The short story has, of late, achieved much popularity and distinction as a form of literature. One of the most popular forms of reading today, it has come to occupy an important place in Indian writing in English also. But it is not uncommon now to say that the art of writing short narratives goes back to the earliest times. In ancient Egypt, Greece, Persia, China, and India, one could come across short narratives the tendency of which was of the nature of the short story. "A collection of short prose narratives bequeathed to us by the ancient Egyptians, contains stories from approximately 4,000 B.C."¹ In ancient times, such anecdotes were woven mainly around religious and historical events. But with the passage of time, the judicious pruning and skilful manipulation of the material made man a conscious artist and hence gave such form and shape to his writing that these age-old stories became immortal.

Gradually man switched over to stories dealing with his own life and surroundings, and social, political, and economic aspects came to replace the religious and mythical issues.

In India, as in many other countries, the short story is of recent origin. It is true that we have had for centuries a very large number of tale-serials in Sanskrit, based on didactic themes. But these serve only as the precursors of the short story proper that was to develop in the modern age, chiefly through the impact of western literatures. This impact was first felt in Bengal and later it influenced the growth of literature in other Indian languages. "The Indian short story was born when the impact of Europe was felt in the wake of the establishment of British power in India."

Rabindra Nath Tagore is regarded as the first writer of India to write short stories. He is one of the greatest masters of the short story possessing world-wide reputation. Many other Indian writers in English have, apart from their other fictional works, produced a good number of short stories which is the outcome of the creative activity going on at present in this field. "Perhaps in no other branch of creative or literary activity has the feel of the Indian scene been so ably, and so rewardingly captured." Writers like R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Anita Desai,

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2 Umayun Kabir in foreword to Contemporary Indian Short Stories Series I, ed. & pub. by Sahitya Akademi, Delhi, 1959.

and many others have written collections of short stories, concerned with portraying character and analyzing the complex phases of a situation. While in ancient times, more emphasis was put on plot and events, today character and situation dominate.

II

The novel and the short story — the two main fictional forms — are not only different in length, but are entirely different in kind. It would not be correct to believe that in the near future, the short story as a form will replace the novel. The story cannot displace the novel primarily because 'it cannot meet the novel on the novel's own ground, or do precisely what the novel does'. The short story is to be regarded not as a substitute for the novel, but another form of literature that has flourished along with the novel. A short story is not a condensed novel, and a novel is not an expanded short story. Both have their respective places in the hierarchy of literature.

Brander Matthews quotes Fredrick Wedmore: a good short story can never be 'a novel in a nutshell', it "cannot possibly be a precis, a synopsis, or scenario, as it were, of a novel. It is a separate thing — as separate, almost, as the sonnet is
from the Epic -- it involves the exercise almost of a
different art. Frank O'Connor compares the short story
with lyric poetry, with which, according to him, it has close
affinity: "short story ... is the nearest thing I know to
lyric poetry. ... A novel actually requires far more logic
and far more knowledge of circumstances, whereas a short story
can have the sort of detachment from circumstances that lyric
poetry has." Certainly, the short story cannot simply replace
the novel for the fact that it cannot deal with life and
character as exhaustively as a novel does.

The short story produces a singleness of effect which
is not applicable to the novel. The aim of the short story is
the unity of effect. Action, character, dialogue -- all converge
to the single aim. "The short story is the single effect, complete
and self-contained, while the novel is of necessity broken into
a series of episodes". According to Edgar Allan Poe, a short
story aims at producing "a certain unique or single effect to be
wrought-out" by such incidents and events as may best aid him
in establishing this pre-conceived effect. "If his very initial
sentence tend not to the outwringing of this effect, then he has

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*Eugene Current Garcia & Walter R. Patrick, ed. What is the

5Ibid., p.134.
failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed; and this is an end unattainable by the novel. Without this unity of impression, it is not possible to bring about the deepest effects in a story. Thus, the short story has, what the novel cannot have -- the effect of totality.

Somerset Maugham's view that "A good short story is a piece of fiction, dealing with a single incident, material or spiritual, that can be read at a sitting; it is original, it must sparkle, excite or impress; it must have unity of effect or impression; it should move in an even line from the exposition to its close," illustrates the same point, namely, that a short story unfolds a single predominating incident or character and the details of the story are so organized as to produce one single impression whereas a novel can have a number of elements woven into its texture and one may, on analysis, find more than one organizing principles at work.


The short story further differs from the novel in scope and in structure. It is not an expansive thing like a novel. The impression is unified from the beginning to the end. There is no room for discursiveness and diffuseness in it. Its brevity and concentration call for the omission of everything superfluous and redundant. The novelist generally seeks for an "all-embracing view", while the short story writer is generally concerned with one particular character, incident, or experience. There may be several characters in a story but the writer usually concentrates on only one, who is basic to the design. In contradiction to this, the novelist slowly and leisurely reveals the lives of various persons in one story. The canvas on which he works is broader -- accommodating varied characters against varied backgrounds. So, the plot of the novel is often complicated by episodes and sub-plots etc., whereas a short story gives a single predominating incident to which all other incidents contribute. Since it must move swiftly to its climax, all the details are compressed and simplified.

Hence, in its singleness of aim and effect, in its simplicity and compression of structure -- the short story emerges as a phenomenon quite distinct from a mere condensed novel.
The short stories of Anita Desai gathered in a single collection *Games at Twilight and Other Stories*, though limited in prospect, are as engaging as the world of her longer fiction. The characteristics and attitudes which she wove into the texture of her novels, find expression in her short stories also. Hence the two fields of creation are complementary to each other. They show the concern of the writer not only with the outer world of reality but also with the inner world—the 'psyche' of the characters, their 'states of being'. Her approach to her characters is, thus, different from that of her predecessors. She does not begin with the personality that appears to the outside world, but with the psychological elements underlying that personality. Her principal concern is, therefore, with what goes on 'within' a character, as well as with what goes on 'without'. It is remarkable for a writer to be able to create in the reader a feeling to probe into the inner life of the person concerned. "The reader of these stories inevitably would try to peer into the mind behind them." In examining the motives of her protagonists, the writer attempts to evaluate the relative influence of both internal and external forces.

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The two worlds of inward propensity and outward circumstance are joined and shown operating in the lives of the characters. Thus, as in her novels, so here, the writer tends in the direction of the "psychological".

Anita Desai is perhaps the first among the Indian writers to practise a deliberate exploration into the springs of human motives and human mistakes. Her observation has the quality of minuteness and her characterization includes a thread-bare analysis. Every action is the index of the mind of the character. For instance, in the title story, the action of the children — "they burst out like seeds from a crackling, over-ripe pod into the veranda, with such wild, maniacal yells..." (p.1) reflects their states of mind i.e., their love and zeal for play.

The writer is not content with depicting the external aspect of her characters but it is her constant endeavour to pierce into their minds, and bring to the surface all the inner struggles going on there. She thus demonstrates a deep understanding of the undercurrents of mind and heart. Her understanding of human personality is extremely profound. The first story Games at Twilight offers a fine study of child psychology. The story deals primarily with the children's world — their love for play, outdoor life, honour, power, and victory, and their strong reaction against defeat and humiliation. After finishing it, we understand how the little boy feels when
he has experienced his disillusionment and insignificance on finding that his playmates had quite forgotten him during the course of the play. We may recall a similar experience of our own, and we are more understanding and sympathetic when in our own lives we see a boy meet the same kind of situation -- "the ignominy of being forgotten."

It is the story of a sensitive child's struggles against forces within and without him. In the portrait of the child's character, the desire to show his sense of victory and impress others with this achievement is an instance of the working of his mind. When he is hurt by the negative attitude of other children and even his parents, he feels that his victory is meaningless and hollow. This sense of insignificance makes him fall into a sullen silence. Desai has here shown her psychological observation of the child's mind in which a feeling of dishonour, shame, and humiliation has taken birth.

A psychological perception reveals a sudden change in the children's game to be really true to them. Other incidents—the children shoving, pushing against each other, their mother pulling them roughly apart, the tearing sound of cloth lost in the heavy panting and angry grumbling, the forming of a vague circle, the children flashing through the dusty shrubs, scrambling up brick walls, breaking mulberries from the trees and eating --
are all realistic descriptions of their play. Again, Ravi's haul -- 'I won, I won, I won,' displays the intensity of enthusiasm in the juvenile mind.

In almost all the other stories also -- *Private Tuition* by Mr. Bose, *Studies in the Park*, *Surface Textures*, *Sale*, *Pineapple Cake* -- there is given an occasional peep into the child-mind. The little kid busy moulding a lump of dough into some thick and satisfying shape, then trying to make a spoon stand on one end; the children on their way back from school flinging their satchels at the door, bawling and screeching as their mother whacks them; raiding the mango-trees in the school compound -- all characterize the attitudes typical of children.

Apart from child psychology, the writer also deals with the psychology of the adult-mind. *Private Tuition* by Mr. Bose is an attempt in this respect to probe into the working of Bose's psyche. He is unable to concentrate on his professional obligations. Every time he takes tuitions, his mind is diverted to his domestic front, but then he realizes, "After all, he must continue with his private tuitions; that was what was important. The baby had to have his first pair of shoes and soon he would be needing oranges, biscuits, plastic toys" (p.14). In *A Devoted Son*, Mr. Varma -- the tradition-bound father of Rakesh, struggles within himself at the behaviour of his son -- "The old man who had been lying stretched out on his bed, weak and
feeble after a day's illness, gave a start at the very sound, the tone of these words. He opened his eyes -- rather, they fell open with shock -- and he stared at his son with disbelief that darkened quickly to reproach. A son who actually refused his father the food he craved? No, it was unheard of, it was incredible" (p.75). He is not ready to follow the dietary discipline imposed by his doctor son and feels that it does not become a worthy son inflict such restrictions on his old father: "My own son. If I ask him for one more piece of bread, he says no, papa, I weighed out the ata myself and I can't allow you to have more than two hundred grammes of cereal a day. He weighs the food he gives me, Bhatia -- he has scales to weigh it on. That is what it has come to" (p.77).

Thus, in the writer's attempt to explore the psychology of the character, the thought process is laid bare before us. She maintains her right to enter the consciousness of her characters and analyse the thoughts found there. She is being omniscient in this respect and this procedure has always been typical of her.

IV

The stories -- close-knit and well-organised -- deal with social ties -- the parent-child relationship or the search
of a person for his individuality in the ambient conditions of the family. They are constructed around ideas that persuade the reader to believe them. The title story *Games at Twilight*, though depicting the child-world, is "a brilliant inversion of the adult world." The writer has convinced us that the mind of a child as that of an adult, can be so delicate, sensitive, and aspiring for success that any hindrance in his natural craving for success would result in a feeling of desperation and humiliation. To appreciate the significance of this idea we have only to imagine what would have happened if the writer had ended her story with the end of the children's game without showing the effect it has on the child's mind. The story states the truth about child behaviour but indirectly it is also symbolic of the adult reality. "Through the children's games the story projects those primal drives like aggressive self-assertion and the need for power and recognition that characterize adult life."\(^9\)

*Private Tuition* by Mr. Bose gives us an insight into a not uncommon type of superficial personality -- that of Mr. Bose -- who is prone to be indifferent towards his profession. The author successfully captures the rhythms of his domestic


\(^{10}\)Ibid.
life through sights and sounds. His life is dictated in terms of visual and auditory faculties:

... he turned his head, slightly, just enough to be able to look out of the corner of his eye through the open door, down the unlit passage at the end of which, in the small, dimly lit kitchen, his wife sat kneading dough for bread, their child at her side. Her head was bowed so that some of her hair had freed itself of the long steel pins he hated so much and hung about her pale, narrow face. The red border of her sari was the only strips of colour in that smoky scene. The child beside her had his back turned to the door so that Mr. Bose could see his little brown buttocks under the short white shirt, squashed firmly down upon the woven mat. Mr. Bose wondered what it was that kept him so quiet -- perhaps, his mother had given him a lump of dough to mould into some thick and satisfying shape. Both of them seemed bound together and held down in some deeply absorbing act from which he was excluded. He would have liked to break in and join them. (pp.12-13)

See below how he reacts to the arrival of Upneet (his pupil learning Bengali from him) in terms of visual aids:

... Upneet of the flowered sari, ruby ear-rings and shameless laughter. Under this Upneet's gaze such ordinary functions of a tutor's life as sitting down at a table, sharpening a pencil and opening a book to the correct page became matters of farce, disaster and hilarity. His very bones sprang out of joint. He did not know where to look -- everywhere were Upneet's flowers, Upneet's giggles. Immediately at the very sight of the tip of her sandal peeping out beneath the flowered hem of her sari, he was a man broken to pieces, flung this way and that, rattling. Rattling. (p.15)

And here, his auditory faculties alert to the different sounds around him:
Pat-pat-pat. No, it was not the rhythm of the verse, he realized, but the tapping of her foot, green-sandalled, red-nailed, swinging and swinging to lift the hem of her sari up and up. His eyes slid off the hook, watched the flowered hem swing out and up, out and up as the green-sandalled foot peeped out, then in, peeped out, then in. For a while, his tongue ran on its own volition:

'All birds come home, and all rivers,
Life's ledger is closed . . .

But he could not continue ... it was the foot, the sandal that carried on the rhythm exactly as if he were still reciting. Even the radio stopped its rollicking and, as a peremptory voice began to enumerate the day's disasters and achievements all over the world, Mr. Bose heard more vigorous sounds from his kitchen as well. There too the lulling pigeon sounds had been crisply turned off and what he heard were bangs and rattles among the kitchen pots, a Kettledrum of commands, he thought. The baby, letting out a wail of surprise, paused, heard the nervous commotion continue and intensify and launched himself on a series of wails. (pp. 16-17)

Another story Studies in the Park deals with the character's realization of self in the context of the family. Sune, the narrator, is all the time persuaded by his family to work hard for the approaching examinations so that he can achieve the highest position. He is oppressed by such exhortations that repeatedly fall on his ears like worms . . .

On his way to work, he [Sune's father] looked in to say, 'Remember, Sune, I expect good results from you. Study hard, Sune.' Just behind him, I saw all the rest of them standing, peering in, silently. All of them stared at me, at the exam I was to take.
At the degree I was to get, or not get. Horrifying thought. Oo study, study, study, they all breathed at me while my father's foot-steps went down the stairs, crushing each underfoot in turn. I felt their eyes on me, goggling, and their breath on me, hot with earnestness. I looked back at them, into their open mouths, and staring eyes. (pp. 21-22)

And later:

My father laid his hand on my shoulder. I knew I was not to fling it off. So I sat still, slouching, ready to spring aside if he lifted it only slightly. 'You must get a first, Suno!' he said through his nose, 'must get a first, or else you won't get a job. Must get a job, Suno!' he mopped and wiped his nose and went off, his patent leather pumps squealing like mice. I flung myself back in my chair and howled. Get a first, get a first, get a first — like a railway engine, it went charging over me, grinding me down, and left me dead and mangled on the tracks. (p. 28)

Suno, crushed under the weight of the impending disaster (the exams), finds himself alive in the world of the dead — "a world in which ghosts went about, squeaking or whining, rattling or rustling." (p. 29). This gloomy attitude of Suno's mind takes a different turn with his vision of a Muslim couple whose relationship is not defined:

who was this man — her husband, her father, a lover? I couldn't make out although I watched them without moving, without breathing. I felt not as I were gazing at a painting or a sculpture, if I were staring rudely at strangers but as if some work of art. Or seeing a vision. (p. 30).

This vision transforms the entire pattern of his life, and it becomes for him a 'search':
Yes, it is a search, a kind of perpetual search for me and now that I have accepted it and don't struggle, I find it satisfies me entirely, and I wander about the park as freely as a prince in his palace garden. I look over the benches, I glance behind the bushes, and wonder if I shall ever get another glimpse of that strange vision that set me free. I never have but I keep hoping, wishing. (pp.32-33)

Surface features is a story about Harish — a character whose existential philosophy of life makes him see not merely the surface reality but the 'deeper' reality. He feels the earth "in search of an interesting surface" (p.39). The story starts with his feeling for an interesting surface at the sight of a melon on the dining table:

All through the meal his eyes remained fixed on the plate in the centre of the table with its big button of a yellow melon. He left most of his rice and pulses on his plate ... he reached out to touch the melon that so captivated him. With one finger he stroked the coarse grain of its rind, rough with the upraised criss-cross of pale veins. Then he ran his fingers up and down the green streaks that divided it into even quarters as by green silk threads, so tenderly. (p.35)

The same tendency goes on with his profession:

As he walked back to his office which issued ration-cards to the population of their town, he looked about him vaguely but with hunger, his eyes resting not on the things on which people's eyes normally rest -- signboards, the traffic, the number of an approaching bus -- but on such things, normally considered non-descript and unimportant, as the paving stones on which their feet momentarily passed, the length of wire in a railing at the side of
the road, a pattern of grime on the windowpane of a disused printing press. Amongst such things his eyes roved and hunted, and when he was seated at his desk in the office, his eyes continued to slide about -- that was Shalla's phrase later: 'slide about' -- in a musing, calculating way, over the surface of the crowded desk, about the corners of the room, even across the ceiling. He seemed unable to focus them on a file or a card long enough to put to them his signature -- they lay unsigned and the people in the queue outside went for another day without rice and sugar and kerosene for their lamps and Janta cookers. Harish searched -- slid about, hunted, gazed.... (p.36)

Ultimately, Harish is dismissed from the job. He cannot look after his family and goes away from the town leaving his wife and children behind, and discovers finally the 'paradise' he had been hunting for -- "Outside the town the land was rocky and bare and this was Harish's especial paradise, each rock having a surface of such exquisite roughness, of such perfection in shape and design, as to keep him occupied and ecstatic for weeks together. Then the river beyond the rock quarries drew him away and there he discovered the joy of fingering silk smooth stalks and reeds, stems and leaves." (p.39)

It is ironical that in the end, Harish comes to be treated as a 'Swami' by the women-folk of the village. They had never seen a swami 'who looked holier, more in-human than Harish with his matted hair, his blue, starved skin and single-focused eyes' (p.39), so they started worshipping him -- "Harish did not speak and his silence made him still holier, safer. So they worshipped
him, fed and watched over him, interpreting his moves in their own fashion, and Harish, in turn, watched over their offerings and worshipped" (p. 40). As observed by a reviewer in British Book News (November 1976), the civil servant who 'drops out' from job, from family, even from speech, intoxicated (like any modern sculptor of the West) by the mere textures of the world -- stalks, reed, stem, leaves, stones -- 'slides into madness and joins India's unkempt army of holy men.'

Stories like Sale, Pineapple Cake and The Farewell Party deal with the vain and nugatory tendencies of the Indian "upper" classes. Sale exemplifies the empty-minded rich -- two men and a woman -- having a good deal of discussion with the painter about painting in general and about the particular pictures the painter shows them. But when it comes to buying, the three visitors unashamedly back out. Their hollow and cynical personalities are exhibited through their speech and action throughout the story. The following extract well illustrates their characteristics:

"Really!" she exclaims, shaking her enamelled ear-rings. "How wonderful to be able to imagine such forms, such colours. Look, Ram, aren't they pretty?" The two men become infected by her exaggerated attitude of relaxation. They begin to

prowl about the room, now showing amusement at the litter which is after all, only, to be expected in an artist's studio, then crinkling their noses for, one has to admit, it does smell, and then showing surprised interest in the pictures of which they have come to select one for their home which is newly built and now to be furnished. ... The woman gives cry upon cry of excitement and turns again and again to the artist who stands watching them thoughtfully. (p.43)

To quote R.S. Sharma, "The story is a biting satire on these philistines who spend time on discussing art but have no real ability or intention either to appreciate or promote it." 12

Pineapple Cake deals more or less with the same empty existence of the people who have the fortune of having been born and brought up under wealthy stars but whose mental faculties do not keep pace with their wealth. Here, the one Mrs. Fernandes is all excited to attend a marriage ceremony, and coaxes her son Victor to get dressed up by promising him a pineapple cake: "You like pineapple cake, don't you? Well, come along, get dressed quickly -- yes, yes, the velvet shorts -- the new shoes, yes -- hurry -- pineapple cake for good boys. ..." (p.5). The rest of the story shows the experiences of the children on such occasions, how they fall under the false pretensions of adults. But ultimately, the story very successfully contrasts the point of view of children and that of the vain adults whose instinctive urges overcome all their sense of

12op. cit., p.157.
modesty and sophistication. The boy realizes the ugly, the
gross aspects of life and forgets all about the pineapple
cake when someone's death interrupts the wedding ceremony.
But his mother remains unaware of the happening and gulps
down her cake, giving the child's arm an excited tug.

'Sit down, man', she whispered furtively, 'here
comes the pineapple cake', and to his amazement,
a plate of pastries was actually on the table
now -- iced, coloured and gay. 'Take it, take the
pineapple cake', she urged him, pushing him towards
the plate, and when the boy didn't move but stared
down at the pastry dish as though it were the corpse
on the red cheesecloth sofa, her mouth gave an impatient
twitch and she reached out to fork the pineapple
cake onto her own plate. She ate it quickly, wiping
her mouth primly, she said, 'I think we'd better
go now.' (P. 55)

The story adroitly holds up the vices, the follies, the vain
lives of the older uncultivated generation. It leaves us with
'a bitter taste in the mouth'.

In The Farewell Party again it is the upper class milieu
with which the writer shows her concern. It is the same false,
pretentious characters revealing their insignificant, their
unreal mode of existence; 'wandering about with a glass in one
hand and a plate of cheese biscuits in the other, she gave a
start now and then to see an acquaintance emerge from the
darkness. ... 'Oh', she cried several times that evening, 'I
didn't know you had arrived. I've been waiting for you,' she would add with unaccustomed intimacy..." (pp. 62-63).

A Devoted Son is a moving story of father-son relationship. The father is tradition-bound and illiterate, while the son is modern, well-educated, possessing a scientific outlook. The conflict occurs when the son makes his father observe some restrictions on his food-habits in order to maintain good health and in order to recover from the disease he is suffering from. But the father remains adamant and rather feels shocked to find that his own son does not even give him the food he wants to have. Thus they look at one thing from two different viewpoints, and the writer thus contrasts the old and the new values.

Pigeons at Daybreak treats a different kind of theme—a theme very rarely dealt with by the writer. It is a story about the happy life of an old couple. The theme is Indian, with a typical, realistic Indian touch. When the old man is confronted with frequent attacks of asthma, his wife, like a true Indian woman, serves him with care and kindness: 'Otima, Otima, I can't breathe,' he moaned. She put the papers away and rose with a sigh of irritation and anxiety—'I'll bring you your inhaler. Don't get worried. Just don't get worried, she told him and bustled off to find his inhaler and cortisone" (p.101).
In *Scholar and Gypsy*, the conflict is between David and his wife, Fat. David visits India in connection with his research project. His wife feels miserably dismayed when she has to attend the parties in Bombay. She feels that the chief occupation of people in Bombay was -- going to parties.

She was always on the point of collapse when she arrived at one. ... Then the parties they went to were all very large ones. The guests all wore brilliant clothes and jewellery, and their eyes and teeth flashed with such primitive lust as they eyed her slim, white-sheathed, blonde self, that the sensation of being caught up and crushed, crowded in and choked, sent her into corners where their knees pushed into her, their hands slid over her back, their voices bored into her, so that when she got back to the hotel, on David's arm, she was more like a corpse than an American globe-trotter. (p.109)

What appears meaningful to Fat, appears meaningless to David. When they arrive in Manali, Fat is deeply fascinated by the village, the orchards, the tourists and their vehicles. But all this seems trifling to her husband: 'Aren't you funny?' he commented. 'I take you the length and breadth of India, I show you palaces and museums, jewels and tiger skins -- and all the time you were hankering after a forest and an orchard and a village. Little Gretchen you, little Martha hum?' (pp.127-28).

But she feels that it is an escape for her (in India) from India: "This isn't like the rest of India, Dave. It's come to me as a relief, as an escape from India. You know, down in those horrible cities, I'd gotten to think of India as one horrible temple, bursting, crawling with people -- people on their knees,
hopeless people — and those horrible idols towering over them with their hundred heads and hundred legs — all horrible. ..." (p.128).

And finally this escapade makes her acquire a new reality — away from the older one. She is seen "striding through the daisy-splattered yard in her newly acquired hippy rags..." (p.138).

V

The writer's talent in the construction of dialogue gives it the pleasant effect of naturalness, falling, as it does, from the speaker's lips spontaneously and unaffectedly:

"Please, ma, please," they begged. We'll play in the veranda and porch — we won't go, a step out of the porch.

"You will, I know you will, and then --'
"No -- we won't we won't", they wailed. (Games at Twilight, p.1)

The use of pauses and interruptions gives the dialogues a natural tone:

"You are a magician", says the quiet man, shaking his head and turning to a crayon drawing of pale birds delicately stalking the shallows of a brooding sea. 'Look at these — I can't believe you haven't actually painted them on the spot'.
'No, I have not, but I do know the sea. You know, I am a fisherman! I should have been -- my people are. How do you like this one of fishing boats? I used to see them coming in like this, in the evening, with the catch. And then my mother would cook one large one for dinner -- oh, it was good, good!' (Sale, p.45)

For the heightening of emotional effects, handy use is sometimes made of the device of repetition. See in The Devoted Son, the father's talk: "Keep your tonic -- I want none -- I want none -- I won't take any more of -- of your medicines. None. Never." (p.81).

Characters like Ravi, Bose, Sano, Victor and his mother, Mr. Varma, Rakesh, Bina, Mr. and Mrs. Basu -- are all convincing as fictional personages because their behaviour closely approximates to that of real people we come across in life. Sano is a typical Indian character -- there is nothing uncommon about the way a student makes preparations for an examination. He is mentally compressed on account of his inability to study in the 'populated, crowded household', where the word 'quiet' is unknown: the father listening to the news in the radio in six different languages; the mother cutting and slicing, chopping and frying the vegetables, and then the turning on of the tap "roaring and pouring, pouring and roaring into a bucket without a bottom."

Characters like Ravi and Mr. Bose are universal as they concern themselves with problems common to all men. Ravi's love
for power and victory and Mr. Bose's love for wealth and comfort make these universal characters, sharing such traits with people in real life.

The language of the stories is simple, though not wholly devoid of adornment and ornamentation. But the careful selection and arrangement of words expresses the unified design. Margaret Widdemer, a successful novelist, short story writer, essayist and poet, says that the necessary qualification of a writer is 'word-sense'. He should have

... pleasure in, and instinct for making every word do its proper work. A writer should want, by nature, to make words and phrases do the very best they can for him. A famous French writer's phrase, le mot juste, or "exact word", should be one of the watchwords of the writer, remembered consciously or not. You should love words as a sculptor loves clay. They are your clay to be modeled. You should want, after the first creative instinct has flung them on paper, to rearrange and substitute and adjust words and phrases until they are a hundred percent right. You should have a strong feeling for the shape and colour and impact of words; they are the material body of your creative thought.13

Anita Desai possesses this instinct for the 'exact word'. Frequently her aim is to give the reader the effect of concreteness. And for this purpose she looks for words which not only say what she means, but say it with the greatest amount of picture i.e., we are treated to a visual representation of the

thing or the person being depicted — "their faces were
pale and triangular in the dusk," *(Games at Twilight, p.8)*.
"After running his fingers over the tampura strings, he put
it down on the carpet and suddenly stretched out his hand
so that the fine white muslin sleeve of his Kurta fell back
and bared his arm, strong and muscular as an athlete's with
veins finally marked upon the taut skin..." (p.58).

Furthermore, as in the longer works, here also we find
the exact and accurate words that stand with rigorous precision,
for the things and objects they refer to. The flowers and trees,
the fruits and birds are specified through their proper names:
bougainvillea, eucalyptus, crotona, hibiscus, tulsi, cannas,
palm trees, oleander, lily, tobacco flower, pipal tree, lotus,
deodar, dog-roses, mistle-toe, balsam; jaman, mulberries,
banana, melon, grapes, mangoes, strawberries, apricots; chipmunks,
pigeons, parrots, bul-bul, hyena, seagulls, cicadas etc. The
adjective, especially in the English language, is a very useful
part of speech for lending emphasis, colour, and picturesque
ness to any description. By Anita Desai also, the adjectives are
used for better effect: homing sparrows, calm face, stony soil,
wax white, well-tended gardens etc. And occasionally they are
used predicatively also — "the house that was not cool," "the
trees and the bushes around them stood inky and sepulchral."

Normally plain and natural, the writing is sometimes
marred by a tendency to use excessively quaint and ornate words;
"superciliously," "hirsute," "lugubrious," "puerillanimit" etc. which seem to interfere with the smooth flow of the narrative and give the impression of avoidable grandiloquence.

In the matter of diction, one of the interesting features of Indo-Anglian literature is the use of words from Indian languages in novels and stories written in English. This phenomenon, which is widespread, is not, however, peculiar to Indian writers, nor can it be said to have been invented by them. It was merely one of the natural and inevitable consequences of the "British Connection," because when two cultures meet — in whatever circumstances — one of the inescapable results is the exchange of vocabulary between the languages in which those cultures are expressed.

The export of Hindustani words to England and their absorption in the English language, began long ago. Englishmen returning home at the end of their careers in the Indian Civil Service or the Indian Army would carry with them not only recipes of Indian foods (sometimes a cook and a bearer too) but also a fund of Hindustani words which, in the society of their friends, helped to heighten their exotic charm and, in their own minds, lent another dimension to their nostalgic recollections of those wonderful days in the most prestigious outpost of the Empire. Not many English children of school-going age today would know that words like curry, buggy,
khaki, Maharaja, Nabob, Sirdar, pundit, which occur routinely in the Oxford dictionary were brought by their ancestors from India. Simultaneous and equally abundant was the traffic of words in the opposite direction, resulting in the naturalization of a host of English words in the Indian languages. How many Indian schoolchildren today are really aware that familiar words like bus, car, cycle, passport, school, station, telephone did not originate in their mother-tongues?

It is therefore not surprising that Hindustani words are found to be widely scattered in the English writings of Indian writers. The very name "Indo-Anglian", indeed, seems to contain both an explanation and a justification of the phenomenon. When the theme and subject-matter are Indian, the characters and their environs are Indian, many names of things Indian will inevitably find their way into the narration. Things which exist universally may easily be described in any language. But if a thing is peculiar or exclusive to one nation or culture, it is often hard -- sometimes impossible -- to do justice to it through translation. Which lexicographer, for example, can ever hope to furnish a precise English equivalent for jalebi or dhoti?

The use of such words is, in fact, not only unavoidable in the circumstances but also, if resorted to in a judicious manner and at the right places, positively desirable as a part of the writer's design to enhance the "realism" of his story by
heightening its local colour. To impart a "local habitation and a name," a wholly alien vocabulary may not suffice.

In the writings of Anita Desai, the use of Indian words for exclusively Indian things is frequent, but it is neither excessive nor injudicious, whenever the setting or the context needs them, they are used unreservedly and without hesitation. Thus we have, in all her works, a liberal sprinkling of words like puja, purées, halva, jalebi, kheer, samosas, bhang, dhoti, borkha, pyjama, kurta, mubarak, mohalla, and many others. Most of these words are virtually untranslatable, because exact equivalents do not exist in English. Their contrast with the rest of the text is, however, always indicated by printing them in italics. This is as it should be, but one would wish that their meanings were explained in footnotes or in a glossary at the end of each story and novel, for the special benefit of readers who do not know any of the Indian languages.

As in the novels, in the stories too, the devices of simile and comparison are fully exploited to heighten the effect: "It was very much darker inside, like a cave, scooped out of a tree trunk" (SCHOLAR & GYPSY, p.122). "Mothers would sit together in flocks like screeching birds" (STUDIES IN THE PARK, p.27). All the stories give evidence of the writer's metaphorical thinking. She seems to suffer, like most writers, from Flaubert's dilemma: "Comparisons consume me like flies."
The later stories are comparatively free from lyrical prose passages, or what we call 'purple passages' that abound in the earlier stories, like the following in *Gnomes at Twilight*:

The bougainvilleas hung about it, purple and magenta, in livid, balloons. The garden outside was like a tray made of beaten brass, flattened out on the red gravel and the stony soil in all shades of metal—aluminium, tin, copper and brass. No life stirred at this arid time of day -- the birds still drooped, like dead fruit, in the papery tents of the trees; some squirrels lay limp on the wet earth under the garden tap. The outdoor dog lay stretched as if dead on the veranda mat, his paws and ears and tail all reaching out like dying travellers in search of water. He rolled his eyes at the children -- two white marbles rolling in the purple sockets, begging for sympathy -- and attempted to lift his tail in a wag but could not. It only twitched and lay still.

The setting or atmosphere serves different purposes. In the story cited above, it works as a visual aid to our imagination through exquisite word-pictures: "It grew darker in the shed as the light at the door grew softer, fuzzier, turned to a kind of crumbling yellow pollen that turned to yellow fur, blue fur, grey fur. Evening. Twilight. The sound of water gushing, falling. The scent of earth receiving water, slaking its thirst in great gulps and releasing that green scent of freshness, coolness." (p.7).

The illusion of reality in stories like *Studies in the Park* and *The Accompanist* is heightened by the use of first-person narration. Here we hear the stories from the characters...
as narrators. But in the majority of the stories, the author is omniscient. She tells the stories in her own right, familiarising us with what the characters are thinking, feeling, or doing. She describes the actions of the characters, tells us what they are feeling, and then makes her own interpretative or evaluative comments.

One of his worst afflictions, Mr. Basu thought, was not to be able to read the newspapers himself. To have them read to him by his wife. He watched with fiercely controlled irritation that made the corners of his mouth jerk suddenly upwards and outwards, as she searched for her spectacles through the flat. By the time she found them -- on the ledge above the bathing place in the bathroom, of all places; what did she want with her spectacles in there? -- she had lost the newspaper. When she found it, it was spotted all over with grease for she had left it beside the stove on which the fish was frying. This reminded her to see the fish before it was overdone. 'You don't want charred fish for your lunch, do you?' she shouted back when he called. He sat back then, in his tall-backed cane-chair, folded his hands over his stomach and knew that if he were to open his mouth now, even a slit, it would be to let out a scream of abuse. So he kept it tightly shut (Pigeons at Daybreak, p.98).

The omniscient angle of narration is convenient, easy, and effective. By its use, the author freely x-rays the minds of the characters and reports what they think and what forces prompt them to action. The following illustration given through omniscient angle shows that Raman does not have the adaptability to mix up with society, he finds himself in a fix when a large number of friends and well-wishers come to his house to attend the farewell party:
Harassed, perspiring, his feet burning, Hasan was nevertheless pleased to be so obviously employed and be saved the strain of having to converse with his motley assembly of guests; he had no more gift for society than his wife had. Ice cubes were melting on the table-cloth in slopping puddles and he had trouble in keeping track of his bottles ... and a bottle of Remy Martin that he was keeping guiltily to himself, pouring small quantities into a whisky glass of his elbow and gulping it down in between mixing some very weird cocktails for his guests. There was no one at the party he liked well enough to share it with ... it occurred to him that everyone had forgotten him, the host ... that he ought to move out, mingle with the guests. But he felt himself drowned, helplessly and quite delightfully, in Remy Martin, in grass, in a border of purple cornflowers. (The Farewell Party, pp.88-89).

And again, "... he glanced into the lighted room where his children and the children of neighbours and guests had collected, making themselves tipsy on fanta and coca-cola ... he smiled and wished he had a ticket, a passport that would make it possible to break into that party within a party" (pp.89-90). The use of the convention of omniscience, in short, enables the writer to assume to power of knowing everything about every character.

VI

'There is a world elsewhere' (Coriolanus, III, iii, 135). So also in these stories there is a vein of encounters with death -- the longing for annihilation. An old man overwhelmed by the 'conduct' of the 'dutiful' son, cries in exasperation: "God is
calling me -- and they won't let me go', and later 'I'm dying.
Let me die..." (The devoted son, p. 79, 81).

The Farewell Party ends with the recitation by one
Bannerjee's wife, of the sweetest, the saddest song, sung in
heartbroken tones --

'Father, the boat is carrying me away,
Father, it is carrying me away from home'.
(p. 97)

And what is more, even the children, in their play seem to
long for the final extinction, ducking their heads and intoning:

'The grass is green,
The rose is red;
Remember me.
When I am dead, dead, dead, dead...

(Games at Twilight, p. 9)

The writer's preoccupation with death and fatality is in
part meant to expose the despair, the pessimism, engendered by
the alienated spirit of the modern man. "Anita Desai seems to be
struggling in her art towards the mastery of a violence which
seems to threaten not only her protagonists but also her own-
self." 14

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14 R. S. Sharma, op. cit., p. 167.