CHAPTER – 5

The Aspect of affirmation and reconciliation
CHAPTER 5.1

A study of “SITA”
*(Where shall we go This Summer? 1975)*

Psychic conflicts leading to compromise

Published in 1975, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is Desai’s fourth and perhaps her shortest novel has raised the basic questions regarding the purpose of human life. Whether life is to be moulded according to the conventional ideas or each individual has to arrive at the conclusion regarding the way life has to be moulded are the basic questions analysed by Anita Desai in this novel. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* portrays, in psychological terms, the feelings of ennui, boredom and meaningless existence experienced by a middle-aged married woman. Sita is married to a prosperous businessman and has four children. However, she has no sense of achievement, fulfilment or satisfaction to make her life worthwhile. Like *Cry, The Peacock* and *Voices in the City* a abnormal childhood environment and frustrating human interaction turn her into a disintegrated personality. A motherless child, she experiences partially, neglect and uncertainties right through her childhood. Her situation is just the reverse of Maya’s in *Cry, The Peacock*.

If Maya’s father is over-protective who creates a conflicting situation. Sita’s father neglects her completely. he had no time for his children. A public figure admired and revered by the people, he is too far-off and formidable a person for Sita to approach with filial affection. There is always an “impossibility of talk between her and her father” (79). He is immersed in his self glorification and he regards Jivan and Sita just
as he considers his sycophant chelas and devotees. But he certainly loves Rekha, his eldest daughter.

The atmosphere in which Sita lives and grows is that of neglect, hypocrisy and partiality. Consciously as well as unconsciously, She is uneasy. She questions herself: why and how is it that there is no resemblance between the two sisters? The disclosure that Rekha is not, her real sister drops on her "skin like acid an she felt them burn whenever she caught an exchange of that heavy-lidded look between father and daughter, or his arm in its fine white sleeve lie fondly across her round shoulders"(79). Here is a clear hint of incest. Some other strange secrets in her father's life, also influence the development of her mind. For example, the existence of a mistress in the house bewilders her. In Rekha, Sita could have found the love and affection of a sister and a friend, but due to her fathers partiality she is deprived of her company also. This serves as the foundation stone of her anxiety - ridden personality. Psychologists emphasize the parents' role in determining the character - structure of the child and maintain that "parental defaults of one kind or another neglect, indifference, display of favouritism to another child, over solitude, spoiling can produce basic anxiety, the feeling of a child has of being isolated and helpless in a potentially hostile world."(27). Thus the two cases of parental partiality, one in Cry, The Peacock and the other in Where Shall We Go This Summer? are quite dissimilar. In Maya's case, a tender father's harshness towards a rebel brother is an indication that any move towards independance or autonomy is punishable by withdrawal of love Maya therefore clings to her father for fear of antagonizing him. Sita on the other hand feels discarded and unwanted when she notices her father's tenderness towards Rekha. This experience breeds feeling of worthlessness, and its consequent strategy is rebelliousness.
Sita, cannot corroborate her father's dubious ways - it seeps down her psyche as a bad human experience. Her world is peopled with hypocrisy and hypocrites - the islanders, the chelas, Deedar, Rekha and her father. The only sane and innocent voice is that of Sita who has the courage to make her face wry and declare that the well water is not sweet. Her environment is injurious. It shatters her faith in life and in the goodness of the world. “It is as strange life, an unusual life”; it does not offer her the freedom to acquire unique individuality but lets her "withdraw into the protective chrysalis of childhood for longer than is usual for most.” (63)

The disintegration of family, immediately after fathers death, testifies the bitter truth that they had nothing substantial to bind them as a family. Rekha does not even stop to shed tears for him and leaves "as though she had waited for and planned for this moment of release from the old man's love." (99). Jivan disappears a couple of days before the demise as if he had had a fore knowledge of the calamity. Only Sita stays on to marry Raman, the first man in her life. The family would not have broken so abruptly had there been a sense of belonging.

Belongingness is a subjective feeling in which an individual experiences personal involvement. The most damaging situation for Sita is complete lack of parental matrix. Hypocrisy and partiality apart, her father cannot provide her a home. Her life starts "in the center of a crowd." With calm eyes she had watched the surge and flow of such masses, listened to endless speeches on subject, Swaraj, had her chin chucked, collected, discarded garlands and played with the tinsel till she fell asleep against a bolster and was carried away to someone's house to sleep - always a different someone, it scarcely mattered which one. She belonged, if to anyone,
to this whole society that existed at that particular point in history - like a lamb does to its flock and saw no reason why she should belong to one family along (55).

As Sita does not have a home, she has no feeling of belonging. “Belongingness ... means a subjective feeling of one's personal involvement to the extent that one feels himself to be an integral and indispensable part of the system.”¹ All along, childhood fears of insecurity remain dominant in Sita’s consciousness. A motherless child, neglected by all in favour of a more gifted Rekha, desperately needs someone to belong to. Raman is the first and of course, the only person to take her out of the stifling isolation after her father’s death. He gives her the desired security, social as well as psychological.

Without an affectionate, understanding mother to take care of her, Sita is a victim of emotional deprivation. Her greatest misfortune is that her childhood interaction has not provided her the emotional security needed for the development of a wholesome personality. The social psychologists believe that, “The central elements of personality are acquired in the bosom of the family and men continue to need the warmth, security and intimacy they experience as children. The primary group - especially, although not exclusively, the family- provides for these psychological needs.”³ (28).

Like Monisha, Sita also has a prominent streak of neurotic pride in her. She thinks that everyone around her is leading an animal existence: "They are nothing-nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matters. Animals." (47). When this pride is hurt, she turns vindictive and openly rebels against all social and familial norms in order to feel triumphant.
Raman has an admirable capacity for accommodation and compromise, but Sita's melodramatic manners disappoint him and her children. As he has a high sense of responsibility, he compromises, and continues his relationship with her.

As an adult, the direct and immediate transaction between Sita and social group to which she belongs also prove futile and false. Sita feels lonely as she has not learnt to share her ideas and feelings with others. Such feelings overwhelm her completely when Jivan tells her the reality about her mother. Sita does not find meaning in her own life. As Backer observes "The most difficult realization for man is the possibility that life has no meaning".

The mystery about Sita's mother and the circumstances in which she left children and went to Benaras are all puzzling riddle to her. Unconsciously she is in search of a solution. When she hears that her mother was not dead but had run away to Benaras she is shocked: "Ran away? And left us? Sita stood clutching her hair about, her ears and feet sinking rapidly into the sand (83) This is the externalization of deep sense of betrayal that overwhelms Sita. Here one has to agree with R.D. Laing who writes: It seems that loss of the mother, at a certain stage, threatens the individual with loss of his self. The mot'er, however, is not simply a thing which the child can see, but a person who sees the child. Therefore we suggest that a necessary component in the development of the self is the experience of one self as a person under the loving eye of the mother. (32).

Thus a family is the most important internal group to condition a persons relationship to himself. It is like a flower, with mother as the center,
the children as its petals around it. The most vital link - the mother - is missing in Sita’s life, a deep seed of insecurity is sown in her life.

This leads to an alienation from self; Her vague fears an abiding sense of dissatisfaction, nausea and mortal dread of taking on responsibility of the new comer - all point towards the sense of insecurity and the emotional crises that overtakes over takes Sita, in her middle years, is the consequence of the dubious part played by both the parents - father as well as mother. Sita engages herself in a schizoid presupposition and imagines “She came into the world motherless” (84). Sudhir Kakar emphasizes that “Late childhood masks the beginning of an Indian girl’s deliberate training in how to be a good woman, and hence the conscious inculcation of culturally designated feminine roles. She learns that the ‘virtues’ of the womanhood which will take her through life are submission and docility as well as skill and grace in the various household tasks”(6). Sita’s peculiar childhood has devised this opportunity to her. Mutual trust and understanding, the most beautiful aspects of a mother daughter relationship, have not been her lot to enjoy. She, therefore, fails miserably to inculcate the same with Menaka, her daughter. She also has no faith in her mother and relies much more upon her father for advice regarding her future. When Menaka asks her father to come to Manori and like her back to - Bombay, Sita feels humiliated and ashamed of herself. She does not want to return to Bombay as she feels like a "woman unloved" and a "woman rejected". She feels as if she had no home and belonged to nobody. This is very natural with a child who finds the image of mother broken. It is easy to accept the misfortune if a mother dies instead of a mother who deserts the children”. (34).

“Sita’s life is characterized by an existential search. She, is always in search of something having no clear idea of this something, she turns into a wanderer. “Who? what was she?” is the obsessive thought in her mind. She
is unable to, identify her own self. The disturbing feelings of meaninglessness and loss of identity, are the results of the various impressions which have been "fixated" to a particular portion of her life. She has not acquired the competencies essential for a successful adult living, viz. marriage, parenthood, citizenship and getting along with other people.

Thus neurotic difficulties of both Sita and Maya spring from a motherless childhood, apart from other complementary causes. In Cry, the Peacock the main triangle is of Gautama, Maya and her father. Sudhir Kakkar studies this aspect from a psycho-social angle. Basing his study an Indian culture, he observes that for a girl's "emotional preparation" for marriage and subsequent motherhood, a daughter's best counselor in the bewildering years of adolescence is the mother.

It is a psychological fact that "friendship between girls is of great importance. Identification with a similar being can strengthen the young girl's consciousness that she is an independent ego." Her life at her father's house does not inculcate in her a sense of belonging. During the traumatic transitional periods she gets no reassuring exchange of confidence. Without mother she fails to internalize womanhood. She loses her sense of identity and herself. She is left to grow alone and face the baffling physical as well as emotional changes without aid. Unfortunately, Sita lacks both: Mother and girl-friends. There is no reference throughout the narrative to any of Sita's friends. She spends her childhood amid crowds surrounding her father. During her teens, Jivan, her brother, is her only companion. This is the reason she does not grow out of her adolescence but struggles through it: "Deprived of as mother, a true elder sister or girl companions, she struggled along with infirmity as a cripple without crutches" (93). Her temper-tantrums in later life are a direct outcome of her lost self.
Her father's strange behaviour with his daughters fills Sita with deep distrust and fear of male in her unconscious mind. These negative feelings adversely affect her relationship with Raman. She knows of no other alternative, but to opt for a life devoid of mutual understanding and togetherness. When Sita herself becomes a mother, she carries the void with her and remains bewildered. Sita, as a mother, cannot nurture her children "baffled as she is by her own predicament as a woman, as a human being."

This obviously points back to her motherless childhood. Due to the restricted experiences of her early life she can't understand the behaviour of her own growing children. "It's all a madness - the boys acting out that scene from a film they saw, fighting each other on the floor; Menaka and her magazines and the way she's torn all those drawings (36).

Anxiety and nausea and meaninglessness that engulf Sita are directly related to her isolated childhood during which she did not enjoy the security, confidence and emotional fulfilment that a place called home generally has. Her trip to Manori and further to beg the miracle of keeping her baby unborn shows that some where, in her consciousness, there is a blockage in her thinking.

Sita's childhood and adolescence set the pattern of her later life. In one of her interviews Anita Desai has said: "I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against or made a stand against the general current. It is easy to flow with the current, it makes no demand, it costs no effort. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out 'the great No.; who fight the current and struggle against it they know what the demands are and what it costs to meet them."

Though it is generally true that her characters struggle against the current, it seems she was particularly referring
to Sita, the central figure of her fourth novel, *Where shall We Go This Summer?* Sita’s predicament too is similar to that of Maya and Monisha. She too is obsessed with her loveless marriage with Raman. The central theme of the novel is Sita’s attempt to say "No" to her life with her husband Raman and the demands it makes on her. That is why the lines which constantly occupy her mind are:

To certain people there comes a day when
they must say the great Yes or the great No.
He who has the Yes ready within him reveal
himself at once, and saying it crosses over
to the path of honour and his own conviction.
He who refuses does not repent. Should he be
asked again, he would say No - again. And that
No......that No ......the right No.... crushes him for
the rest of his life.

"So the conflict as between conformity and rebellion; the "Yes" and No". As B. Ramachandra Rao points out that Sita and Raman represent the eternal opposition between “the prose and the passion in their lives”.

Raman says the "great yes" and achieves hounour and social success Sita, in her obdurate pride says "No", but is ultimately compelled to arrive at some kind of compromise with life. The temperamental polarities and contradictory drives pull them apart, making it difficult for each to comprehend the feelings of the other. Indeed, The novel "dramatises, two kinds of courage : a struggle between the positive No and a potent Yes".

*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is an extension of *Cry, The Peacock* - the theme the atmosphere, the characters though matured, producing
the similar effects to a large extent. It therefore presents another passionate commentary on the maladjustment that renders Raman and Sita, the husband and wife, spiritually homeless. Disaster prone from the very beginning, Sita’s marriage to Raman is already tottering on the verge of collapse. Sita is a picture of the much dependent Indian wife. Her elusive place and status in her own house begins to weigh on her. She becomes restless. What was she to do other than just work for the husband and children, who obviously do not need her any longer? It is after living of nearly twenty years with her husband, that Sita realizes that she cannot take life as it is:

She could not inwardly accept
That this was all there was to life,
That life would continue thus inside.
This small, enclosed area, with
These few characters churning round,
Then part her, leaving her always
In this grey, dull lit empty shall (36)

The routine existence and her own in activity begins to pressurize her mind. The initial restlessness as a wife turns into a quest for the meaning of life. What exactly is she? A mere wife and no longer a woman? As a wife, she bound to her husband and children, and consequently her life had become one of service and devotion. In the process of which she realizes that Raman, an children had forgotten that she is a woman and an individual as well. Sita has been playing a role to guard. Herself from the crushing circumstances. The need for affection, suppressed so far, raises it head. She is helpless, lonely young woman, in need of support, and Raman can fulfill the need.
With this unconscious desire in the background, Sita makes a "bargain with fate" - if she is helpless, good and humble, she will be lovable, Raman will love her. As a self-effacing person she poses to be good, without pride, and hopes that she will be treated well by fate and by others. We have the first inkling of Sita's bargain when she submits to the marriage proposal of Raman, who marries her, out of pity; out of lust, out of sudden will for adventure, and because it was inevitable. (99) and not out of an overwhelming desire or love. Living with Raman was like living with a Robot. For Raman was indifferent, calm and passive all the time, he never gets flustered about anything - be it a minor or major incident. This irks Sita. She protests against his calmness, wears the drabdest of sarees to provoke him. But it fails to affect Raman, who takes every gesture of Sita as theatrical and uncalled for. There is nothing that would shake him out of his placid behavior. To all the incidents no matter how painful or traumatic they are to Sita, he reacts with a tune "Don't make too much of it .... He closed his mouth, closed the incident". For Sita, intense and sensitive as she is, it is not possible to forget and be distracted by a book" ... Ripped open, the wound remained open" (29) - it festered and added to the pain as she continued to think of various episodes around her. The almost inhuman behaviour of the suburban Bombay life pains her. As their marriage continues to add on years, Sita continues to get pained and frustrated with too much of violence outside and the perfect passivity and indifference inside the house. To Raman nothing was more important than his work. The family, he felt, ought to be happy and contented with the luxuries he piled on them. Sita was comfortable enough, but not happy. Even the comforts around irritated her: of what use, she felt, were the luxuries without love, understanding and a feeling of empathy? Were they not artificial and pompous?
There remains no doubt about the fact that Sita's neurosis spirings from the monotonous existence of her daily, routine married life, that denies her any sense of active involvement. Her life is a long wait for the climax that would shatter this placidity of comfortable existence: "Life had no period's, no stretches. It simply swirled around, maddling and confusing, leading no where" (155) Raman like Gautama is another victim of unavoidable circumstances that conspire to join an ordinary man to an extraordinary woman.

His puzzlement over Sita is genuine, for he has left his family, suffered nervous back pains and tried to adjust to her provocative manner of talking and living. He, a born adjuster, is at a loss to understand why she is upset and bored with life: "Bored? Why?, With What? and could not begin to comprehend her boredom" (50) - three vital questions, asked time and again by men like Gautama, Jivan and Raman and left eternally unanswered on the parts of their wives. Of all the male protagonists of Mrs. Desai, Raman wins the sympathy of the reader due to his tolerance and concern. He is definitely better than Gautama who is exasperated and acerbic at his wife's emotional excesses and Jivan, who des not and cannot see through his wife's strange silence.

Watching the "puzzlement slowly working across the rigid map" (145) of Raman's face Sita is touched though the believes that all human relationships are only farces and are of no consequence at all. For the first time in her life, she exposes her "inner self" with all its longing to Raman. She narrates an incident in the hanging gardens where she has seen a Muslim couple, deeply engrossed with each other:

They were like a work of art so apart
from the rest of us. They were not like
us --- They were inhuman, divine. So
strange --- that love, that sadness, not
like anything I have seen or known.
They were so white, so radiant, they
made me see my own life like a shadow,
absolutely flat, I uncoloured. (146-47)

The seeds of this image employed in the novel is seen in Mrs. Desai's
short story Studies in the Park which brings out a tremendous change in
Sonu, an intermediate student who feels oppressed by the system that
seems to hanker after degrees. This sight of divine relationship bereft of
greed changes the meaning of life for him and life becomes a search now "
no longer a race" (23).

Like Maya in Cry, The Peacock Sita too graves for a spiritual
communion with her husband. But there is never any inner spiritual contact
between them. The sight of the lovers in the park, engrossed so deeply in
such a pure love transcending all human limitations, accentuates her
unfulfilled desire. The flaw in her life suddenly assumes gigantic proportions
and her life with Raman seems to be flat, toneless and meaningless.

But, ironically, she herself admits that the love of the Muslim couple
seem to be either divine or insane. Her unconscious identification with these
people who are not obviously ordinarily human and her intense desire to
attain such non-human love speaks of her neurotic anxieties. And Raman,
being an average person, cannot possibly fulfill her neurotic claims.

Raman's failure to recognize Sita's self-effacing drives and honour
her capacity for surrender and love, injures her self image. Her hopes of
getting love are frustrated. All she wants is to feel her glorified self. Raman's inability to honour her claims of love impinges upon her pseudo-self. Her neurotic pride is hurt and she turns vindictive. She must restore her damaged self-esteem; so she tries to attract attention by being plaintive, and complaining of her unhappiness; secondly, she openly rebels against all social and familial norms in order to feel triumphant.

She rebels against the "vegetables existence" lived by the women of Raman's family - initially it is, only a verbal attack then she takes recourse to a more flagrant disregard for their way of life by taking to smoking. Shocking them thus, Sita enjoys a sense of superiority.

Raman is startled when she describes his business associates as animals: "They are nothing - nothing but appetite and sex, only food, sex and money matters. Animals"(47). This outburst vexes Raman who is not an introvert, nor an extrovert - a middling kind of man.... Dedicated unconsciously to the middle way."(47).

One immediately recalls Maya in Cry, The Peacock - Maya shows her disgust for the people and the entire atmosphere at the Lals's party. Gautama is irritated and he exhorts her to learn to bear everyday mediocrity Sita also baffles Raman by her behaviour and enjoys having thus annoyed him. It gives her a sense of triumph.

From psycho-analytical point of view this shows her hostile-aggressive drive, not only for a vindictive triumph over Raman but also to restore her neurotic pride. This is an attempt at self preservation.
Sita's desire to achieve the miracle of not giving birth to a child in a world not fit to receive it, could also symbolize her desire not to continue the bond that existed between her and Raman; because that bond had come to represent life tied down to responsibilities and duties with a person who did not in the least understand or know her. It has been quite difficult for her to believe that though they had lived so close together, he did not even know this basic fact of her existence that she had always felt bored with life. She realized with a shock that a forced marriage was, all human relationships were. Her face had become the face of a woman unloved - a woman rejected. For Raman too it was hard to believe that he had worried her for her quite outstanding fire and beauty. But whereas her beauty had turned haggard through nerves and neglect, her fire had turned on him and even on the children inspite the ill temper. Such was the sum total of their marriage.

This maladjustment between Raman and Sita is based on the clash of values, of principles, of faith even, or even between normal, double social standards and the iconoclastic attitude of uncompromising honesty. It is a conflict between the compromise with disappointment, as Raman puts it and the capacity to say Great No if and when needed as believed by Sita. This is not simply a case of an emancipated woman revolting against the slavish bonds of marriage. It is much more than that, it is a question of the basic truth that is bitter and naked and can neither be hidden, nor be halved to suit individuals. There are also Prominent illustrations of maladjustment in marital life that forced women to say "Great No" in their lives.

In Where Shall We Go This Summer? Anita Desai's stance against negativism is too obvious. Life inspite of its nastiness, brutishness, madness,
tedium and boredom, should be lived, she seems to assert. This is effectively
convey through pregnant Sita who adopts escape as the main strategy of
survival. As in Desai's earlier novels Cry, The Peacock and Voices in the city
in which Maya and Monisha, respectively crack up eventually under the
pressure of urban domesticity, Sita, too, arrives at a near break-down and
this is what brings her to the promised island of Manori in the novel. But
Sita's decision to go to island of Manori is both an escape and a return. It is
an escape from the "destructive forces in the urban milieu." (N.R.Shastri,
87) It is also a return to the magic island for realizing the fantasy of "keeping
the child unborn" A woman in her forties, a mother of four children, greying
and aging does not want to give birth of her fifth child, because she is afraid
of the violence that goes with the process of creation. The "madness" in the
city, the violence and destructive attitude of its people, her husband's in-
difference and the callousness of the children drive her to think that it is
better to escape into the primitive island of her father in Manori. The
children fight among each other. Menaka has developed a destructive
attitude which is revealed as she crushes the buds that had appeared in the
plant which Sita had grown with much care. She destroys the painting which
she herself had drawn. Raman and his family members do not have any
finer sensibility. Only food, sex and money matter to them. Their ".sub-human
placidity" threatens Sita's very existence. In her celebration of freedom from
"duties and responsibilities, from order and routine, from life and the city,"
Sita lacks "comprehension" and clarity. She does not have a healthy'man's
concept of freedom.

Sita's disillusionment is reflected in her behaviour and her decision.
Coming back to the island Sita finds it adversely affected by the passage of
time and changes in outlook. It is no more the island of her memory and
dreams. island cannot provide her "unity of being" (Sastri, 99). Sita realizes that life has no periods, no stretches. It simply confuses and leads nowhere. Looking back she finds that she had spent twenty years of her life "connecting", eventually leading herself to a state of acute frustration. She comes to the realization that escaping to the island was a sheer illusion, like "an actress in a theatrical performance".

In portraying Sita who is opposed to society and forces of life, and by stressing her inner conflicts, Anita Desai gives the impression that life, inspite of the contraries that assail it, has to be lived because "the existent lives in constant interaction with other existences or existence is being with others". Life is full of treasons, betrayals and treacheries one cannot avoid. These are elements that penetrate a person as air water do.

It struck Sita then that Raman too had suffered from worry and anxiety about her, the unborn child - it was her consummate glimpse into the human psyche. While walking on the beach she began to trail after Raman, "knowing she would follow him, follow the trail of footprints he had laid out for her." (150). She decides to return to the reality to a life of "retirement, off stage." "She had realized the difference between the necessity and the wish, between what a man wants and what he is compelled to do.

Her perception clears towards the end of the novel. In D.H. Lawrence's verse she finds an answer to her problem. So far she has considered giving birth an act of violence but now she realised that a seed fallen from the tree of life into the cosmic womb, must break open. There can be no life without growth into a full organism. Sita realizes that "the strange new knocking of life at her side," is indicative of a flow of energy, which must be released, to fertilize a new life. With this awareness, her self questioning consciousness, gets busy in the task of self-improvement. This is her moment of inspiration; in it she establishes a contact with her authentic self. She gets prepared to
go back to Bombay as she realizes that "Life must be continued and all its business." (138).

Speaking of the ending of the novel, Suresh Kohli rightly points out that as compared to her earlier works, there is "one distinct change: Sita neither dies in the end nor kills anyone nor does she become mad. She simply compromises with her destiny." The positive ending is an important feature of the novel.


8. "The transition in motherhood from feelings of inefficiency and disorganization to those of a Jaption and confidence are analysed in relation to various factors, including the development of the child, the assumption of new roles, the values the mother holds for herself and the child, and matters of personal deprivation associated with mothering roles."


CHAPTER 5.2

Sarah (Bye-Bye Black Bird, 1971)

As a case of social and psychological alienation leading to an optimistic reconciliation

Sarah in Bye Bye Blackbird, is a case of both social and psychological alienation. The social factor stems from her marriage to an Indian settled in England; her psychological trouble emanates from her pride system. The novel is, thus, a departure from Desai’s other works in its emphasis upon the cultural factors in shaping the individual psyche. The characters or events do not offer a sociological thesis in her handling of the East-West-encounter theme. Many critics read this novel chiefly as a “presentation of the social isolation of Adit and Sarah,” or as a depiction of racial and cultural problems. Thematically, it is the story of Dev and Adit. These two male characters dominate the field of action, yet it is Sarah who remains the palpitating presence throughout the narrative.

Anita Desai displays her skill of characterization in dealing with the psyche of Sarah. Menakshi Mukherjee considers Sarah the most successful and a typical Desai character, “complex, hyper sensitive and intelligent.” She can claim kinship with the introverted heroines of Cry, The Peacock and Voices in the City. The parallelism, however, ends here. Sarah does not suffer from inner vacuity like the earlier two heroines, though she is temporarily alienated. In dealing with the problems of Sarah, stuck with duality and uncertainties, the novelist projects an authentic study of human relationships bedeviled by cultural encounters. Of all the novels of Desai, this one is most intimately related to her own experiences. She told an
interviewer that, "of all my novels it is most rooted in experience and the least literary in derivation"3 She held: "Bye-Bye Blackbird is the closest of all my books to actuality - practically everything in it is drawn directly from my experience of living with Indian immigrant in London."4. It has rightly been maintained that in the novel "the tension between the local and the immigrant blackbird involves issues of alienation and accommodation that the immigrant has to confront in an alien and yet familiar s-world."5. Desai's interpolations of Indian exuberance and British reticence, and her penetrating study of the impact of English Literature on Indian intellectuals, forms the whole range of Indo-British experience. Thus, social and psychological realism runs side by side in the narrative.

Fear, Insecurity and resultant withdrawal are the three major motifs of the novel. The novel incorporates the impact of an East-West marriage on the psyche of Sarah. Adit marries Sarah an English woman, settles in England and feels at home there. Dev reaches England from India for higher studies. His behaviour and personality are all conditioned by the prejudices he holds for the British people and vice versa. His visit to England was goal-oriented, but the psychological conflicts arising out of his practical experience in dealing with the people disturbed him. His bias is normally social and cultural. He is soon nauseated by the racial prejudices. He is highly critical of everything English. Their attitudes take a sudden turn after their return from weekend spent in the suburb of London: Dev starts loving England whereas Adit is nauseated. He decides to leave for India. "For the Sens, the weekend ended in a mottled grey fade-out of regret and apprehension as they drove off.... But for Dev the adventure had only begun. (190).

Although the novel revolves round the two male characters, the main story concerns Sarah, who lives in a dual world- the two social worlds that
do not meet; the two incompatible cultures that split her. A poignant portrayal of Sarah's predicament reveals that Anita Desai's view is not limited to the socio cultural dimensions of alienation from the point of view of Indians. Alienation and cultural dissociation can be experienced even when living in one's own society. Sarah's situation as an English girl, married to an Indian, culturally alienates in her homeland. Her marriage to a 'wog' compels her to keep "to the loneliest path' and walk, drawing across her face, "a mask of secrecy." She avoids facing her own people. This is obvious even to the strangers. "Those who glanced at her made aware of her by the violence with which she turned away from them." (35).

Sarah loses her identity in her own country; she becomes nameless. She suffers this anguish silently yet, she fails to hide the turmoil within. Adit notices this but he cannot perceive the true nature and cause of her disturbance:

An anguish, it seemed to him, of loneliness
- and then it became absurd to call her by his own name, to call her by any name: She had become nameless, she had shed her name as she had shed her ancestry and identity, and she sat there, staring, as though she watched them disappear. Or could only someone, who knew her background and her marriage, imagine this? (35).

Sarah presents a picture of a very lonely and helpless person. She sacrifices most of the things-childhood, family, friends. Her identity is based on her marriage to an Indian. People from her own society look at her with suspicion and contempt Sarah's pain and agony know no bounds when she
hears Julia, her colleague saying, “If she's that ashamed of having an Indian husband, why did she go and marry him?” (42). Such comments from her friends and colleagues make Sarah feel socially alienated. This alienation creates psychological crisis wherein she feels that she is parading “like an imposter to make claims to life and identify that she did not herself feel to be her own”(42).

Harry C. Triandis and William Wilson Lambert point out that “Cultures shape aspects of psychological functioning,” and also that “ecological and psychological variables are inter-related.” Sarah is the product of the happy, traditional English home with its set principles and norms. As long as she is able to identify with her image, there is no conflict. Tension creeps into her life after her marriage. Now she has to operate in two different worlds where she is unable to have reciprocal relationship with either. By marrying Adit she has become a “Nowhere woman” who does not know who she is and to which group does she really belong? This struggle to know her real identity is expressed when she questions herself:

Who has she - Mrs. Sen who had been
married in a red and gold Benaras Sari one
burning, bronzed day in September, or
Mrs. Sen, the Head's secretary.... They were
roles- and when she was not laying them,
she was nobody. Her face was only a mask,
her body only a costume. Where was Sarah?
.... 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. (39).

South thoughts reveal that disintegration is seeping into Sarah’s personality she wavers between two selves - public and private-, and is torn between two world. If Dev fluctuates between uncertainty and certainty, Sarah shuffles between reality and unreality, her predicament is more intense than that of Adit or Dev because Adit and Dev at least have the guarantee that they will be accepted where their roots are. But Sarah has no assurance even in her own homeland. She is not very eager to visit her parents. It is merely duty rather than feeling that makes her meet them. She is constantly and perennially under tension, which makes her life unreal, that is why she is affected by the tortures of anxiety and insecurity. The division in herself can be clearly seen in her monologue: “in the center she sat, feeling the waves rock her and then the fear and the questioning began: who was she ..... Both these creatures were frauds, each had a large, shadowed element of charade about it.... Her face was only a mask, her body only a costume.” (39) Her dilemma is not that of finding new roots but it is that of uprooted ness and hence deeper. The harmony of her life is disturbed by her contact with Adit. The future is unknown and dark. “To her closed eyes the darkness moved in a tumult of black shapes that woul not settle. her dreams too were in pieces.” (58).

She finds herself an alien and a stranger. Her own people, like Mrs. Miller insult her.

What about you Mrs. Sen? Have you no intentions of starting a
family - or do you think it
wiser not to, in view of ...

She stood letting silence make a series of long straight dashes
towards Adit. (93) Sarah cannot understand the jokes of her husband's
friends. Initially she made an attempt and then gave up. She cannot relate.
The chasm between her and the native people and between her husband's
people is widening. Even the tea breaks at the office are unbearable to her
she is afraid to answer any personal question as she suffers from an
inferiority complex.

Sarah is intelligent enough to understand the changed attitude of
her parents. She does not see any possibility of this interpersonal tension
being resolved through interaction. She also knows that a strong involvement
with her mother will not strengthen her identification with her husband. To
avoid Intra-psychic conflicts and save herself from further anguish, she
takes recourse to "side stepping" she becomes an inhibited personality
and starts keeping an emotional distance. The self imposed seclusion is
one of the reasons of her "anonymity." She confesses to Adit that if he had
not married her or if he left her, she would be a lunatic like Miss Moffit.
These are not light hearted passing remarks meant to tease her husband.
They display her sense of insecurity. The introvert and brooding nature
fears this outcome and to avoid it Sarah submits to Adit.

Adit chides Sarah for imagining such things and calls her an "icicle".
She is not altogether an icicle though she loses the warmth of her personality
in an effort to connect her two selves. In the attempt to survive and lead a
meaningful existence, she withdraws herself from her English friends and
relatives and creates a small world inside her house. Her decisions to herself away from her English past and present, and withdrawing completely into the world of Adit and Dev pose further problems for her. Her relation to herself turns impersonal. Ashamed of herself, she moves away from her real self. Her self alienation and self hate are symbolized through a water mammoth in her dream. During their weekend visit to Sarah’s parents, she dreams that she is carried on the back of a gigantic water-mammoth “that suddenly rose out of its underwater lair to start borrowing and digging through banks of black mud that flew back into her face no matter how she fought it off, protesting, and very nearly choked her (174). This signifies the unconscious terror of the relentless forces of self-pity and self-destructiveness. It is symbolic of her disturbed psyche. The water mammoth represents her self hate. She is smeared with black mud which signifies the fear of her inner process hiding her for not being able to stand up to her “shoulds.” This indicates Sarah’s wish to hide her identity and not to perceive her genuine self, struggling for recognition. Ralph Linton comments “man throughout most of his history has been only vaguely conscious of the existence of culture and has owed even this consciousness to contrasts between the customs of his own society and those of some other with which he happened to be brought into contact”7. Adit’s decision to leave for India makes Sarah feel uncertain and suspicious of the outcome of this change of lands.

Disharmony prevails in Sarah’s familial life and seems to threaten her marriage. We learn of Adits’s tastes. He hates English cooking and Sarah, has not learnt to cook Bengali food to his satisfaction. Whereas Sarah does not relish Indian music, Adit loves it.

She remains an alien in Adit’s social circle not equipped to participate in their jokes, conversations and laughter. They present private maladjustments. They are also victims of separate culture maladjustments. There is
confusion and escapism in their marriage, resulting in the recurrent doubt about divorce and separation. Outwardly, Adit and Sarah seem to be successful and happy. In reality, both are afraid of the immediate rejections, vicious distrust and mocking pity from their own people. They are transformed into voluntary escapists. We clearly see paradoxical characteristics in their outlook when we find Adit sacrifice every little bit of self-respect and loyalty to his own people to become a perfect Babu and consider it to be the height of achievement. Sarah slowly dies a spiritual death through her intense unfulfilled desire to escape from the worldly and drudgery-filled world of an English home to become an integral part of an Indian family. It is the contradiction in their situation that constitutes the basis of marital disharmony in their married life. Sarah is blindly and impulsively involved. So she suffers more than Adit: “she had so little command over these two charades she played each day, one in the morning at school and one in the evening at home that she could not even tell with how much sincerity she played one role or the other.” (38).

Sarah is sensitive and reserved person. She suffers agonies when Adit reveals the credulous side of his character to invite scorn and pity from her relatives, friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Her longing for a Christian wedding explicitly indicates non-belongingness and instability in her marriage: “I have never been to a Hindu wedding so I don’t know how to compare, but I do know that a Christian wedding is touching and charming and-heart-wringing” (217).

Sarah lives the life of a cultural exile in her own country. She feels displaced in England by marrying an Indian. She is like Sindhi in Arun Joshi’s Foreigner. Sindhi is twice removed from his culture and society.
under circumstantial compulsion. In his opinion, marriage cannot solve the problem of loneliness. Aloneness can be resolved from within. He says to his beloved June: "Marriage would not help June. We are alone, both you and I that is the problem. And our aloneness must be resolved from within. You cannot send two persons through a ceremony and expect that their aloneness will disappear." Sarah also faces the same problem.

Married to an Indian, she tries her best to adjust herself with her Indian husband and his friends. She is worried about the loss of identity in her own society. When people discuss about India she deliberately avoids the discussion. She is disturbed by an anguish of shedding her own name and identity:

An Anguish it seemed to her of loneliness
and then it becomes absurd to call her by her own name - to call her by any name.
She had become nameless, she had shed her ancestry and identity and she sat there staring, as though she watched them disappear (63).

It would however, be naive to conclude that these factors create marital dissonance. One feels that Adit and Sarah have adjusted to each other despite these differences. His romantic love for England is matched by the romanticism of her imagination about India. They maintain their cultural identities, yet experience a close affinity with each other's culture.

Unlike her husband Sarah is aware of the 'falsehood' of their existence in England. She believes that as Adit's roots are firm, he can surely lead an
authentic existence in India. She hopes that she too can strike new roots in India and contribute to the 'reality' of their existence with the birth of a child in India. She does not have so much hope in England as she herself feels very inadequate to its demands.

Sarah is different from Desai's other characters. She is almost an exile in her own land but unlike others she never withdraw. She faces the challenges of life and triumphs over her sufferings and dilemmas. Desai herself says that Sarah's sense of loneliness is very different from her other heroines because she chooses it deliberately whereas for her other characters it is as part of their nature (15).

Sarah is a "silent volcano, not dead yet not bursting." (64) Like an existentialists she tries to know her real identity. She tries to trace out the real Sarah:

Where was Sarah? Staring out of the window at the chimney pots and the clouds, she wondered if Sarah had any existence at all, and then she wondered if Sarah had any existence at all, and then she wondered with great sadness, if she would ever be allowed to step off the stage, leave the theatre and enter the realworld-whether English or Indian, she did not care, she wanted only its sincerity, its truth (35).

She feels that the real solution to her problem lies in leaving England and going to India. At long last, Sarah realizes the imperative demand of her situation: will have to forego her cultural identity in order to adopt a new
culture and undergo a completely new experiences. This produces a natural anxiety. The distinction between normal and neurotic anxiety is subtle: The former results from the recognition and acceptances of complexities of life. It is constructive and expanding. The latter is destructive. Natural anxiety enables a person to see the real world, to make decisions and to commit to a way of life. Sarah’s anxiety helps her to grow out of her frustrating situation. Although it is painful to say good-bye to her “English self”, there is a firrn hope that she will “come to life” in India, it would be a “new, a different personality” (255).

These positive thoughts have a therapeutic value for Sarah. In Sartre’s The Flies, Oreste, says to Zeus, “Human Life begins on the far side of despair”

Sarah has undergone the experiences of depression and is ready to reach the other side, which brings her a hope to find her real self. Sarah is willing to experience a new life - not only culturally or socially but psychically too. She is poised for two changes simultaneously: the birth of a child and the emergence of a novel identity.

One wonders if Sarah will be successful in recovering herself in an alien atmosphere. One also speculates if Sarah is planning another escape to get rid of certain memories which would identify her to herself. But one thinks that her self analysis will help her in being normal. Meenakshi Mukherjee opines that she is displaced in her own country and her crisis of identity will never be solved even if she goes to India. It is true that Sarah's social or cultural identity will not be regained. But, her crisis is not irreducible. If Sarah is able to maintain the spirit of her constructive thoughts and if they are not followed by any repercussions of self-destructive feelings, she may assume responsibility for self. If she strives towards a clearer and deeper
experiencing of her feelings, beliefs and wishes, outgrowing narrow, neurotic egocentricity and if she manages to relate herself to others, she will steadily gain inner certainty which comes by belonging, through active participation in life. Thus the novel ends on a note of joy as it has started. The protagonist agree to a continuation.


