CHAPTER - 5

Semantics of Desai’s Novels
CHAPTER - V
SEMANTICS OF DESAI'S NOVELS

5.1 Topic

Literature holds the mirror to the society; literature reflects the society; literature is about the society; it speaks of the weal and woe of the society; it is the tale of the society, that is human society. So, it is natural that literature highlights different aspects of the society; it exposes the relations among different human beings in their different roles. Therefore, human relationship has been a major topic of literature. Fiction with its vast scope and magnitude is more akin to life than any other form of literature.

But the treatment of human relationships in the Indian fiction brings out a clear-cut distinction between the Indian and western social systems and values. As R.K.Narayan says, western society is based on a "totally different conception of man-woman relation from 'ours' and it can certainly be demonstrated that marital bliss is a more
frequent subject in Indian novels than romantic love."

The western novelists lay emphasis on the individual, while the Indian English novelists emphasise the importance of the family. Western civilization is predominantly individualistic, but in the social value-system of India, renunciation of the individual ego is regarded as the most desirable thing. As Meenakshi Mukherjee says, "The fulfilment of oneself, however desirable a goal according to the individualistic ideals of western society, has always been alien to Indian tradition, especially when it is achieved at the cost of duty to the family."

So, being an Indian writer Anita Desai chooses family life to be the topic in many of her novels. Family life is a network of relationships viz. husband-wife relationship, parent-child relationship, brother-sister relationship, brother-brother/sister-sister relationship. Sometimes, the relationship of an individual to the society also defines the relationship in the family. Therefore, in her first novel "Cry, The Peacock", she depicts the parent-child relationship in a very peculiar way. Maya, a pampered child of an affluent father has got every thing in life, but her
mother's early death makes her feel neglected, her father never neglects her. So, when she suffers from loneliness, she longs to see her father: - "I wish I could see father again. It always helps." She remembers with intense longing the breakfast sessions in the garden as good "as a revel of elves and fairies." On such occasions she was fed on fairy tales, The Arabian Nights, the glories and bravado of Indian mythology, long and astounding tales of princes and regal queens, of jackals and tigers.

Such an atmosphere makes her unable to cope with the natural and normal problems of life. Her husband does not like the childish behaviour of Maya's and he angrily remarks,

"He is the one responsible for this, for making you believe that all that is important in the world is to possess. Life is a fairy tale to you still."

No doubt, Maya's unhappy and pampered childhood is responsible for her abnormal behaviour to a very great extent, but his father cannot be blamed for that. This is because he has advised Maya to give up childish impulses
and act rationally.

The parent-child relationship in "Voices in the City has been dealt with in a very detailed manner. The mother-son relationship turns sour with Nirode suspecting his mother's relationship with Major Chaddha. This shocking fact about his mother makes Nirode feel that - "between him and mother's brilliant territory was erected a barbed wire fence, all glittering and vicious." He feels offended by "the sensual smile which was hideous in his mother."

In Where Shall We Go This Summer? the treatment of parent-child relationship is of a peculiar kind. Sita, in her childhood, was deprived of the filial love - both his mother's and father's. That emotional insecurity of her childhood affects her personality in the future. As a mother she also cannot show sufficient love and affection towards her children. Therefore, her children like the father more than mother. She feels betrayed and neglected both by her husband and children. She looks upon herself "as a woman unloved" and "a woman rejected".
The parent-child relationship is shown in a unique way in *Fire on the Mountain*. A grandmother (Nanda Kaul) who has been ignored by her husband, feels more ignored when her granddaughter (Raka) also ignores her. His granddaughter's taking interest in somebody else pains her a lot.

"What had pained her most was seeing Raka run after Ramlal and swing from his arm. She had not even called her Nani to come and see later."

In *Clear Light of Day* the parent-child relationship has been presented in a moving manner. The parental indifference has resulted in similar indifference in the children.

Bitter or sweet, man-woman (husband-wife) relationship has been the central subject of literature and it has been depicted in a variety of ways. Like any other writer, Anita Desai has also been influenced by the contemporary intricate social situation in dealing with the husband-wife relationship in her novels. Her novels speak of the agonies, heartaches and the shocks of embittered man-woman
relationship. If we hardly get a glimpse of the delights and exultation of mutual, reciprocated love, it is the prevailing conditions of the contemporary society that she tries to explore through her characters.

This novel *Cry, the Peacock* depicts the failure of marriage, which is the resultant of husband-wife alienation.

In *Voices in the City* Anita Desai exposes the unhappy married life of the parents which influences the life of their children. Marriage has not been viewed as something sacred and harmonious in this novel.

Man-woman relationship has been depicted in a social milieu characterised by racial discrimination in *Bye-Bye Black Bird*

*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* projects the marital relationship as abnormal.

*Fire on the Mountain* exposes the frustration caused by an unhappy marriage.
It is natural that a novelist like Anita Desai exploring the inner psyche of the characters deals with topics centering problems like alienation, suffering, boredom and so on. Though a literary writer, with her intuitive and imaginative insight into the complexities of human nature and life, she has been found to be very sincere to her commitment, (if any) as a literary artist.

5.2 Focus:

Anita Desai in her first novel Cry, The Peacock focuses on temperamental difference between Maya and Gautama. Maya, the wife is half neurotic due to over-attention and excessive breeding in childhood. So, in the beginning of the novel, Toto, her pet dog’s death causes unexpected havoc in Maya but to practical Gautama, the husband, it is no more than a natural phenomenon which can be wiped out by a cup of tea. His calmness is remarkable against her constant pacing with occasional outbursts. He is "As calmly as the mediator beneath the sal tree. " But the misfortune, the "panic stricken posture " of the moment of Toto’s death has left a long mark in her heart to be soothed.
The stubborn routine life of Gautama cannot satisfy Maya, a young heroine interested in everchanging beauty of nature, its sounds and colours.

Preoccupied with a horrible prediction Maya starts losing boldness and mental strength by the amateur palmist Shikh's persistent gossip of the words like "fate" and "star" and jovial laughter. To it Gautama pleads -- "No educated adult can seriously be expected to believe that the patterns or the movements of the astral bodies--solids, after all, of earth and ice and rock -- or the lines formed in the palms of your hands, and in those of monkeys and gorillas as well, have the remotest influence upon our deeds and actions in our everyday lives--or those of the apes."

Maya dislikes the black mask of humanity, sadistic pleasure associated with the cabarets, and crazy colour of the dim lit club with the dimmer. Anita Desai's heroines are not ordinary women--they are women of sense and sensibility. Maya is one of them. Her sense of civility, her love for aesthetic life get expressed in her hatred for cabaret dancers. "I felt myself trapped at an oneiric ball where the black masks that I had imagined to be made of paper turned
out to be of living flesh, and the living flesh was only a
mockery, a gathering of crackling paper. It was perverse, it
was wrong, but it was a fact, a fact that had been taken for
the truth. Values were distorted in that macabre halfflight with
its altering tints, at an hour when those values would have
been all-important."

Maya's sensibility has no value for Gautama. Maya
is governed by whims, but Gautama by logic; Maya stands
for attachment, Gautama for detachment of life. When Maya
wants to go to south to visit the Kathakali dancer Gautama
dismises it by saying that they can enjoy it while the party
will be visiting Dehli, their own town. Again, Maya's sexual
desire is repelled by Gautam's intelligence. His intelligence
does not care for a replica of silken skin but " the elongated,
etiolated one of an intellectual, refined by thought and
reflection, bereft of the weaknesses of impulses, aloof from
coarseness and freshness. " For Gautama comforts and
cosies which Maya longs for are crime. She is spoilt. So,
once he remarks :- " Yes, and all you ever knew was
happiness. What a crime ! A crime because it was a
delusion. And here you are, capable of seeing nothing but
delusions imagining them to be real."
Gautama's indifference to Maya's appreciation for beauty of nature serves as an excuse for the killing of Gautama. Gautama is not only indifferent to Maya's platonic love of nature, he also fails to distinguish the smell of lemons from the smell of petunias. As Maya meditates -- "The blossoms of the lemon tree were different, quite different: of much stonger, crisper character, they seemed cut out of hard moon shells, by a sharp knife of mother-of-pearl, into curving scimitar petals that guarded the heart of fragrance. Their scent, too, was more vivid - a sour, a stringent scent, refreshing as that of ground lemon peel, a crushed lemon leaf."

Maya wanders in a world of fantasy. Her world has greenery and flower beds. Her world is the world of purity and peacock, but to Gautama, it is an idle thought of an idle mind. Her world is full of dreams as apposed to Gautama's world of facts. She remembers the finely groomed hand that places solvers of fruit upon my plate seems made of alabaster and ivory, fashioned by those magic carvers of ivory that sit beside the Taj Mahal, creating one humble replica of the inamorta's mousoleum after another".
While Maya believes in a life of total absorption and involvement, Gautama preaches to her the need of detachment, "detachment of every count". This temperamental difference mars the joy of their strolling together. As she says -- And so we strolled up and down the lawn, talking desultorily, not really listening to each other, being intent, on our own paths, which, however, ran parallel and closely enough for us to briefly brush against each other, now and then, reminding us --- or, perhaps only myself --- of the peace that comes from companion life alone, from brother flesh."

Gautama ignores Maya as a wife; he treats her as a child, but Maya loves him intensely. To express her love for Gautama she says - "Oh you know nothing, understand nothing, nor will you ever understand. You know nothing of me --- and of how I can love. How I want to love. How it is important to me. And you don't love me."

Maya may not have succeeded as a wife in capturing Gautama's mind, but the brief moments that they spend together are always accompanied with philosophical
and logical discussions. Words like "attachment" and "detachment" from the Gita, logical interpretation of "Karma" and "love" birth and incarnation speak much of the two polarised outlooks. Once Gautama says, "Now what is it? he sighed, in utter disgust. Really, it is quite impossible to talk to a woman."

Her second novel "Voices in the City" focuses on a struggle for freedom. The three protagonists Monisha, Amla and Nirode chase their own solutions through personal suffering. Their effort is to renounce the world and to unite self and the soul. They try to free themselves from doubt and disillusion through suffering. Monisha does it by adoring "our feet in the grass", Amla by appreciating art and painter Dharma, Nirode by experimenting with failure.

In moment of difficulties, Monisha recites from the Bhagvat Gita. She keeps away herself from involvement, attachment, wisdom, fruits of action through which the spiritual quest is made towards a greater attainment. Devaluation in the standard of living affects Monisha. "Harsh voices," "putrid breaths" and "moist palms" speak of increasing darkness, poverty and disease. Overflowing
gutters speak of the "uneasy lassitude of conscience". Trade houses with swelling iron safe, declare shunning of ethics and the modern cult of materialism. The "yellow flame" of bitterness, the bonfire of anger - burning of trams and buses and of innocent - victims remind T.S.Eliot's "Four Quartets" where feet before faces show a similar sickening sight. Monisha feels suffocated in the vast crowd. The city produces an ugly sight for her. Night also gives her no relief. The sunset is all "ashes and swamped by smog". Images of decay, of disintegration provides a suffocating sensation to the entire novel. The stars seem pale with tuberculosis. Monstrous vulgarity of everyday life, the sniveling women and obscene men of the marriage party speak a lot of spiritual degneration. The world seems to be a wasteland to Monisha. She finds herself encaged. She cries for freedom. Generations of Bengali women behind the barbed windows in half dark rooms "spending centuries" in household work acutely focus on the stagnancy of the prevailing custom. Monisha's reaction to such a world is described in these words - "Lives spent in waiting for nothing, Amla's patience crosses its limit when Nirode
accuses her of mistrust and suspicion. She complains against the city which conspires against all who really wish to enjoy it.

A party with its atmosphere of underlit reality, of incomplete life, arouses a feeling of "stifling fear" in her. The pressure of the yellow glint and the sight of the dancers make her think of pleasure as the most "rotten sensation" of all in Calcutta. The party exposes the artificiality, imitation, the perversity of sex of the city life.

The suffocation of the city life leads her step by step to reach out a decision to remain "alone", apart and enclosed within herself. She wants to be far from the madding crowd. Her strong desire for freedom leads her, at last to commit suicide.

Anita Desai's belief in existential philosophy regards human life as a spectacle of human suffering. Nirode, the male protagonist of the novel quotes Camus: In default of inexhaustible happiness, eternal suffering at last would give us a destiny. But we do not have even that consolation, and worst agonies come to an end one day."
The abnormal behaviour of his mother has so deeply shocked and outraged Nirode that his behaviour towards other members of the family becomes very badly affected. To him, all human relations are unstable and vain.

In *Bye-Bye Black Bird* Anita Desai focuses on the problematic life of the immigrants. Though concentration has been shifted to Dev and Adit, the male characters of the novel, the inner sufferings of Sarah, an English girl with an Indian husband attract our attention.

Adit by marrying an English girl Sarah incurs the anger of the white society, but ironically, Sarah suffers more than Adit on account of this. For the white society, Sarah has broken the social code and therefore, she is subject to taunts and jibes of not only her colleagues but even of the young pupils of the school where she works. She always avoids questions relating to her husband and family, but she is asked such questions only to her embarrassment. One such comment by Julia worsens her condition. "She was still breathing hard at having so narrowly escaped having to answer personal questions. It would have wrecked her for
the whole day to have to discuss Adit with Julia, with Miss Pimm, in this sane, chalk-dusted, work-a-day office. She was willing to listen for hours to Miss Pimm's diagnosis of her aches and pains. "... But to display her letters from India, to discuss her Indian husband, would have forced her to parade like an impostor, to make claims to a life, an identity that she did not herself feel to be her own, although they would have been more than ready to believe her. "... She had stammered out her replies, too unhappy even to accuse them of tectlessness or inquisitiveness and, for her pains, had heard Julia sniff, as she left the room. "If she's ashamed of having an Indian husband, why did she go and marry him? "

Not only grown-ups, even the pupils ignore and taunt her. They pretended not to notice her at all, but once she came across the road, she heard them scream, "Hurry hurry, Mrs Scurry!" and 'where' the fire, Pussy Cat? " This sort of awkward behaviour towards her, affects her day to day life. When she goes for shopping she avoids going to the stores of Laurel Lane where she lives, for her shopping would easily betray her link with India. So, she prefers going to big department store where she would remain an
anonymous buyer, none knowing her asian connections. -" She went into the supermarket to wander amongst the starved shelves

Her another novel Fire on the Mountain focuses on experiences of an elderly woman Nanda Kaul. She is the protagonist, who being tired of the role of a wife, retires to a secluded place. The first part of the novel shows her as the vice chancellor's wife. Being the pivot of the family, "at the hub" she was like the city in Voices in the City. She was crushed under the burden of responsibility. "Too many guests", "too many trays", of tea have annoyed her.

The book speaks of the growing burden of duty and increasing restlessness that simply was too much for her. The society reflected through the visitors, the workload thrust upon in the pretension of duty made her life miserable. So, in her later years, grown up children being away, her suppressed longing for solitude brings her to the mountains. "She had been glad to leave it all behind, in the plains, like a great, heavy, difficult book that she had read through and was not required to read again. " Like Shelley (calling the westwind to lift him as a wave), she came being
attracted by the solitude of Carignano.

Everything was alright for Nanda Kaul but Raka intruded upon her life at Carignano as a mosquito to "tease and worry." For her, Raka stands for anxieties of her life. She like the hoopoe is a threat to her tranquility. Raka's sound is the sound of disorder. She remembers her past when she tried to shut out sound by shutting out light. Sounds seem to invade her past and present and stir her with restlessness. The telephone call, another reminder of the metallic world, is so shrill or painfull, that it cuts "black furrows of desperation," across her face.

Nanda Kaul is "rocky belt", dry, hardened by time and age. Raka is silent, swift and threatening like a forest fire. Her soundlessness is eerie, still then "It had the quality of a dream - disaster, dream-spectres that follow one, trap one. " Nanda is finally trapped and drown to care for the child."

The novel is the story of inabilities of human beings to ignore the world; to place oneself in another's position. Nanda Kaul's feigned isolation, forced banishment
fails before Raka's natural, total rejection of the society. She is thus drawn, as the only link between the outside world and the inner world of the heroine. Her instinctive, effortless refusal of discipline, order and disobedience, her exploring self, has no match in her great grandmother's guarded dislike for clamour. Her inborn genius, gift of avoiding, is an alarm to drag Nanda out of her shell of pretension.

Nanda Kaul fails to attract Raka even though she tactfully describes her past life, the mystical expeditions of her heroic father, fantastic rendering of facts, and the zoo in the parental house in Kashmir. She cannot smother Raka. On the other hand, Raka, independent in her pursuit of nature, "could not bear to be confined to the old lady's fantasy world when the reality outside appealed so strongly."

At times, Nanda Kaul gives the impression of arriving at her "second childhood". She looks "so exactly like a baby", demanding attention. On the other hand, Raka looks strongly aged, beyond her age, her face "black and wrinkled". 
In *Where shall we Go this Summer* Anita Desai focuses on the emotional reaction of a sensitive woman. Sita, a pessimistic and whimsical heroine falls a victim of situation. Her sharp sense puts her in troubles. She considers people to be pariahs — "They are nothing -- nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matter. Animals."

Unlike her other heroines, Desai in Sita creates a character who is responsible for her own troubles. Her first entrance in her father-in-law's "age rotted" flat instigates her to revolt against their "sub-human placidity" and "sluggishness". She unwarrantedly shows her boldness to go against the conventional. She does not like cooking, preparing food but provocatively starts smoking only to irritate her orthodox in-laws. She shifts to another flat to escape from her husband's family. In this, she lacks Monisha's silent brooding and timidity. Even the sea cannot bring her relief from the "aggression and violence" of the city. She discovers her own self in the rocks of the sea which her ceaselessly spilled, and littered with the "rotten carcasses of fish". The city objectified through the hissing sea, shudders her with apprehension of revealing more of the disputable world. Her reactions against "the rapacious claws and beaks"
of the crows ready to tear a weak helpless eagle, "either wounded or too young to fly" make her ridiculous before her children and husband.

The violence and the aggressiveness of these quarreling ayahs with their beastly dirty nails remind Sita of the helplessness of the modern life. She says, "It is like living in the wilds". To her husband, again, she says, "One may be attacked--one's children may be attacked in the streets."

Her quarreling children, "one buckling the other beneath him, being overthrown, then both rolling, both enmeshed, thrashing, grunting" makes her apprehensive. She finds destruction in every form--destruction of the new buds. Her reactions to Menaka's tearing the painting provoke her.

Taken aback by her mother's passionate, almost tearful reaction, Menaka said, "But they are no good. They're not 'worth keeping.' 'They're not worth destroying.' 'If they're bad -- why not?' Menaka shrugged.

Sita as a wife is not against her husband. She is
against Raman's devotion to duty, to reason. She is afraid of the customary life, the old routine, and the old friends. To get rid of the patterned life she manages to escape. She is hurt by the stereotyped, the boredom hidden under the familiar patterns. So, she refuses to give birth to the expected baby. The latent motive is to offer the new arrival a life "unlived", a life "bewitched".

Sita, like Anita Desai's other heroines is modern, but is disturbed by visitors. As it is seen, her heroines are like sensitive plants which shut themselves with every external touch.

Sita's journey to Manori is like Yeat's sailling to Byzantium where she tries to discover the spiritual wholeness, integration amidst the ruins of disintegration. Sita's first experience in the island was full of excitement with the clamour, the legendary figure and the magical deeds of her father. But the second journey, rather an escape melt into the thin air of reality as she realises her childhood reactions were "merely" illusions.

Sita as a wife is against any compromise. Sita says
"no" to Raman's "yes". Sita responds by "I can't" to Raman's "you must". This contrasting views make their life unhappy. Sita cannot find meaning in a meaningless society. Raman's prose and Sita's passion only emphasise the distance between the two. Sita as an individual cannot connect herself with the society. So, B. Ramchandran says - "The novel may, thus, be seen as a parable on the inability of human beings to relate the inner with the outer, the individual with society. It is a story of illusions melting away in the cold light of the everyday and the commonplace."

Unlike Monisha and Maya, Sita realises the reality that a woman, however modern she may be, cannot easily get out of the situation she is placed in. So, she accepts defeat crumples her passion and mingle with the prose of life for the betterment of human relationship.

The light of Clear Light of Day is the light of emancipation, of liberation for the whole class of women to sweep away the darkness of ignorance of oneself and the family, of family values and dignity encircling from generation to generation. It is the perfect medium, the clear light of day to provide them with ample opportunity to
compose themselves to oblige with new ideas and changes.

Anita Desai here, keeps dropping hints at the necessity of change in the patterned outlook of women. So, she focuses on Bim as her voice. The story in this novel is told from Bim's point of view. Though highly sensitive, she, separated from the rest, moves a part to secure a place of her own choice, within a circle containing all time, past and future in it. Time makes it dark as well as rich affecting the deepest selves within reach. She, torn between acceptance and resentment, love and hostility, understanding and misunderstanding of all those who become a part of her, weighs down with exhaustion. Like the bereaved emperor she, utterly alone and defeated, will carry the consequences of every deed, good or bad with her. As she reflects - "Strange that I came with nothing into the world and now I go away with this stupendous caravan of sin ".

She realises at the end. Now, there are no shadows, but the clear light of day. The novelist observes - "They found the courage, after all, to float in it and bathe in it and allow it to pour on to them, illuminating them wholly, without allowing them a single shadow to shelter in."
Bim's revelation removes clouds of grudge, dissatisfaction and depression because of the trecherous behaviour of Raja who does not reciprocate Bim's feelings who sacrifices her life for the sake of the family. There is an authorial comment on the title of the novel which has a broad sympathetic attitude of forgiveness bringing to our minds the final mood of Shakespeare's romances.

The comment very much focuses on Bim and her retrospection:- "Bim could see as well as by the clear light of day that she felt only love and yearning for them all, and if there were hurts, these gashes and wounds in her side that bled, then it was only because her love was imperfect and did not encompass them thoroughly enough, and because it had flaws and inadequacies and did not extend to all equally. She didn't feel enough for her dead parents, her understanding of them was incomplete and she would have to work and labour to acquire it."
5.3 Theme

Any novelist has a personal view of the world; he views the world from his personal angle but he arranges and organises his views and experiences to give it a design that we call "the novel", but while designing it, he focuses his attention on some central idea which makes everything converge on one point. This central idea, precisely called "theme", is the unifying and controlling factor in the organisation of his material. As Flaubert says, the central idea is the mother idea and it is the governing factor from which "all the rest flow in the novel".

Theme is the very nucleus of the whole design. All the component of the novel viz. plot, characterisation, description and setting, the narrative method and style are subject to its shaping pressure. All these components are balanced and functionally related to each other to create a real unity under the magnetic field of the theme. If the theme loses control, the plot-structure gets deformed; characters get out of hand or run away; descriptions become out of place and verbose; incidents and events become irrelevant and improbable; the choice of narrative design becomes
unsuitable. Thus, all the limbs of the novel attain a harmonious fusion under the pressure of the theme.

Any novel as a form of literature is concerned either with "human condition" or "human nature". The novels dealing with human condition speak much of the outward, but those dealing with human nature focus on the basic instincts and emotions that are much inward to be dealt with at the psychological level. In this context it can be said that Anita Desai's novels have central themes revolving around the mental and spiritual developments of the characters. In her themes, Desai is very close to James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. In her novels, we find that action is made secondary whereas psychological analysis is made primary. Her stories are peopled with men and women that we see around us and with happenings such as might occur any day to such people. Familial relationships, especially man-woman relationship, a recurring theme in her novels bears an existential touch. She has been influenced by the philosophy of existentialism which speaks a lot on alienation, despair, frustration, anxiety and the emotional life of the individuals. She can be called an existentialist novelist showing profound skill in exploring the "emotional life" of
the people in the stories.

Though the titles of all the novels of Anita Desai are significant and expressive, "Cry, the Peacock", the title of her first novel is perhaps more expressive than any of her other novels. The cry of the peacock for love is also an invitation to death. Here, Maya's cry is identified with the peacock's cry. The novel, based on the theme of marital discord and rupture has a married couple Maya and Gautama. Maya is full of life; she wants to enjoy life to its full brim. To her, sexual satisfaction is a must and total denial of it makes her a victim of such abnormal mental disease as neurosis and schizophrenia. Daughter of a wealthy father, she is married to Gautama who is very senior to her in age. To make the matter worse, Gautama is a dry, matter-of-fact and prosaic personality. Gautama, a friend of Maya's father, remains indifferent, oblivious and cold towards her love for everchanging beauty of nature, her interest in the life of birds and animals, in poetry and dance. Gautama is irresponsive towards her seductive postures and her initiative in love-making. More shockingly, Gautama makes disparaging remarks about Maya. Utter lack of communication between the husband and the wife makes the
wife's life miserable. Her condition worsens by her obsession with the prediction by the albino astrologer of death either of her or her husband with four years of their marriage. Maya strongly believes that prediction. May be it is her disturbed mental condition or childish nature, she is haunted by the word "murder" as foretold by the albino astrologer.

Gautama lost in his work is oblivious of the dust-storm that has occurred earlier in the afternoon. On Maya's request, he accompanies Maya on the roof of the house. Coming out of the room Maya prays to the bronze Shiva, the Lord of dance to protect her. While Maya is walking on the roof with Gautama, she is enchanted by the pale hushed glow of the rising moon. She is so enamoured of the moon's beauty that while Gautama, incourse of his movement, comes between the moon and Maya hiding the moon from her view, an agitated Maya pushes Gautama over the parapet to pass through an immensity of air down to the very bottom. Gautama meets his tragic end there. Gautama's mother and sister send disturbed Maya to her father's house.

"Voices in the city" is Desai's second novel which
won her the Sahitya Academy Award. Here, the plot is so skilfully narrated that the critics confuse to decide whether Nirode, a human character or the city of Calcutta is the real hero of the novel. The novel describes the corrosive effects of the city-life upon the Indian family. The novel is divided into four sections - Nirode, Monisha, Amla and "Mother". The chapter-division itself shows the importance of women in the novel. Actually, it is an unforgettable story of a Bohemian brother and his two sisters caught in the cross currents of changing social norms. In this novel the novelist has tried to explore the feminine psychology through the character of Monisha. Monisha like Maya is also childless, sensitive and a victim of maladjusted marriage. Maya craves for company in the family, Monisha being in a joint family of her husband Jiban, craves for privacy. She does not like her sisters-in-law entering her room unhesitantly and discussing Monisha's sarees and her blocked fillopian tubes sitting on Monisha's own bed. The discussion on her being childless adds insult to injury. The suffocation of a sensitive intellectual woman in an un congenial atmosphere of her in-law's house is very nicely expressed through the character Monisha. To her helplessness, she being an intellectual is a non-believer. So, though she reads "the
Bhagwad Geeta" her plight and sufferings continue. She writes in her diary, "of a mad religious faith ... a difficult choice."

She deviates from an average Bengali daughter-in-law. Her life is not happy in the given circumstances. So, she puts an end to her life. She longs for darkness beyond sleep, because even sleep may have nightmares. Being submerged in total darkness, she does'nt want even the stars. Thus she bursts out "Leave me to gather the stars ... a desert to which my heart truly belongs ... (8-138). This echoes the Hamletian dilemma reflected in the famous " to be or not to be " soliloquy.

In exact contrast to Manisha is Sarla, wife of Nirode's rich friend who lives in a Victorian house with many touches of the bygone days. She believes in the philosophy of " eat, drink and be merry. " She has many admirers, white ones mainly, and a few that she calls honey-complexioned " (34). Nirode does not like her. For him, " she seems to belong to the same century as her house, to that class of courtesans who had clung like bracelets or vampires, to its wealth and leisure and decadence. (V.C. P. 34)
Monisha's mother is another peculiar woman character in the novel. According to Amla, her mother is "the most beautiful woman in the world, and very accomplished. None of us is like her, so polished and balanced and contained like a well-cut jewel. (V.C. P 209)

She has a refined taste for flowers, music, and good food but she also suffers from incompatible marriage. Amla's father is a man who derives sadistic pleasure by hurting his own wife. So, after his death, Amla's mother carries on an affair with a retired Major Chadha. Nirode hates this sort of behaviour of his mother, but appreciates the beauty that she has maintained so far.

"Bye-Bye Black Bird" deals with the problem of immigration and racial discrimination tinged with feeling of loneliness. On the surface, it seems to be concerned with the lives of Indian immigrants in England but, it explores the existentialist problems of loneliness and hollowness, adjustment and belongingness tormenting them. The interaction between the local and the individual acquires a new dimension. This is because the tension between the white
local and the immigrant blackbird involves issues of alienation and accommodation that the immigrant has to confront in an alien yet familiar world. The migratory blackbird is drawn to and repelled by the white England as its new habitat.

Dev and Adit are two immigrant Indians who find themselves trapped in England which is a foreign country for them. In the changed social atmosphere of England they find themselves uprooted from their own soil. Dev feels the pain of racial discrimination more acutely than Adit. He finds himself to be one of the eternal immigrants who can never accept their new home and continue to walk the streets like strangers. He is dutifully trying to be busy, unobtrusive and, however superficially, to belong.

Dev is shocked to find the pattern of life in England which is entirely different from that of India. Here, in England he finds everyone a stranger and living in hiding. They live silently and invisibly which could happen nowhere in India.

Dev's friend Adit lives in England with his
English wife Sarah, but he feels suffocated. He finds no change in the behaviour of English people towards him though he has married an English woman. He desires to go back to India to see the Indian landscape of vastness and wilderness, sunrise and sunset. He discovers that he is leading an artificial life in England and he can lead a real life only in India, his motherland.

More shockingly, Sarah, a white girl also suffers from the racial discrimination by her own people only because she has married an Indian. She feels isolated in her own motherland. This feeling of alienation haunts her all the time and even her colleague passes bitter comment on her.

Small children also tease whenever they see her. Torn between two identities Sarah becomes a "Nowhere woman" and she herself cannot know which group does she really belong to.

"She wondered, with great sadness, if she would ever be allowed to step off the stage, leave the theatre and enter the real world whether English or Indian, she did not care. She wanted only its
sincerity, its truth."

"Where Shall We Go This Summer?", her another novel deals with the sense of meaninglessness of life. Here, Sita is a married woman with four children. Though married to a rich businessman Raman Sita has aged abnormally -- her face assuming the aged stillness. She has come to the island of Manori thinking that she would not have the baby which is in her womb. When her husband dissuaded her from going to Manori, Sita cried out

What I'm doing is trying to escape from the madness here, escape to a place where it might be possible to be sane again."

Sita's married life is not smooth. She does not like the company which her husband keeps. She does not like her in-laws. Whatever there may be in her husband, the cause of Sita's unhappiness is rooted in her miserable and lonely childhood. Her hatred for others is shown in these words -

"When they lived, in the first years of their married lives, with his family in their age rotted flat
of Queens Road, she had vibrated and throbbed in revolt against their sub-human placidity, calmness and sluggishness. The more stolid and calm they were, the more she thrummed, as though frantic with fear that their sub-humanity might swamp her. She behaved provocatively— it was there that she started smoking, a thing that had never been done in their household by any woman and even by men only in secret—and began to speak in sudden rushes of emotion, as though flinging darts at their smooth, unscarred faces."

The unhappy childhood affects Sita's personality. She fails as a wife and as a mother as well. She comes back to Manori to escape from the harsh reality and indulge in fantasy, but it is in Manori that her belief in the world of fantasy is shattered. She cannot prefer "a life unlived, a life bewitched" to "a real life".

About the theme of her novel "Clear Light Of Day", Anita Desai herself says—

"My novel is set in old Delhi and records the
tremendous changes that a Hindu family goes through since 1947. Basically, my preoccupation was with recording the passage of time; I was trying to write a four-dimensional piece on how a family's life moves backwards and forwards in a period of time. My novel is about time as a destroyer, as a preserver, and about what the bondage of time does to people. I have tried to tunnel under the mundane surface of domesticity."

The very title of the novel is suggestive. Though it may be suggestive metaphorically, the novel starts with night and ends with daylight. The misunderstanding, hatred and hostility caused by deep-seated prejudices represent the darkness of night, which is removed by the clear light of day which stands for clarity of vision brought about by sympathy, compassion, friendliness and wisdom.

The novel begins with references to communal disturbances; friendly relations between the two major communities are at stake; the future seems to be bleak. However, the forces of darkness and evil looming large on
the horizon are driven back by the forces of gentleness, sanity and understanding and prejudices among the members of the family are removed.

"There was nothing left in the way of a barrier or shadow, only the clear light pouring down the sun. They might be floating in the light—it was as vast as the ocean, but clear without colour or substance or form. It was the lightest and the most pervasive of all elements and they floated in it. They found the courage, after all, to float in it and bath in it and allow it to pour onto them, illuminating them, wholly, without allowing them a single shadow to shelter in."

This novel deals with the life of four members of the family—Tara, Bim, Raja and Baba. Though in small details, the novel speaks of the unhappy married life of Bakul and Tara. The difference between Bim and Raja, though on small matters and intellectual in nature, it becomes so grave that ultimately Raja decides to leave the house to live with the family of Hyder Ali in Hyderabad. Again there is temperamentel difference between Tara and her elder sister
Bim. Tara is meek, submissive, mentally dull and timid whereas Bim is intelligent, strong and curious. Bim blames Tara for her spending a lot on luxurious living when Tara blames Bim for her spending much on books.

The parental neglect towards children is another prominent feature of the novel. Living with the parents the children are deprived of parental affection. For the children their mother was a wife, not a mother. The children, denied filial love by mother, discover a mother in aunt Mira. Their response towards aunt Mira is described very poetically in the novel.

The brother-sister relationship of the Mishra family is rather a sub-plot in the novel. There is social interaction between the two families. Through Mukul, the most interesting character of the Mishra family, the novelist implicitly suggests that no individual should be regarded as a permanently lost.

Bim, the most shining character of the novel attracts every reader with her distinguishing personality. She keeps up her devotion to study. At the same time, she
attends on her mentally retarded brother and old aunt Mira. Very sensibly she gets rid of Dr. Biswas' love approach. Sometimes Bim undergoes a period of inner conflicts. Therefore, she is often unsteady, oscillating but, in the end, she discovers the structure of her own consciousness and achieves wholeness. She develops the awareness of time and its importance in human life, and strives "to be whole and to be sane in the midst of "decay, destruction and death".

Anita Desai's another novel "Fire On The Mountain" is about the frustration of an elderly lady Nanda Kaul, who finds her married life of three decades to be a life of betrayal and shockingly the betrayal from her husband. Her husband, a vice chancellor's love affair with Miss. David, a Mathematics teacher ruins her conjugal bliss. She can not consider her own house to be her own. That disturbance of the past haunts her even when she is leading a seclusive life in Carignano.

Her frustration becomes more acute when her granddaughter Raka also ignores her. Raka's mother's ill health and her father's habit of excessive drinking have deprived Raka of a happy childhood. She has lost faith in all
human relations. So, she gets attracted towards nature. She likes not its beauty or loveliness but its dullness and desolation.

"It was the ravage, destroyed and barren spaces in Kasauli that drew her: the ravine where yellow snakes slept under grey rocks and agaves growing out of the dust and rubble, the skeletal pines that rattled in the wind, the wind levelled hilltops and the seared remains of the safe, cosy, civilized world in which Raka had no part and to which she owned no attachment".

Solitude has influenced her in such a way that "Raka wanted only one thing --- to be alone and pursue her own secret life amongst the rocks and pines of Kasauli".

5.4 Cohesion

Coherence or cohesion in discourse is the quality of sticking together of different signals in an utterance by way of hyponymy, collocability, comparison, repetition,
substitution, consistent tense, etc. (cf. Brown and Yule, 1983: 194). This is the basic need for texture in language use and whose function is to relate utterances to the context in which they are produced (cf. Halliday, 1970: Halliday & Hasan, 1976). "These text-forming, or contextualizing resources may be lexical, grammatical or phonological. For example, such word-forms as 'however' or 'moreover' never occur in what we take to be the system-sentences of English: their function is exclusively that of relating the text-sentences in which they occur to the preceding co-text. Such word-forms as 'but' and 'and', on the other hand, have both a contextualizing and a non-contextualizing function" (Lyons, 1977: 632).

Let's study the following passage from Desai's Bye-Bye Black Bird:

The morning light slid down the lane-lengths of telephone wires, perched a while on the peaks of television aerials and then rolled down the drain pipes into the new-leafed hedges and through the silver caps of the milk bottles on the steps, rang the brass door knockers and set the birds and bottles clinking and clanking in informal
good-morning voices that rose up to Dev's window and politely woke him. But when he pulled out his watch from under his pillow he was disgusted to find it was barely five o'clock. He wondered if it had died in the night of an inability to acclimatize itself, but its steady ticking asserted itself through the bright bead-curtain of bird-and-bottle sounds and he shoved it away with a groan, then put his head beside it under the pillow. But he had mistakenly left the window open at night and now the milky fingers of morning reached through and scrabbled through his winter covering like a giggling tease and eventually he had to emerge, halfsmothered, from the dark pillow and face the window now swimming with liquid light in which the red roofs and blackened brick walls of Clapham stood steady as the keels and hulls of sound old boats that had weathered the wash and swell of another day's tidal wave.

He propped himself up on one elbow, trying to conjure some of yesterday's excitement and buoyancy out of the tiredness of a night's sleep begun too late and ended too early. Groping about for the support of a tranquillizing smoke, he found he had left his cigarettes on top of the brass-knobbed dresser at the far end of the room. There was
nothing for it but to roll out of his dishevelled bed, leap up into the air as his feet touched the freezing floor boards race across to the dresser, snatch up cigarettes and matches and take a flying leap back into his blue quilt. Trying nervously to nurse it back to warmth and keep the bitterness of the cup of tea that would have been brought to him if he were at home in India now, by a mother fresh from her morning prayers, or a servant boy scorched and sooty from a newly made fire. By no stretch of imagination were his host Adit Sen or his wife Sarah likely to do this for him: there was an eiderdown-smothered silence from their end of the flat. Once the cigarette had dwindled to a stub and he had to leap up in order to fling it out of the window into the hedge, he felt he might as well wrap his earthen brown shawl about him and go out to find the kitchen and make himself a cup of tea. It was the first lesson his first day in London taught him: he who wants tea must get up and make it.

In this passage articles as co-reference links have been used in a very interesting way. Seven indefinite articles used with abstract ideas imply familiarity and normalcy. A groan a giggling tease, a night's sleep, a tranquilizing smoke, a mother, a servant, a newly made fire.
a cup of tea etc. The comparison between the life styles go on unconsciously as expressed by this habitual thinking. The definite article has been used generally with concrete objects. Only thrice it has been used with abstract nouns (the wash and swell, the tiredness and bitterness, the support). Such use of definite article with physical objects intensifies their permanence and changelessness; Dev's behaviour has been described with indefinite noun phrases to make him stand out as someone in unfamiliar surroundings. Another device used by Desai to ensure cohesion is repetition. In the above passage the word window has been repeated four times, pillow two times, leap three times, milk, milky two times, bird and bottle two times, steady two times, half-smothered, smothered two times. Apart from that, personal pronouns and demonstratives have been used several times.