CHAPTER III

CHARACTERISATION

The comparative importance of the various elements which enter into the making of a story is one of the questions which have often exercised the theorists of fiction; and of these elements, character and plot are the most controversial.

It would perhaps be instructive to "begin at the beginning" by quoting from the venerable text of Aristotle. After enumerating the six parts which "all tragedy must necessarily contain," he quickly points out that "of all these parts, the most important is the combination of incidents or the fable."¹ Explaining why "fable" (i.e., plot) is more important than "manners" (i.e., character), he continues: "Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of actions -- of life, of happiness and unhappiness. ... Now, the manners of men constitute only their quality or character; but it is by their actions that they are happy or the contrary ... so that the action and the fable are the end of Tragedy; and in everything the end is of principal importance."² Aristotle's belief in the superiority of plot over character-

²Ibid.
Isation was, in fact, so firm that whereas the latter could even be dispensed with in a story, the former was indispensable. "Tragedy cannot subsist without action; without manners it may." ³

Now, we must remember that when Aristotle concentrated his laser-like intellect on the question of the relative value of "fable" and "manners" (i.e., plot and character), he could have applied it only to that body of literature which was extant in his day, and to the literary tastes and requirements of its readers. And as, to a child the primary interest of a story lies in the incidents which it narrates, it is not surprising that in the infancy of civilisation, and in an age when the most famous men were "men of action", the "fable" should have held so much appeal for critics as well as readers. But much has happened since Aristotle, and as tastes and values keep pace with civilisation, it is equally un-surprising that the emphasis in modern times should have shifted to a diametrically opposite stance. An emphatic and uncomprising is Arnold Bennett's affirmation that "the foundation of good fiction is character-creating and nothing else."

Tastes and attitudes can change again, but in the twentieth century at least -- when, to reverse Aristotle's

³Ibid.
phrase, a story is often an imitation, not of actions, but of men -- the class of fiction which has to be regarded as the most "typical" is the novel which concerns itself primarily with the delineation of character and the probing of the human mind and soul -- in other words, the "psychological novel," represented by George Eliot, Henry James, and, nearer home, Anita Desai.

II

However, in most fictional works, there is a combination of plot and characterisation by the use of what is called "character-plot incidents" (incidents which depict character and simultaneously advance the story). The two aspects are closely connected and interwoven, and it is not usually possible to separate them in the framework of the story. As Henry James observes:

People often talk of these things as if they had a kind of interminable distinctiveness, instead of melting into each other at every breath and being intimately associated parts of one general effort of expression. I cannot imagine composition existing in a series of blocks, nor conceive, in any novel worth discussing at all, of a passage of description that is not in its intention narrative, a passage of dialogue that is not in its intention descriptive, a touch of truth of any sort that does not partake of the nature of incident, or an incident that derives its interest from any other source than the general and only source of the success of a work of art -- that of being illustrative. A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other
organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts:...

What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?*

But in spite of the fact that character and plot are closely connected, there are stories in which the interest of character is uppermost and the action is used with reference to it; on the other hand, there are stories in which plot dominates, and characters are vehicles to carry on the action.

Unlike many of the Indo-Anglian writers, Amita Desai is not interested in just narrating the story. Character is, to her, of greater importance. Her art, in this respect, resembles that of the Russian writer Turgenev. Henry James admired Turgenev for his emphasis on character rather than on plot. Says he, "The germ of a story with him was never an affair of plot -- this was the last thing he thought of; it was the representation of certain persons." This is equally true of Amita Desai who says on her own that, "Story, action and drama mean little to me except in so far as they emanate directly from the personalities I have chosen to write about, born of their dreams and wills. One must find a way to unite the inner and the outer rhythms, to obtain a certain integrity and to impose order on

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Writers who are concerned with "telling the story" place the character on a secondary level. Their main business is to tell the story, form the background, and then bring the characters on the stage. But Desai’s predominant interest in character renders her work somewhat special and distinguished in Indo-Anglian writing. "It gives to the Indo-Anglian novel a poetic depth, a psychological sophistication which were lacking."\(^7\)

"Character", as a rule, has a place above 'plot'. It is agreed that novels with the main stress on character rank higher than those in which the principal stress is on incident. The interest aroused by characterization is 'deep and lasting'. But the combined use of the plot - incidents and the character-incidents, is of great value in creative writing. Judged from this viewpoint, *Cry, The Peacock* contains good examples of incidents which relate to plot as well as to character. The stimulus in this story is the death of Maya's dog, Toto, and this motive triggers different reactions from Maya and her husband. It reveals character-traits, and simultaneously, assists the movement of the story. Maya's emotional and overwrought response to this bereavement shows her attitudinal


sensitiveness. She is impatient and finds it hard to bear the loss. Unable to endure the sight of the corpse, she is shown "rushing to the tap to wash the vision from her eyes," (p.5) and again, "she cried helplessly and ran to the door to see if the bed was not still there, under the limes, but found it gone, and stood there, not knowing where to run next." (p.7). Such hysterical responses and the author's direct statement "she grew hysterical," carry with them the implication of a character highly-strung and sensitive, bordering on the neurotic. The 'stream of consciousness' method employed in the second part of the story provides us with a full knowledge of the personality of the narrator (Maya) along with the developing incidents.

This incident (the death of the dog) throws light on the character of Gautama, too. He remains indifferent to the happening -- detached, cool, and casual. "It is all over," he had said calmly. He takes the tragedy as a natural happening and laughs away, in a cursory manner, Maya's frenzied response to it. So the effect of the stimulus in this story is that the heroine, being over-sensitive, starts behaving like an insane person. Thus the plot effects and character-traits are revealed side by side -- the plot moves on and on till finally the insanity of the heroine puts an end to the life of Gautama. Hence plot and character interact with each other throughout the story.
Says Peter Westland, "the extent to which plot and character are woven together is one test of a real novel. Motive must lead to incident and incident to motive; the actions of the characters must lead to incidents through human emotions, passions, habits, and fears. Only in this way can the novel fulfil its function of interpreting life to us." 8

Character and plot incidents are to be found in Desai's other stories also. In the fourth novel Where Shall We Go This Summer?, the characters of Moses -- the caretaker of the house at Manori, of Sita, of her husband Raman -- unfold progressively as the story advances. Characters and incidents are joined in a relationship of logical interdependence. All the events grow and move with Sita's basic trait -- her over-sensuous nature. The writer uses repetition with variety to emphasise the basic traits of the main character. The sensuousness of Sita is shown by her facial expressions, her behaviour, her action, her talk; and what is more, the author keeps confronting us with this trait throughout the story in such a way that we feel as if we were seeing the character in flesh and blood: "... she began restlessly turning, looking into the muddy sea as if to pierce its depth and discover its

treasure..." (p. 11). See below how Sita's behaviour serves as a mirror to her personality: "Tossing clothes, cigarettes, books into the suitcases that she had dragged down from the tops of cupboards..." (p. 21). Or again, "She took to smoking instead of eating, to staring about her in silence, to speaking provocatively" (p. 33).

Another novel *Fire on the Mountain* presents before us the whole story in a harmonious co-ordination of characters and events. The alien nature of Nanda Kaul and the alienness of the environment, are closely interwoven: "What pleased and satisfied her so, here at Carignano, was its barreness ... its starkness ..." (p. 4). And later, "Like her, the garden seemed to have arrived, simply by a process of age, of withering away and an elimination, at a state of elegant perfection. It was made up of a very few elements, but they were exact and germane ... she no more wished to add to them than she wished to add to her own pared, reduced, and radiantly single life" (p. 31).

III

Desai's primary concern with the upper middle class characterises all her stories. This is the stratum of society with which she is fully and directly acquainted. She herself
stated in an interview, "Naturally I write about the class
I know best." This explains why her characters are sketched
with remarkable originality and precision. This knowledge of
the upper sections of society enables the writer to treat her
people understandably. Says she, "I find I have to write
about the society I know. If I were to write about the
Indian peasant, it would be forced and show an element of
strain."  

The preoccupation of the writer with the upper class
milieu is to be found in all the stories. Almost entirely
free from political concerns, the first two novels "deal with
spiritual collapse among upper class Indians whose traditional
religion and manner of life have been undermined by modern ways
and concepts." The heroine of the first novel Cry, The
Peacock, is the affectionate daughter of a wealthy Indian
Brahmin, married to a rich, pragmatic and reputed executive,
Gautama. The second novel Voices in the City presents the
metropolis of Calcutta where affluent people are shown sipping
coffee and discussing spiritual and literary problems. From
here, we are taken with her third novel Bye-Bye, Blackbird, to
England where the upper class Indian immigrants are shown

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10 Quoted by Ranjana Sen Gupta, "Sunlight Through Chika", The Hindustan Times (October 25,1980).

enjoying comfortable lives in London. In the fourth novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?,* the protagonist Sita and her husband Raman belong to the upper order of society. The next novel *Fire on the Mountain* shows Nanda Kaul — the Vice-Chancellor’s wife, possessing a good family and social background. The recent novel *Clear Light of Day* records the tremendous changes a wealthy Hindu family goes through after independence.

The stories give clear indication of the fact that the dramatic personas are connected (with a few exceptions) with the higher strata of society. The following illustration from the first novel, showing the kind of life they lead, serves well to certify this point:

The tea-tray had been brought to the table beside her, neatly decked with the grandmotherly silver teapot, the biscuit tin and the sliced lemon, and the curtains had been drawn as the sun had gone down now, leaving a vivid orange glow behind the trees, and all was quiet, formal, waiting... just as on every other evening before this... Just then the servant came in to announce a visitor — an advocate, he said, come to see the Sahib. And Ganatma rose immediately ordering tea to be sent to the study... (p.7).

What is more, "the servants taking the immaculate white beds out for the night to spread on the inky lawn at the back of the house, smoothing sheets, preparing dinner; the gardener sprinkling the lawn so as to lay the dust before the beds are brought out; the lawn chairs being taken out on the veranda
where Gautama and Maya every evening, sit down to glasses of fresh lemonade; the light on the veranda illuminating the white pillars, entwined by rangoon creeper -- crowning them with clusters of small, star-like flowers; a row of papaya trees at the backyard, and a tangle of vines -- beans, jasmine, all mixed -- hiding the servants' quarters from view" -- all show the high social grade to which the characters belong.

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Sita, the main character, is depressed to see the ugly condition of the house, at Memori. But here is the actual big house in which the writer lodges her: "Flat in Bombay, white with electric light, the twinkle of China, the meal served by servants in white, the routine to which the children were used and their beds, smooth, cool" (p. 18). And then, the children washed and dressed, sent every afternoon with their ayahs, to play with other children in the neighbourhood with their toy-care and trains; towards the end, Monaka's (Sita's daughter) admission into the Medical College -- all signify the upper crust to which the personae belong. Leave apart all this, the very title of the story suggests the family's visit to some hill-station every year as an escape from the terrifying heat of the tropical land of Bombay. Ramam asks the question 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?' every year when summer seems
Fire on the Mountain is another story showing the writer's first concern with prosperous and well-to-do people. Nanda Kaul, the protagonist, is a vice-chancellor's wife. The account of her household activities (before her husband's death and before she started living on the hills) shows how the writer revels in the narration of high living:

... she would go into the kitchen to see the milk taken out of the icebox, the layer of cream drawn off, the row of mugs on a tray filled and carried out to the green table on the veranda around which the children already sat on their low cane stools—the little girls still having their long hair plaited and their fresh cotton dresses buttoned, and the boys throwing themselves backwards and kicking the tablelegs and clamouring with hunger. Then there was the bread to be spread with butter, jam jars opened and dug into, knives taken away from babies and boys, girls questioned about homework, servants summoned to mop up spilt milk and fetch tea.... (p.24)

Again, the house at Carignano before Nanda Kaul's arrival, it was occupied by the English people. The two Miss Hughes "filled the house with chintz sofa-covers and great China evers and basins, on which pink and blue carnations mingled and that still minced and curtsied about in the dank and mildewed bathrooms of Carignano" (p.8).

The last novel Clear Light of Day depicts the same involvement with the upper order of society as is found in
the earlier stories. Here also, the physical environment reveals the high standard of living of the characters — "the long beds of roses at the far end of the lawn where a line of trees fringed the garden — fig and silver oak, mulberry and eucalyptus ... the bushes of hibiscus and oleander, the beds of canna lilies ..." (p. 1); the parents visiting the club every evening; the children reading volumes of Tennyson and Swinburne and Lord Byron, etc., etc.

Apart from the environmental conditions, the affluence of the personae is also emphasised through their talk and manner of living. In Cry, The Peacock, Maya's remark, "You know what I really wish to do, Gautama? I should like to go South — to Travancore, Cochin, Mysore, Malabar, all those places," (p. 42) and Gautama, along with his friends enjoying the summer evenings on the terrace by reciting ghazals and Urdu poetry — all show the liveliness, the vivacity with which they live their lives. So in all the stories, the prevailing atmosphere is that of wealth and affluent living.

It is true that such characters do not form the bulk of the Indian society, yet there is reality inherent in their portraiture in Desai's stories. The essence of the love of reality is her keen interest in character. This is the fine and admirable quality in her work despite the "flatness" which occasionally seems to impair it.
What is remarkable is the fact that though the writer's main concern is with the upper middle class -- the section of society with which she herself is associated -- nevertheless, the lower section of society also gets its fair treatment. This is primarily on account of her imaginative, creative, and visual faculties, as she states somewhere, "I have never been interested in society as such. I've never been interested in writing about typical families ... there has to be some kind of vision beyond observation. Situations must be such that you are not handed all the conclusions. Your imagination must be free to reach out ... (my writing is from) instinct rather than from observation."12

In all the six novels, one comes across characters, the low class people -- the servants, the ayahs, the gardener, the cook, the teashop owner, the caretaker of the house -- all known through their milieu, their customs explained, as for instance drunkenness, fights etc. In a word, an exact picture of the life of such people with its foulness, its vulgar language, its cheap mentality -- is provided in the framework of the stories. An absolutely exact reality! For instance, notice the touch of vulgarity in the conversation between the caretaker of the house and his neighbours of the island --

12 Quoted by Ranjana Sen Gupta, OP Cit.
"I was sent twenty rupees," he [Nose] admitted. 'I had to spend it on something.' 'Twenty rupees! who would send you a present like that -- your mother-in-law?'(p.4). And later, the mental calibre of the poor is given with exactitude: the ayahs gossiping and smoking, discussing their salaries, their messahibs, their lovers, and the cinema. And then suddenly, clashing and clamouring, screaming and screeching, shouting accusations, bawling, pushing and pulling each other, tearing each other's frocks and saris.

All this serves well to illustrate that though the higher stratum of society is given the first preference, the lower one has also its respective place, and is not totally ignored.

While on the one hand, it is true that Anita Desai's world has its limitations. Yet it can safely be said that the limitations are rooted in reality. Ordinary problems of daily life like hunger, poverty, and disease are not dealt with by her. This is in contrast with writers, like Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, 'whose concerns are larger and whose skills consist in externalising what is implicit in social reality.' 13 Mulk Raj Anand weaves the fabric of his fiction from problems like poverty and backwardness. He draws his material from

the lower sections of society, and the characters depicted are reflections of the real people he has known in his own life. A great many writers show political concerns in their works. But the novels that appeared after India's independence show the concern of the writer not so much with politics, as with the way of life of a number of people familiar to him. Anita Desai is one among such writers. Her novels are no reflection of Indian society, politics, or character. Says she, "They are part of my private effort to seize upon the raw material of life -- its shapelessness, its meaninglessness, the lack of design that drives one to despair...." She desires obviously not to be categorised as a realist, as she dwells not on social issues, but on things that are not immediately seen -- "All my writing is an effort to discover, to underline, and convey the true significance of things, that is why in my novels small objects, passing moods and attitudes acquire a large importance." Speaking generally, hers is the art of limitation as is that of R.K. Narayan, who, as Iyengar observes, "is content like Jane Austen with his 'little bit of ivory'." Likewise, Desai acts as a detached observer, concentrating on a small number of characters.

14 James Vinson, Contemporary Novelists, op. cit., p.356.
15 Ibid.
The delineation of the characters is accomplished through the combined use of the direct and the indirect methods. In the former, the character is portrayed from the outside — the author explains by dissecting the thoughts and feelings and also passes judgement upon him. It may also be called the 'analytical' method by which the author simplifies what is complicated and complex or what is chaotic and confused by separating and recombing the constituent elements in a logical manner. In the latter, the writer allows the characters to reveal themselves through speech and action and also re-enforces their self-delineation by the comments and judgements of other characters in the story. Or it may be named the 'dramatic' method applied to speech or action, which has the power of deeply stirring the imagination or the emotions. The direct description or exposition has the advantage of instant clarity. The indirect or dramatic method enables us to decide whether the character's actions speak louder than words. It has the advantage of allowing the reader to draw his own inferences which are firmer and seem more real, than any given by the author.

The above two methods are linked together by Anita Desai in the handling of character. The first story *Cry, The Peacock* exhibits the fusion of the analytical and the dramatic
in the presentation of character. The writer, in the first part of the story briefly states the character of Maya and that of her husband Gautama, through their respective reactions to the death of their pet-dog. Maya's overwhelming response to this little incident reflects the traits of her personality -- morbid excitement, hysteria, frenzy -- that manifest themselves in her actions and thoughts. Gautama remains unperturbed by the incident -- patient, cool and composed. Maya fails to throw this loss off her consciousness. The writer throws light on her character directly: "She thought she saw the evil glint of a bluebottle and grew hysterical," (p.5) -- thus introducing her straight to the reader. The last section of the book again abounds with direct comments of this type.

We find that the dramatic element pre-dominates in this story. Leave alone the first and the third part -- the second part that is comparatively much longer -- is a first person rendering of the story by Maya, revealing herself through what she says and does. One may say that the writer's method is unique in delineating characters through their manner of speech. Maya reveals herself best through her own voice: "I gave myself up to a fit of furious pillow-beating, kicking everything but crying" (p.9). And again -- "Fatality-fatality. Fate-fatality. I fingered the flowers sadly, and felt much like them myself -- bruised and tired, not quite alive, not
quite alive, not quite of today" (p.94). Such first-person revelations of character are of great use to the reader. Says B.R.Rao, "To make a character speak and through her speech build up a picture of that character ... requires a deftness in manipulating the material and a sureness in the handling of the language."17 The reader is able to visualize the character of Maya through the vivid images she employs. "The richness of her language, her loving and lingering descriptions of the good, the beautiful, and the fascinatingly ugly things of the world create, as no mere statement can, a whole character."18

M. K. Derrett's complaint that in Indo-Anglian writing, characters are presented as "figures in a tapestry"19 would hardly apply to Amrita Priti Desai's characters. Here, highly poetic subjective descriptions serve not only to create the physical environment, but also reveal the state of mind of the characters concerned. Well-selected language serves as a tool for the precise portrayal of the mental dispositions.

In Where Shall We Go This Summer?, the curious blend of the analytical and the dramatic methods is significant.

The author shows the main character partly through direct description: "Then the woman came slowly, clumsily out of the back seat, sighing, shaking out the crumpled folds of her sari ... she stood staring across the sea at the island ... with eyes she shaded with one hand, and her face, too, was drawn up into a lined from of perplexity" (p.8). And then — "She had had four children with pride, with pleasure..." (p.20). Sita — the nervous and sensitive woman finds herself alienated from her husband and children because of her emotional reaction to things around her. Her emotions and the emotional happenings are presented in detail. There is a wealth of information conveyed about her emotional situation — her confused sense of time, her fatigue arising not from work, but from depression, her sentimental concern for the island of Menori, and so on. Here — "She continued to huddle, to twist her fingers, to smite bitterly through the nights and display an agony that he felt was unbecoming to her as it was puzzling to him" (p.21). And again, the writer employs exposition, talks directly to the reader, and gives a clear conception of Sita's character: "She never got used to anyone. ... She behaved provocatively — it was there that she started smoking, a thing that had never been done in their household by any woman or even by men only in secret — and began to speak in sudden rushes of emotion, as though flinging darts at their smooth, unscarred faces" (p.32). See here, the
accurate picture of Raman: "He never hesitated — everything was so clear to him and simple: life must be continued and all its business — Menaka's admission to medical college gained, new child safely brought forth, the children reared, the factory seen to, a salary spent" (p.101).

Besides disclosing characters directly, Desai also partly allows them to show themselves through their talk and action. The old aphorism, "Actions speak louder than words" bears much significance, here. "What people say may often be misleading. What they look like is often not a true index to their characters; what others say of them is often unreliable. But what they actually do, reveals their true natures." Hence, in fiction, too, the most accurate impressions about characters are formed from their behaviour. And in the aforesaid novel, there are quite a large number of seemingly insignificant and trivial acts that help us in forming a completer idea of the characters concerned.

Sita cannot control her emotions. She gets emotional over trifles and finds herself unable to adjust to the conditions of the family and of society at large: "They frighten me — appal me ... they are nothing — nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex, and money matter. Animals" (pp.31-32). This degree of emotional intensity makes her

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introverted and subjective. She appears before us through her characteristic response to the world. Her husband, on the other hand, is extroverted, a middling kind of man — dedicated unconsciously to the middle way. His manner of speech shows that he is intelligent but devoid of the capacity for introspection. He is rational and is puzzled at his wife's frequent emotional outbursts. For instance, in the episode relating the fight between the ayahs, Sita thinks that one of them must have scratched her child while quarreling with each other: "It is like living in the wilds," she said to her husband at night. "One may be attacked -- one's children may be attacked in the streets" (p. 29). In response to this, sensing the black cloud of her melodrama rising, he reminds her rationally: "Karan said it was the spoke of the railing that scratched him." But Sita all full of emotions, retorts -- "He doesn't know -- he only says that. It could have been the women with their beastly dirty nails," (p. 29) -- presenting thus the excitement and agitation that fill her mind, as compared with the reasonable and sound attitude of her husband.

Thus we see that Sita's character is revealed in numerous tiny and unobtrusive ways. All this is achieved by the author through her keen eye for little things and details and through her imagination which interprets their significance.
Not only this, her character is echoed in the thinking and conversation of Raman. He was shocked to see her standing all day in the balcony, keeping away the crows that were attacking a wounded eagle on a neighbouring rooftop. "Mad", he breathed in relief, understanding all in a stumbling access of clarity. He saw her again as she had stood on the balcony in the glitter of afternoon light, holding her son's popgun, its cork dangling from its mouth absurdly: the intensity of that attitude was now explained: "You've gone mad." Thus the opinion of one character is utilised to characterise not only himself but also the other person he is commenting upon.

The fifth novel Fire on the Mountain is analytical, as well as dramatic. The character of the main figure, Vanda Kaul, is given through a series of direct author-analyses. Her thoughts and feelings are dissected by the author who also passes judgement upon them. The physical appearance of Vanda Kaul serves as a clue to her nature.Appearances are said to be deceptive, yet the first impression we form of a character lasts long. We are given a brief description of Vanda's personal appearance, her physique, and the dress she normally wears: "She was grey, tall, and thin, and her silk saree made a sweeping, shivering sound and she fancied she could merge with the pine-trees and be mistaken for one" (p.4). We feel we are looking at her by the way she is described -- "She ...
read it through with her lips pressed so tightly together that it made deep lines furrow the skin from the corners of her nostrils to the corners of her mouth, dark runnels of disapproval" (p.14). And Nanda's thought about Naka as "a mosquito, minute and fine, on thin, precarious legs ... a pair of large and somewhat bulging eyes..." (p.39) makes the child appear before us in flesh and blood.

Furthermore, the temperament of the main character is also revealed through her likings or tastes -- stated by the writer through direct comment: "She wanted no one and nothing else, whatever else came or happened here, would be an unwelcome intrusion and distraction" (p.3). And later, "All she wanted was to be alone, to have Carignano to herself, in this period of her life when stillness and calm were all that she wished to entertain" (p.17).

The 'setting' or 'environment' also provides us with a key to her real nature. The 'setting' includes not only the concrete details of a certain locale, but also the 'atmosphere' or the 'feel' of a particular environment. Her character is influenced by the setting. A description of Carignano -- its barrenness, its starkness, its rocks, pines, light and air, in every direction a sweeping view -- to the north, of the mountains, to the south, of the plains; occasionally an eagle swimming through the clear unobstructed
mass of light and air -- carries with it the implications of a character fascinated by such surroundings.

The latest novel *Clear Light of Day* again, mixes the analytical and the dramatic methods of character-presentation. The writer, here, describes the physical appearance of the character: "He [Bahe] was in his pyjamas -- an old pair with frayed ends, over which he wore a grey bush-shirt, worn and washed almost to translucency. His face, too, was blanched, like a plant grown underground or in deepest shade, and his hair was quite white, giving, his young, fine face a ghostly look that made people start whenever he appeared," (p.8) -- indicating the character's pattern of life -- how he has not been exposed to outdoor life but remains imprisoned in the 'deepest shade' of the 'old' house in Delhi -- and consequently retarded in his physical and mental development.

Besides this, characters in this story are delineated through their dialogues. The difference in the respective tastes of Bin and Tara is brought out through their conversation: Tara, the younger sister, shows herself to be the type of character yearning for change -- for a life that was ever-growing, ever-changing, lively, fresh and developing all the time; while Bin, the elder sister, appears to be much fascinated by the old ways, the unchanging pattern of life: "How everything goes on and on here, and never changes", she [Tara] said 'I used
to think about it all — and it is all exactly the same, whenever we come home.' 'Does that disappoint you? ' Him asked drily, giving her a quick sideways look. 'Would you like to come back and find it changed?'" (p.4). These contrasting attitudes of the two sisters are also enumerated by the writer directly: "It seemed to her /Fara/ that the dullness and boredom of her childhood, her youth, were stored here in the room under the worn dusty red rugs, in the bloated brassware, amongst the dried grasses in the swollen vases, behind the yellowed photographs in the oval frames — everything, everything that she had so hated as a child and that was still preserved here as if this were the store-room of some dull, uninviting provincial museum" (pp.20-21).

V

Amita Desai's art of characterisation gives us a sense of identification with the characters. The use of details helps move the stories and the characters gradually forward. Thus it is that in the first novel, we are fully prepared for the final scene — the closing revelation. Part II of the story tells us through Maya's view of herself that she has an intense love for life: the flowers, the lemons,
the birds — all convey her profound passion for life, consequently her decision to murder her husband. The character's attachment to life is expressed through concrete details. It is suggested not only by the things she says but also by the way she expresses what she says. She is definitely typical of the sensitive individual who haunted by the childhood prophecy, escapes "through the world of reverie into the world of childhood." Frequently she cries and resorts to furious pillow-beating — "From childhood experience I knew this to be surely exhausting," remarks Maya. And this suggests a frail personality tottering on the verge of insanity. The writer seems to have a special ability for noting and revealing the little ways in which people reveal their inner natures.

The really notable feature of the novel is the portrayal of Maya — "the vulnerable creature who is brutally brought to the horror and reality of being hypersensitive." Her language matches her mood. We are not told what she looks like, yet how clearly we see her! Maya is terrified by what others relish, and we are conscious of an abnormal sensitivity, and acute unwavering perception — the standard equipment of the artist. A sensitive, imaginative, and illogical character has already

been established that finds its counterpart in the novel *Where Shall We Go this Summer?*

*Voices in the City* presents the details and the explanations, given by the author to show the responses of the three major characters in the story. Hirode is a straightforward and upright character. We see him wavering between life and death. His sensitive nature draws him away from working on a meaningless job. "Confronted with a life which holds no great prospects for the artist, depressed by the inconsequential work which gives him no opportunity to display his creativity, surrounded by the city which would wipe out any traces of his individuality, goaded and prodded by his friends and relations for doing something against his will, Hirode wants to escape from this world -- the world of ugly sights and horrible repugnant smells." So to him death seems to be the only escape. But it can be said that the writer merely reports the conflict of his mind, and does not present it in dramatic terms. Though his character is superbly drawn, yet his crises seem unreal. He seems to be a real character, possessing flesh and blood vitality only during intense eruptions of irritation. Another character, Monisha provides us with a hint of her character through her ‘diary’. She is not a vividly realized character, her reactions against the depressions of the city are not very convincing.

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In *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*, the cast of characters is necessarily large. They belong to different ethnic groups — the Punjabi, the Madrasi, the Bengali — and this the author does to show the basic Indian sensibility. There are English characters also — the Millers, the Roscomons, and Mrs. Moffitt. But three major characters — Dev, Adit, and Sarah occupy a lot of space in the story — "they are shown talking, brooding, and occasionally doing," but remain vague and fail to convince us. Says Meenakshi Mukherjee, "The Indian characters in this novel live in a pathetic little world — forever cooking lamb-curry and rice and listening to recorded sitar music — exiles huddling together...." Desai is accused of being a caricaturist. But the unreality of the characters arises for the most part from the necessities of plot. Because the Indian immigrants and the English do not want to see each other as they are, rather they see what they want to see — "stereotypes of each other, coloured by prejudice, conditioned by false notions of oriental and occidental characteristics — and they naturally fail to see the human being behind the stereotype." So the reader mistakes them for flat caricatures and burlesque figures — only because he

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has such a limited and stereotyped view of reality. In *Clear Light of Day*, all the main characters are well-developed. Rim, the protagonist, is the most vividly drawn character — "brisk, practical and acerbic on the one hand, and on the other ghostly and trapped in the past." She is always affectionate and highly appealing.

Characters, on the whole, have their separate individualities. Even the minor or 'background' characters are allowed moments of intensity and depth. Particularly in *Noises in the City*, all the minor characters — Jit Nair, the haunters of the coffee house, Sonny's father, and Lila Chatterjee — are individualized and superbly realized characters. Similarly, the minor figures in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* — the ayahs, the cook, and the multitude — exist mainly to establish the density of society in which the heroine must move. And several other characters — Moses, the teashop owner and his wife Jamila, the neighbours of the island — collectively establish themselves as chorus to the main action. "The nightmarish and adhesive Miriam, the heavy Moses with his lungi, the adamant Manaka, the impatient Karan leave a lasting impression on the reader's mind."


27 Atma Ram, "A View of Where Shall We Go This Summer?" *The Journal of Indian Writing in English* (Vol.9, No.1, Jan., 1981), p. 77.
In a word, the writer desires to make her readers so intimately acquainted with her characters that "the creatures of her brain should be to them speaking, moving, living human creatures." Moreover, the reality of the characters is heightened by an effective rendering of what is called, the atmosphere. "By atmosphere we mean the mood, the general feeling, associated in the description with the scene, person, or event described." It is the delicate relationship between the character and the environment, that gives intensity to the action. Anita Desai is esteemed as perhaps the only Indo-Anglian novelist "who lays stress on the landscape and co-relates it with the psychic state of her protagonists." In the first story, there is an atmosphere of terror and madness. Throughout the story pervades this aura, sometimes completely dominating and overwhelming the heroine. Through atmosphere, the author conveys the prevailing attitude of mind which she wishes us to adopt towards her subject. The choice of imagery and the concrete details of scenes and episodes play an important role in creating an appropriate atmosphere. If we peruse carefully the descriptions in the above-cited novel, we find that the sombre, gloomy,

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and brooding atmosphere coheres with the attitude the author wishes us to take towards this violent, tragic human story: "Crows sat in a circle around the corpse, and crows will eat anything -- entrails, eyes, anything." (p.5). And "... the stench of the decaying flesh still hung in the bougainvillea coloured evening air" (p.6). Later on, "Death lurked in those spaces, the darkness spoke of distance, separation, loneliness..." (p.22).

In the next novel *Voices in the City*, the environment in which characters are condemned to live, plays a vital role. In this story, Mita Desai "seeks to relate the subjective world of the individual to the spirit of the place," and also seeks to "delineate a sensitivity to locale, as it operates within the consciousness of her characters." Here, the writer "displays an extraordinary skill in creating the atmosphere that suffuses the lives of her characters." The city of Calcutta is shown as 'the heart of all maladies'.

Nirode, stuck up in the pressures of the city, feels threatened by it: "On all sides the city pressed down, slight, aglow, and stirring with its own marsh-bred, monster life that, like

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32 Ibid., p.27.

an ogre, kept one eye open through sleep and waking ... the city was as much atmosphere as a den, as much a haunting ghost of the past as a frenzied passage towards early death" (pp.41-42). The locale of Calcutta "accentuates and even embodies," the despair of the sensitive souls. The external climate corresponds with the internal climate of the characters. Indeed, as observed by Westbrook the very name of the city is derived from Kali, the black goddess of Death worshipped as a major deity in Bengal. The writer alludes frequently, though obtrusively, to Kali, "... thus adding a religious and mythological element to the novel and deepening the impression of terror evoked by her descriptions of the city."  

The atmosphere of solitariness, barrenness, and emptiness permeates another story, Fire on the Mountain. But here the author tries very subtly to show the gradual change of atmosphere with the arrival of Raka in Nanda Kaul's life. The darkness and seclusion is abstracted out of the first chapter into the next in the first part of the story -- "... the wind suddenly billowed up and threw the pine branches about as though to curtain her" (p.3). And again, "... the yellow rose creeper had blossomed so youthfully last month but was


35 Perry D. Westbrook, op.cit., p.357.
now reduced to an exhausted mass of grey creaks and greens again" (p.47). And something new comes as Nanda Kaul fights against the solitariness around her in an effort to adjust herself to the conditions of life that change with the arrival of her great grand-daughter in Part II: "... the pine-trees stood bending and twisting extra-vagantly in the wind as though miming welcome in a modern satiric ballet" (p.39). It is the same old Nanda Kaul who once preferred (and still prefers at times) not to talk to the child at all, but who is unable at the moment, to stop talking to her. Though Raka backs away from her in embarrassment, yet the old lady obliges her to pace at her side, and this feeling of hers is charged with an apt rendering of the atmosphere: "The green, glassy sky was full of rooks, searching for a resting place, wheeling in circles, cawing and calling to each other, somehow incapable of settling down for the night" (p.98). The atmosphere created by such descriptions is in harmony with the feelings of Nanda Kaul, who is all excited (like the rooks) to have a chat with Raka, but finds it hard to do just as the rooks are 'incapable of settling down for the night'. See how the atmosphere and the scene are joined together: "She kept her eyes strictly averted from Raka, looking up at the moth-furred sky where the rooks wheeled and cawed, and Nanda Kaul talked and talked at an exhausting length, till the rooks fell silent, pressed by the darkness into the tree-tops..." (p.99).
I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated, or being driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against, or made a stand against, the general current. It is easy to flow with the current; it costs no demands, it costs no effort. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out "the great No," who fight the current and struggle against it, they know what the demands are and what it costs to meet them.36

The preoccupation of Anita Desai as a novelist with the delineation of character "enables her to offer an unexpected glimpse into the deeper psychic state of her protagonists."37 She not merely deals with the external aspects of a man's life, but also handles his inner reactions. Virginia Woolf's remark that "Jane Austen went in and out of her people's minds like the blood in their veins,"36 may be applied to Desai also whose pre-occupation with the inner lives of the characters is so significant. Most of the Indo-English writing has been limited to the depiction of the external world. Only an outside view of human nature is presented by a large number of these writers. But Anita Desai is probably the first among them to probe deeply into the inner nature


37 Shyam M. Asmani, op. cit., p. 81.

of man. Her characters have 'inner lives'. "She must be
 accorded the reputation of having firmly established the
 psychological novel in the annals of Indo-English fiction." 39
 "Since her preoccupation is with the inner world of sensibility
 rather than the outer world of action," says Iyengar, "she has
 tried to forge a style supple and suggestive enough to convey
 the fever and fretfulness of the stream of consciousness of
 her principal characters." 40

 'Words and actions' are the only ways by which we come
to any knowledge of what passes in the minds of others, writes
Henry Fielding, but his sister Sarah, believes that "the
motives to actions and the inward turns of the mind' are more
necessary to be known than the actions themselves; and much
rather would we choose that our readers should clearly under­
stand what our principal actors think, than what they do." 41

As remarked by Atma Ram Sharma, "Amita Desai, perhaps
for the first time in the history of Indo-English novel, turns
the search-light inward and studies her characters with deep
understanding." 42 We are concerned in her stories not only

39 Sudhakar Batakar Jemkhandi, "The Artistic Effects
of the Shifts in Points of View in Amita Desai's Cry, The
Peacock," The Journal of Indian Writing in English, Vol.9,
No.1, January 1981, p.35.
with the external circumstances in which a man has his being, but with the living man himself, she is "almost obsessively concerned with the dark, uncannily oppressive inner world of her intensely introverted characters." In the writer's own words, a story imposed from the outside simply destroys the characters' life, reduces them to a string of jerking puppets on a stage. Whatever action there is in her novels, is a part of "the integral whole composed of the human psyche, the human situation, the outer and inner rhythms."

As the stories deal mainly with inner life and with complexities of motive and passion, much space is given to direct analysis. The feelings of the characters are approached analytically through their respective thoughts and actions. It is by the use of the 'stream of consciousness' method that we are offered intimate glimpses into the minds of most of the characters. These give us a direct impression of the continuous flow of ideas, sensations, feelings and memories as they enter the consciousness of the characters. Anita Desai's first novel Cry, The Peacock is also perhaps, the first step in the direction of psychological fiction in Indian writing in English." Here, the writer "ably explores

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the turbulent emotional world of the neurotic protagonist, Maya, who swims under an acute alienation, stemming from marital discord, and verges on a curious insanity. If we analyse the consciousness of Maya, we find that it is stirred by thousands of small, irrelevant ideas of daily life — even by such small things as the petunias "floppy white and faint mauve-sentimental, irresolute flowers..." (p. 19). The author, it seems, is more concerned with describing the 'how' than the 'why' (though the latter term is not altogether excluded). It is usually clear to the reader why a character acts as he does, for we know that action flows from character. In one case, for instance, Maya murders her husband: it seems clear enough why she does so — perfectly in keeping with her character as we know it. The story told from the first-person point of view succeeds in giving the reader the psychological probings of Maya's mind in a more vivid way. Had the story been told in the third person or from omniscient viewpoint, the effect created would not have been so intense as it is now. The psyche of Maya — disordered and chaotic as it is — is presented through images and symbols. They externalize her moods, her agonizing abnormality.

Madhusudan Prasad, OP-611, P.3.
But what of the dangers? Ah, they'll not all you
of them. Of the lizards, the lizards that come upon
you, stalking you silently upon clawed toes, slipping
their clawlike tongues in and out, in and out, with
an audible hiss and a death's rattle, slowly moving
up, closing in on you...

Albinos. Bleached into albinos by the desert sun,
these lizards. But the rat, too, is an albino, from
having lived always in the dark, from never having
seen the sun at all.
And moonlight?

Ah, dangerous, if you don't know. Be careful, best
be careful, who knows which one is to perish? Perish
one must. The desert is waiting, the rats and the
lizards. They'll claim the flesh, the winds will
carry the bones away. Mind the wind. Shut the
windows. Hide, hide. Ah, here it comes, the
lizard. Here it comes to mount you, saliva falling
in lines of white from its mouth, its belly dragging
on you. Here it is. (pp.127-28)

So, it may well be said that it is precisely the exploration
of Maya's mind in which the appeal of this story is centered.

In the second novel *Voices in the City*, the author delves
into the psyche of Hirode, Monisha, and Asla, and explores
skilfully their conscious and subconscious thoughts. Through
the "omniscient" angle, Desai offers psychological analyses of
the characters. As observed by Iyengar, "In Anita Desai's two
novels, the inner climate, the climate of sensibility that
lores or clears or rumbles like thunder or suddenly blazes
forth like lightening, is more compelling than the outer weather,
the physical geography or the visible action. Her forte, in other words, is the exploration of sensibility — the particular kind of modern Indian sensibility that is ill at ease among the barbarians and the philistines, the anarchists and the amoralists." Mirode's imbalance of mind is caused partly by his 'unresolved oedipal fixations'. The mother figure "symbolizes in Mirode's psyche a complex cluster of dream and fantasy in which he is inalienably entangled and to which he returns psychically and emotionally after every encounter with reality." Here is an insight into his dream-world:

Into Mirode's sleep the bright birds of the past came serenely winging, and the wide gestures of their wings ushered into his sleep the gowned loveliness of a holiday home of his childhood. The birds cast their shadows on an uncertain violent dream, and the shadows turned to light, to colours, vivid as goss, as paints ... the red and blue and yellow prayer flags whipped by a breeze into a flutter against a sky so blue, hills so purple, snow so white that it was like an illustration to a fairy tale, animated by the sweetly melancholy tune of cowbells drifting up and down the hill sides. A nicotine-tinged hand rose to shield the dreamer from the wild, white wind that swept across from Tibet, and, with mock-obedience, the gesture was copied by his mother who sat on the wind-wild veranda, working on her embroidery. He could see it so clearly, the worked span of the embroidery ring, that his shellblue eyelids moved faintly, with an oyster life. Red and green threads striped the young girls' aprons, vermillion silks spread a sheen upon the curving monastery roof, and white and lilies silks went to make the small stars of the bamboo dahlias. (pp. 26-27)

48 R. S. Sharma, op.cit., p.62.
In Part II of the story, there is an account of the miserable life of Mirode's married sister, Monisha. Her mental life is ascribed to an 'emptiness within as well as without'. Her feeling of frustration is confronting even to herself: "Is this what is then, my life? Only a conundrum that I shall brood over for ever with passion and pain, never to arrive at a solution? Only a conundrum is that, then life?" (pp. 124-25). In Part III, Amla, another sister of Mirode, is faced with the same feeling of hollowness as the other two faces: "Despite all the stimulation of new experiences, new occupations, new acquaintances and the mild sweet winter air, this sense of hollowness and futility persisted. Daily it pursued her to the office, hid quietly under the black mouth-piece of her telephone, shook -- ever so slightly -- the tip of her pencil as she traced the severe lines of a well-draped sari, then engulfed her in the evenings when she attended parties at which she still knew no one well, and at night when she tried to compose her unsteady thoughts for sleep" (pp. 157-58). It is obviously her inner frustration that makes her exclaim, "why ever did I come to Calcutta? Why didn't I stay away in Bombay, or go home to Kaliapong?" (pp. 176-77).

In the third novel Bye-Bye, Blackbird, the writer fails to enter into the minds of the dramatic personas with that intensity which is found in the rest of the stories. The next novel Where Shall We Go This Summer? again reveals the writer's
concern with psychology. She succeeds well in probing into the inner life of Sita, the main protagonist. The tumult in her mind is conveyed by adopting the pattern of Monsoon winds: "I wanted the book to follow the pattern of the monsoon together darkly and threateningly, to pour down wildly and passionately, then withdraw quietly and calmly." This makes the writer delineate the inner life of the heroine, her confused state of mind: "Oh", she said, muddling her hair with her hands, muddling the sand with her feet, suddenly anxious to close this conversation and resume the silence of the past" (p.108).

Another story Fire on the Mountain depicts the psychology of the chief character, Nanda Kum. When she learns that her great grand-daughter is visiting her to spend a couple of months with her, the averse emotions that crop up in her mind are legion. She is distracted and tries to divert her mind from this thought of Raka's arrival: "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" (p.17). Later again, we have a peep into her mind when we read her thoughts-- "The child was not there, was never there. She did not like ————

49 Anita Desai: An Interview with Atma Ram, World Literature Written in English (Arlington) - 1 April 1997, pp.97-98.
being in Carignano, perhaps she would not leave her the house after all, why should she? Baka no more needed, or wanted a house than a jackal did, or a cicada. She was a wild creature — wild, wild, wild ... perhaps she ought to have refused to have her. Perhaps she ought to leave the house to Tara who needed shelter, a cave to crawl into and die. Perhaps, perhaps ... the alternatives were as many and as bothersome as flies" (p.103).

In Clear Light of Day, we are given occasional peeps into the minds of the protagonists. In Part II when Bim's mother passes away suddenly, her brother Raja departs to Hyderabad. Bim and her younger brother, Baba, are left alone in the house. This makes her utterly unhappy, frustrated and baffled. Her pathetic and simple-worded conversation with Baba at this time discloses with a strange intensity the agony of her mind:

'So now there are just you and I left, Baba,' she muttered. 'Does the house seem empty to you? Everyone's gone, except you and I. They won't come back. We'll be alone now. But we don't have to worry about anyone now -- Tara or Raja or Mira-masi. We needn't worry now that they're all gone. We're just by ourselves and there's nothing to worry about. You're not afraid, are you? There's no need to be afraid. It's as if we were children again -- sitting on the veranda waiting for father and mother, when it's growing dark and it's bedtime. Really it'll be just the way it was when we were children.' She yawned hugely, her eyes starting out of her head and her cheek bones straining at her stretched skin, 'It wasn't so bad then,' she mumbled, shaking her head sleepily, 'was it? No, when we were children...". (p.101)
The conversation taking place between the characters is essential to the narrative. It serves as the link between them and the means by which they explain themselves to each other. In Desai's work, very seldom does the plot develop through conversation. Only Bye-Bye, Blackbird and Clear Light of Day bear some testimony to this point. Here the author avoids the necessity of giving prose-sections to analyse the characters.

Dialogue helps to make the story more dramatic. It does more than present persons as actually speaking. Their words reveal their natures, being adapted -- in rhythm and in diction-- to their various characters. Through the use of good dialogue, the writer reveals basic character, emphasises the relationship between characters, and develops action. It leads us from exposition to drama, and helps the writer to stop telling us about her characters and begin showing them to us. Through dialogue, the persons are balanced one against the other, thus each the more fully portrayed.

Dialogue well-managed, has been regarded as one of the most delightful elements of a novel; it is that part of it in which we seem to get most intimately in touch with people, and in which the written narrative most nearly approaches the vividness and actuality of the acted drama. It adds natural touch to the story.
One of the main obstacles which the Indo-English writer is confronted with, is the difficulty in writing dialogues. Because the Indian writer is using an alien tongue to express himself, he may sometimes first be thinking in his own language and then translating the thought into English. As pointed out by Patricia L. Sharpe: "The Indian writer in English is often cravenly sensitive to the ever-threatening charge that he is unable to use the language correctly, although to the extent that he has something unique to contribute, he must inevitably do something to the language, which has never been done before -- especially not by Englishmen."^50

N.Kaul states in his preface to The Heart's Way: "The greatest difficulty of Indian writing in English is perhaps in the matter of the writing of the dialogues ... the tone, manner, turn of phrase, and allusions of the language in which they are spoken, can hardly be transformed into the reality of another tongue."^51 "An Indian novelist in English should employ his skill in contriving a dialogue that is at once natural and lively, supple and functional. He may even catch the speech rhythms and the turns of phrase used by all

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^51 Quoted by M.E. Darrett, OP. cit.
kinds of people in the village and translate some of the abuses, curses, imprecations and proverbs to advantage."  

Many of the Indo-English writers achieve indifferent success in the matter of translating ordinary Indian language into English. As Iyengar observes, only an R.K.Narayan is successful in using "the English much as we used to wear dhoties manufactured in Lancashire." Yet, this problem of writing dialogues comes in the way of only those writers who deal with the ordinary, illiterate masses and the lower sections of Indian society. Because in this case, the writer has to translate the speech of the common man into English, and this involves the risk of sounding burlesque, quaint, and ridiculous. But the writers who, like Anita Desai, restrict themselves to the higher strata of society, easily get away from this difficulty of making their characters speak an alien tongue. As B.R.Rao points out, "Her characters, because of their social status, education, and culture do speak in English and it does not sound unreal."  

So Desai confines her choice of characters to the better educated and "anglicised" sections of society in which characters would normally use English.

54 B.R.Rao, op.cit., p.64.
It must be admitted that on the whole, the modern Indian writers in English reveal a phenomenal poise in the handling of English as a medium of expression. The English language has created problems for Desai, too, but as she herself asserts in a very confident tone, she has simply side-stepped them, "... not deliberately, but unconsciously and intuitively -- by not writing the kind of social document that demands the creation of realistic and typical characters and the use of realistic and typical dialogue." Having been concerned with "psychology" in her stories, she has been left free to employ simply the language of the interior. Even when two characters meet, they use this particular type of language -- the language of their thoughts, their interior selves -- which has nothing to do with geography and can be written in any language. Some other writers like Maja Dao and Sudhin Ghose who, like Desai, depend more on their inner vision, have an easier time as compared with G.V. Desani, Pravin Jhabvala, and R.K. Narayan -- all writing social satires, though with skill and fluency.

Anthony Trollope has thus defined the place of conversation in the novel:

The dialogue is generally the most agreeable part of a novel, but only so long as it tends in some way to the telling of the main story. It need not seem to be confined to that but it should always have a tendency in that direction. The unconscious critical aumen of the reader is both just and severe. When a long dialogue on extraneous matter reaches his mind, he at once feels he is being cheated into taking something which he did not bargain to accept when he took up that novel. He does not at that moment require politics or philosophy but he wants his story.

The conversation in Anita Desai's stories suits the respective speakers and situations. Yet examples of extraneous conversation are to be found in the discussion on philosophy in *Cry, The Peacock*. It is well said that dialogue in narrative cannot bear the weight of irrelevant material as it retards the progress of the story, and creates a blurred effect, but it is also true that such conversation is necessary in the exposition of character. In Chapter 1, Part 2 of the above-mentioned story, there is an apparently irrelevant discussion of the rituals surrounding the burial and cremation of the dead. But despite the extraneous nature of this talk, it serves well to reveal the characters of both persons. The discussion, though incidental, is functional. It expresses characters: Maya's love of life and Gautama's detached outlook.

As noted by Brooks and Warren, the problem of the writer of dialogue is a problem of selection and logical organization. A dialogue is rarely a direct transcript of what people say in conversation. Conversation is often stumbling and awkward. If the writer duplicates such a conversation on paper, the reader will not be readily able to follow the line of significance. So the material has to be organized in such a way as to preserve the interest of the reader.

Anita Desai succeeds in giving the dialogues a realistic surface, by using italicized words that give the impression of a particular character’s voice, his sense of emphasis etc.:

"It is a belief in these frivolities" -- Cry, The Peacock, p.15.
"Now this is confounding." -- Cry, The Peacock, p.15.
"I must admit." -- Bye-Bye, Blackbird, p.120.
"They are all violent." -- Where Shall We Go This Summer?, p.128.
"How marvellous!" -- Fire on the Mountain, p.21.
"This is what I mean." -- Clear Light at Bay, p.174.

and hundreds of other instances can be cited where the italicized words are skilfully used to convey the precise tone of the speaker concerned. All these are, no doubt, employed to 'emphasise' the speakers say, yet they seem to be over-used almost through the entire work.

The writer usually succeeds in achieving a dialogue so individual that it stands alone with narrative tags. She escapes
the "he-said" and "she-said" monotony in dialogue by using expressive synonyms, like shouted, cried, exclaimed, faltered, shrilled etc.

"Here!" she cried in a panic." — Where Shall We Go This Summer?, p.10

"Perhaps that was only innocence," Sita flared. — Where Shall We Go This Summer?, p.35.

VIII

In summing up, we may remark that in her astounding skill in taking the reader into the complex world of the human mind, in her exploration of the mental agony of the characters—Anita Desai may be said to have made a unique contribution in the field of Indo-Anglian writing. The characters are depicted as individuals "facing single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence." Her concern is with individual men and women. She admits that she has little interest in society, seen as a mass; only the individual, the solitary being, is of true interest to her. Her attempt is to deal with the meaningless world of reality and "discover its significance by plunging below the surface and plunging the depths, then illuminating those depths till they become a more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of the visible world." And surely this is a noteworthy achievement.

57 Anita Desai: An Interview with Yashodhara Dalmia, op.cit.
58 Anita Desai: Replies to the questionnaire, op.cit.