-bind women writers are in- they are in a
prison of language in a men’s world. She also lists some features of woman’s language - the need to use modifiers in declaratives to make the woman sound polite and also the use of declaratives with interrogative intonations. Other features mentioned by Showaltor, Virginia woolf and Helene are plurality of meaning, refinement, tact, knowledge of domestic details, fluency and an open-ended prolixity.

Desai’s language seems to this corpus of women’s language. Look at this sample of the way the Mama talks: “What? What? He said so? Does he know how old Aruna is? 13! And he dares to ask for the younger daughter when you show him the elder? What kind of family does he think we are? Why did you send these people to us? Such people you think we would marry our daughter into a family like that? Ha? (p79) Desai uses women’s language not only through her women protagonist, but also in her own narrative style. There is a fluent flow of thought in her narration. Though she uses the third person omniscient narrator, the reader is perplexed at the start. The novels begins with references to “Mama and Papa”- leading the readers to believe to expect first person narration. But this does not happen. Mama and Papa are given no names- they remain Mama and Papa throughout the novel. This leads to the purity of meaning. Desai’s knowledge of domestic details exhibited in both the Indian and the American family in this novel is also
characteristic of women’s language. The novel has an open-ended conclusion. Arun is getting ready to go back to the college. Melonie is recovering in an institution. Mr. Patton has a night job to pay the bills of Melonie’s rehab center. Rod has won a football scholarship and all’s well with the world and life moves on. Part 1 which is the last time the reader hears of the Indian family, also ends on an open note. This is the only chapter in this section, which ends with the present tense. Uma, Mama and Papa have returned from immersing the ashes of Uma’s cousin Anamika who has died a tragic death. These are the last lines of the chapter: “Uma dips her jar in the river, lifts it high over her head and when she tilts it and pours it out, the murky water catches the blaze of the sun and flashing fire. (p 156) Anita Desai’s female characters function within the parameter laid out for them by the society. Mama and Uma kill all their needs to look after Papa and Arun. And her American female protagonists, though they seem to have broken out of the traditional format, do not seem to be happy. But then, the ubiquitous question what happiness is? And how happy are her Indian female characters? Fredric Jameson has said that narrative is a socially symbolic act that tries to affect the world indirectly. We try to make sense of the world we live in by telling stories. The narrator’s view of reality is transmitted to the reader and can influence how the reader perceives and
this constructs her own reality. In comparison to her earlier novels, “Fasting and Feasting” fails in meeting the expectations of something better to the readers. It leaves behind a bland taste.

**Grammatical analysis**

MAMANDPAPA . MamaPapa. PapaMama. It was hard to believe they had ever had separate existences, that they had been separate entities and not MamaPapa in one breath. Yet Mama had been born to a merchant family in the city of Kanpur and lived in the bosom of her enormous family till at sixteen she married Papa. Papa, in Patna, the son of a tax inspector with one burning ambition, to give his son the best available education, had won prizes at school meanwhile, played tennis as a young man, trained for the bar and eventually built up a solid practice. This much the children learnt chiefly from old photographs, framed certificates, tarnished medals and conversation of visiting relatives. MamaPapa themselves rarely spoke of a time when they were not one. The few anecdotes they related separately acquired great significance because of their rarity, their singularity.

Mama said ‘ in my day, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts, good things to eat. If something special had been bought in the market, like sweets or nuts, it was given to the boys in the family. But ours was not such an orthodox home that our mother and aunts did not slip us something on the sly.’ She laughed, remembering that – sweets, sly.

Name of the book: Fasting & Feasting (p5,6)
No. of words :- 212
No. of Sentences :- 13

Total no. of nouns (total ) : 53
  Concrete :- 39
  Abstract :- 12
  Proper :- 2

Total No. of verbs :-
  Transitive :- 9
  Intransitive :- 7

Adverbs :- 6
Adjective :- 16

Total No. of articles :- 19
  Definite :- 13
  Indefinite :- 6

  Simile :- 0
  Metaphor :- 2