In Anita Desai's novels we come across the themes of alienation and accommodation. In Bye-Bye Blackbird, these themes appear prominently. This theme is presented in terms of a conflict between the cosmopolitan and the parochial outlooks. In this conflict we notice that the human being is incapable of choosing any alternative, but there is a longing for life.

Characterisation rather than social milieu is the striking feature of Desai's novels. She always writes about individual men and women, the solitary beings, 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 of life. Her characters are by and large independent, agonized, frustrated, somewhat domineering and combative, defy ing always their individual problems and predicaments. These predicaments are basically existentialist in character.

Desai's craft consists in creative manipulation of scenes apart from characterising protagonists and elucidating
their various psychic states, obsessions and predicaments. While doing so as by-products, secondary symbolic implications are also developed.

Duel has generously employed symbols and images, charged with tremendous significance, strictly on a criterion of aesthetic rather than casual relevance. This has added a remarkable dimension to the textual density that is not noticeable in the works of other Indian-English Novelists. Various complexities of man-woman relationship and also the varying states of human psyche, are crystallised portraying the novelist's great originality and ingenuity. Striking symbolism and telling imagery (especially colour symbolism and prey-and-predator imagery) supporting some of her failing or beckoning narrative techniques which might not have yielded desired effectiveness otherwise in her novels such as *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, *There Shall Be No This Summer?* and *Fire on the Mountain* are worth our attentions. Apart from the functional dimension of vivifying various scenes, situations and emotional states of the characters in her novels, an ornamental dimension, creating mosaic textural richness, is gained by spontaneous lyrical splendour. In some of her novels, particularly in *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City* and *There Shall Be No This Summer?*, she presents innumerable purple passages of luscious lyricism (a rarity in Indian-English fiction) which not only intoxicates the reader
but also leaves him wondering why she has not written poetry at all.

The techniques of stream of consciousness, flash-back, montage and jigsaw puzzle not only suit the existentialist themes dwelt upon but also go a long way in her externalizing the inner emotional tornadoes of her protagonists. She is a wonderful teller of tales. As a truly talented teller gifted with high imaginative power and artistic capacity for control and selection, Desai proudly demonstrates her talents in her prize-winning novel, _Fire on the Mountain_, in which there is hardly any tale to tell in the strict sense of term. However, she has written a marvellous novel. The reader gets spellbound by her art arriving at sorrowful surprise at the end. That the whole story in fact is compressed in the penultimate paragraph on the last page of the novel sets one wondering how she could manage to build a mountain-like novel on a moloch-like story. She proved that she alone could conjure up a novel out of almost nothing.

_Dye, Dye, Blackbird_ makes a heroic, although unsuccessful attempt to present the whole gamut of emotions of Indian immigrants in England. All the Indian “types” are present the Madrasi, the Bengali, the Punjabi along with Bussi selling yoga, the third-rate musician and his woman with the inevitable pan-box. There are also the expected English characters — the Killers and the Roscommonns with their
unconcealed dislike for the alien immigrants, the sentimental English woman, Mrs. Moffitt whose ambition is to start an Indian Club and arrange weekly get-togethers where the "spiritual" Indians may spiritualise the materialistic English. The English and the Indian immigrants do not see each other, and that they only see what they want to see—stereotypes of each other, coloured by prejudice, conditioned by false notions of oriental and occidental characteristics and that they naturally fail to see the human being behind the stereotype. Unfortunately the real individual is lost in the stereotype characterisation. Unreal characters, theatrical conflicts, clashes and the crises in the novel are unattractive. The feeling of the racially discriminated immigrants is poorly conveyed. Dev's incoherent anger at the pedlar who refused to tell him the price of the Russian icon, disdainfully, the frequent quarrels between Dev, and Adit sound comic and queer. The three major characters, Dev, Adit, and Sarah, are predictable and dull. One would have thought that the marriage of an English girl with an Indian immigrant would be an excellent subject for a novel. But there is a very brief reference in the book to the first meeting between Sarah and Adit. There is no real attempt made to explain the irresistible passion that impelled an English woman to marry of an Indian and brave the scorn English society. Sarah's loneliness is made dramatic and more interesting than the
tension between her and Adit. Adit's sudden decision to return to India, Dev's changing attitudes towards England, the blackbird's feeling that he is unwelcome in England, the tensions and the hatreds, are well "described." The immigrants behave like temperamental children, loud, noisy, boisterous, quarrelsome, lacking in delicacy, and deficient in love of privacy. Similarly, the English characters, the sentimental Emma Moffitt, the unforgiving Mrs. Kneecumen, the spiteful Mrs. Miller move like puppets. The challenging quality of the theme could make no adequate impact on the imagination of the readers. Through defective narration and presentation. The society as represented by the ayahs, the cook, in *Shall We Go This Summer*? the nameless and faceless multitudes is very intrusive and oppressive threatening the very life and existence of the heroine. The vegetarian complacence, the stolidity of the wellfed infuriate Sita. People are unacceptable: "She took their insularity and complacence as well as the aggression and violence of others as affronts upon her own living nerves..."1

Characterization rather than social milieu, is the striking feature of Joshi's novels. She always writes about individual men and women, the solitary beings, 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 of life. Her characters are by and large
independent, agonized, frustrated, somewhat disillusioning and
combating defying always their individual problems and
predicaments. These predicaments are basically existentialist
in character. A great deal of rhetoric, abstract philosophical
discussions and hysterical denunciations, savage attacks and
callous withdrawals are seen in the novels. Some of the
attitudes and emotions of Niroda are very unconvincing. For
instance, his love-hate relationship with his mother is not
properly "motivated." Nothing in the novel prepares the
reader to anticipate Niroda's hysterical, and sometimes
obscene remarks regarding his mother. Most of the battles
of Niroda are reported after they are over. The only thing
that is realized in concrete terms is the savage and
uncompromising honesty of his character. One is offered an
insight into a personality grappling with issues of life and
death. But most of the psychological conflicts and spiritual
crises of Niroda are merely reported without being realized
in dramatic terms. Hence the character remains brilliantly
outlined but his crises are unreal. He comes alive only in
his fitful outbursts of irritation or denunciation.

_Cry, the Peacock_

In _Cry, the Peacock_, Anita Desai begins with Maya's
grief and mourning over the death of her pet dog, Lota. Maya
is married to a lawyer of standing, Gautam, twice her age,
and a friend of her father's. She is childless, introverted and constantly subject to melancholia. Though she is obsessed with the fear of death even from her childhood, she is sensitive, responsive to beauty and receptive to artistic excellences and accomplishments. The death of Toto spells the snapping of marital bond. The death motif is skilfully woven into the story: The emotional tension springs from her poetic temperament and pitiable lack of sympathy and appreciation or understanding on the part of her husband.

Anita Desai is not concerned with merely outward effects. Keeping the ideal steadily in view, she develops the story naturally, gracefully and rhythmically. Her verbal felicity, poetic insight and creative talent prompt her to prefer an original exposition or bold exploration into the psyche of her characters to a mechanical adaptation or utilization of set themes, plots and people, fixed forms or preconceived background, prefabricated material into which the plot is fitted. Dev's portrait is natural and subjective. He is sensitive and mindful of his defects and deficiencies. He is no longer "an apprehensive and short-sighted visitor." The author's concluding remarks seem to point that Dev is without the rapture of a victor—and that he is lamentably self-conscious. Anita Desai may be suggesting that Dev may reconcile himself to isolation, the usual lot of artists.

To get over his existential predicament, introversion is his
only way out of the uneasy situation, as he cannot rebel against constraining conditions.

The bus drove up, he swung himself on. While buying his ticket he felt certain... and then not so certain... that he saw a glint of scorn in the conductor’s eye, the abrupt way in which he handed him his ticket and then kept him waiting for his change. He wondered if the old lady beside whom he sat down did not clutch her handbag and lean away from him as though she suspected a smell. But, he told himself, it didn’t matter.

Maya and Gautama are diametrically opposite: poles apart in nature and response. Gautama is more interested in his cup of Tea and is not, in the least, mindful of Maya’s intense grief over Toto’s death. He is provocatively practical and exasperatingly detached. Anita Desai explores and exploits the clash of these two opposite temperaments; Maya’s subjectivity and attachment; warmth of response to the external world and tender feelings within are in sharp contrast to Gautama’s objectivity and detachment: coldness and rigidity of response to the external world emotionally and incapacity to feel joy or sorrow intensely. Toto’s death symbolises the destruction of their ‘bond’ or mutual understanding, removal of tender marital relationship under unbearable strain and total gap of communication.

Maya’s view of life and the world is purely subjective, her servants, on the other hand, are common, unsophisticated
and practical. For them, death is a hard and inevitable reality. Life, service and resignation to fate are more important to them than death. They toil, suffer and bear their sorrows stoically. But Maya is crushed by grief over Toto's death, a pitiable case of neurosis and imbalance.

The death of Toto does not evoke sorrow or pity in Gautama. He is indifferent and unsympathetic to Maya. His attitude shocks her because she feels very sad at the death of Toto and expects his consolation. The Christian dictum, "Let the dead bury the dead" seems to find a suitable illustration in him.

Trifling things do sometimes produce far reaching effects. They may seep in the subconscious, grow and erupt with utmost violence later. Gautama cannot distinguish between the smell of lemons and petunias. This surprises Maya. She knows that they do not share any common sensory impression or thought or feeling. Anita Dandi describes many episodes denoting the lack of communication between the husband and the wife; the reader feels conclusively that their alienation is complete. Their temperaments are irreconcilable and diametrically opposite.

... The blossoms of the lemon tree were different, quite different: of much stronger, 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, astringent scent,
refreshing as that of ground lemon peel,
a crushed lemon leaf. I tried to
explain this to Gautama, stammering with
anxiety, for now, when his companionship was
a necessity, I required his closest
understanding.

The whole story is woven round Maya's sensitiveness and
Gautama's lack of it; his cold and practical intellectualism
annoys her. Their lives, their relationship and the final
tragedy are determined by these qualities. The presentation
may seem to be subjective and untrue to life and reality.
But the development is consistent and artistically well
executed. The end is convincing, logical, inevitable.

Anita presents Gautama's personality – his detachment,
indifference and emotional alienation from Maya as a necessary
precondition to the final tragedy. In the first part Maya
is not portrayed in detail. In describing Gautama, the
novelist designs a sharp contrast to Maya who succumbs to
those qualities and the incapacity to adjust herself to
inevitable changes.

The novelist's presentation of Maya's inconsolable
sorrow, her complete dependence on Gautama for everything
and bitter disappointment when he does not comfort her in her
grief over the death of Toti and utter unconcern shown by his
readiness to leave her when an advocate arrives at his house:
gradually prepare the reader to anticipate the final, irrevocable tragedy. Maya feels certain that Gautama is impractical as he fumbles even when buttoning his shirt. The pet dog, object of Maya's affection, is disposed of in the scavenging truck of the public works Department. He does not indulge in Maya's happiness nor care to share her intense grief. She is interested in the rational, logical and the merely professional. Maya has no other alternative but to fling herself on her bed to muffle her outburst and in a fit of sobbing succumb to tears.

Maya is essentially romantic and sensitive. She has been brought up tenderly and dotingly in her childhood and youth. Her sense of possessiveness becomes a confirmed trait, a second nature. She takes the beautifully adorned almirah containing poetry, fiction, drama and romantic literature and a pet animal by her side for granted. She is incapable of detachment and adjustment. She can realize transience and change very momentarily and temporarily. She lives in her childhood memories. She evokes the past so vividly that she actually relives those moments. Anita Desai makes a deft use of the flash-back to childhood days. She uses the present tense very significantly and effectively. Her wishful longing is painted impressively in
If I could but tie them all into one
burning knot of contact and relationship
with me, nothing, not the fiercest
fingers, would be able to extricate and
banish me— or Gautama. 4

Moya is obsessed with the morbid fear of death, feels
she is alone in this world; and her mind constantly tortures
her: smites her hard. Her neurosis is acute: she is
suayed by the idea that Gautama is about to die. Her
thoughts are described thus:

The man had no contact with the world,
or me. What would it matter to him if
he died and lost even the possibility of
contact? What would it matter to him? 5

Ultimately she becomes insane like Emily Grierson. She
feels to transfixed her experiences, suitably modify her
responses or make necessary changes in the background but is
herself transfixed to her childhood days: a victim of extreme
sensitiveness and morbid fear, she is unable to become an
autocrat: so she takes refuge from the present problems in
flights to childhood. Moya succumbs to the marital discord:
the total incompatibility of diverse temperaments: her
husband's detachment and insensitiveness and her own
morbidity, hypersensitiveness and neurosis. She is a toy
princess in a toy world, incapable of realism, pragmatism
and intellectual detachment.

The workings of the human mind are complex and mysterious.
Casual acquaintances or conversations; chance meetings;
memories of sights, sounds or scenes, intrude; enter the mind
silently, obscurely remain, grow and assume monstrous proportions.
Even scrap of news read in the papers, a catchy tune or a
happy turn of word or phrase affect the mind and leave their
traces. Slowly they grow; take root in the subconscious;
the accumulation of sensations and experiences gives rise to
neurotic thoughts, nausea and insomnia: Instead of creating
luminous and edifying: angelic and beautiful forms; elevating
and enrapturing, they nourish monstrous shapes, though in-
advertently and unconsciously: which burst out with fury and
frayz. The roles of the unconscious and subconscious are
highly significant and powerful and human life is a plaything
or puppet in the hands of these powerful forces - which act
mercilessly. An exploration into the "Psyche", therefore, is
a thrilling venture; an encounter with the shaping of thoughts,
attitudes, passions and impulses needs tenacity and restraint.

The technique of contrast is used by Anita Desai: to
acquaint the reader with Maya's predicament. The world of
the Father, world of Love, understanding, flowers and Urdu
poetry in which Maya is brought up b, her indulgent Father
with care and tenderness is in sharp contrast to the world
she enters, after marriage; the world of detachment, erudity,
philosophy of Gautama which shakes her to the roots, drives
her to morbid melancholy and prompts her to kill Gautama and commit suicide. Stray incidents like the disappearance of the Ayah or her Father's shoutings "Charlatan! Charlatan!", the incident of Mrs. Suru, the story of Leela who shares her life with a tubercular husband and of Nila who secures freedom through divorce—serve to bring out this contrast between a life of freedom and a life of loveless enchantment; Love and expansion in contrast to slavery and morbidity. Maya is weaned from the former and is condemned to the latter. She is doomed to death by her own inability and incapacity.

Maya thirsts for understanding; longs for contact especially after the death of Toto. Life becomes unbearable, dreary and meaningless to her as she loses contact, communication and loving communion with Gautama; with the outer world. The death of Toto symbolises a spiritual catastrophe: Gautama's flaw and defect spells disaster. He is incapable of warmth, depth and passion. Gautama is not incapable but insensitive. Maya fails to achieve contact with Gautama. Anita says:

Even if each star in the sky were an heart, what of it? Give to me one heart that is capable of sorrow. Maya finds the 'couplet' weighted with a rare compassion, a tender understanding, so that it hung pendent in the dark like a radiant rain drop, catching the star-light, catching it and flashing, brighter and brighter.6

The urdu couplet expresses an idea of rare beauty. "Even if each star in the sky were a heart what of it? Give to me
one heart that is capable of sorrow" Maya feels intensely: it is a moment of hope; she is beyond Time, space, life it self: She achieves epiphany, transcendence: trance

And my heart stretched, stretched painfully agonizingly, expanding and swelling with the vastness of a single moment of absolute happiness, and my body followed its long, sweet curve, arching with the searing, annihilating torture of it. Ultimate. A word dropped down the tall tunnel of memory - it had been used that evening - Ultimate. Ah, this was it, the ultimate, absolute joy, Here lay perfection, suspended, bearing all that it could bear, so full was it. Were one more flower to unfurl that night, one small bird to cry, if one bright star were to be shattered and fall now - I could not have borne it, no. I was filled, filled to the point of destruction. God, God, I grasped-enough, enough, no more. Let it remain so. Let it remain . . . ?

Maya feels that Gautama is her point of contact with reality. She longs for sensory fulfillment, love, communication and get a hold on not only Gautama but the pulsating world around them.

. . . it was not only for his presence, his love that I longed, but mainly for the life that would permit me to touch him, feel his flesh and hair, hold and then tighten my hold on him. And not on Gautama alone, but on all the pulsating world around him, from the frieze of stars silently exploding in the summer sky to the faintly fluttering souls making covert, hidden love in the crotch of the fig tree - all that suggested life and the great, entrancing world to me who was doomed not to live.8
She is frustrated to find that Gautama's world is cold, detached, philosophical and grim. Her fantasy, longing and yearnings have no place in it, she is emotionally alienated from him.

In his world there were vast areas in which he could not understand that I could even wish to enter them, foreign as they were to me. On his part, understanding was scant, love was meagre. Not to be loved as one does love...

Gautama's intellectuality subjects her to unbearable strain and stress. She loses interest in everything; her longing for life assumes a negative character. Both proceed towards a philosophy of detachment but cannot meet even there. Maya reads aloks from the Gita but she understands detachment differently. It is an essential concomitant of life and action. But for Gautama, detachment is an abstraction totally unrelated to his life. He is neither capable of attachment or detachment but an intellectual abstraction of it. He also quotes from the Gita.

Thinking of sense objects, man becomes attached thereto. From attachment arises longing and from longing anger is born. From anger arises delusion; from delusion, loss of memory is caused. From loss of memory the discriminative faculty is ruined and from the ruin of discrimination he perishes.

Gautama is intellectual in his understanding of the Gita.
His detachment becomes an abomination, curse resulting in alienation and estrangement from Maya. She revolts against this negation and denial of life and thinks of him in terms of an ascetic like Buddha.

He looked very much the meditator beneath the bo tree, seated upon a soft tiger skin, too fastidious to touch the common earth, with those long, clean-cut hands of his, too fastidious to admit such matters as love, with its accompanying horror of copulation, of physical demands and even, overbearingly, spiritual demands of possession and rights won and established...11

Maya is obsessed with the morbid fear of death. This disables her to achieve contact with Gautama. Even in his presence she feels removed from him.

He was not on my side at all, but across a river, across a mountain, and would always remain so.12

Maya lives in a world of illusion, as her name indicates and so cannot enter the solid world of reality and cold detachment in which Gautama lives. She tells her:

What have you learnt of the realities?
The realities of common human existence, not love and romance, but living and dying and working, all that constitutes life for the ordinary man. You won't find it in your picture-books. And that's all you were ever shown: picture-books.13

We get an insight into the workings of Maya's and Gautama's
mind when we read their long discourses. May's philosophy
is based on vital contact: realism, experiential knowledge.
She spurns the idea of an inner reality "to detach oneself into
when the world around one grows either too boring or too
hectic". She tells Sautama:

I have so much to look at, to touch, and
feel, and - be happy about. I like to walk
about here and touch things - leaves, sticks,
earth, everything. I play with my cat. And
if I am lonely, I can visit my friends. The
world is full-full, Sautama. Do you know
what that means? I am not bored with it that
I should need to hunt another one!14

Voices in the City

Anita Desai's characters in Voices in the City, Nirode,
Monisha and Amla are exceptionally sensitive, sharp and
introverted. They are keenly, painfully aware of their
existential condition and predicament; react sharply against
the monstrous city of Calcutta; at times hystERICally and
fitfully assaulted by the brutality, dreariness, dullness,
ugliness, sordidness and cacophony it stands for. Nirode
about
remarks at the beginning/the nocturnal Calcutta as

... 'this dark pandemonium' and as 'the
coagulated blaze of light and sound and
odour.15

He walks with jii along the streets of Calcutta. His
feeling is vividly described
... the city slid past them in alternating cubes of white and black, and dust and the odour of diesel oil and damp rot. 16

Calcutta scares him mortally, agonisingly, unrelentingly.

... he shuddered and, walking swiftly, was almost afraid of the dark of Calcutta, its warmth that clung to one with a moist, perspiring embrace, rich with the odour of open gutters and tuberose garlands. ... 17

Nirode’s mother is chided and abused for her intimate relationship with major Chedna in Kalimpong. His sharp invective and remonstrance reveal “mother-fixation.” The illicit relationship is disclosed to Amla, in a fit of anger.

I know of their little Monopoly and mah-jong games, she wrote herself. I can see them, the major with bushes of hair bristling in his ears, bushes of hair tickling inside his nose, and his red pop eyes trying to nudge the sari off her shoulder. I can see her leaning across to give him a good look into her blouse, saying ‘Ah-ha, ah-ah, I have you now,’ the way she does. ... 18

Nirode is a man who values aloneness...

... for when aloneness alone was the sole natural condition, aloneness alone, the treasure worth treasuring. 19

even if it makes him feel at times like a leper “diseased with the loneliest disease of all.” 20

He is an artist, described by Anita Desai as a “misfit
hero," "rootless nihilist and outlaw" who turns against even his family, chooses to remain aloof, independent of the world and its people and his relations. His self-respect develops self-reliance. We are reminded of Dr. Johnson, who though poor, never compromised his self-respect. His letter to Lord Chesterfield and his throwing away of new shoes (bought and kept in the place of the old wornout shoes by his reputed biographer, Boswell) through the window are well-known in the literary annals of England. He suffers poverty, lives in a very stuffy, dark congested and inconvenient room, not even fit for pigeons and lives independently. He spurns patronage of friends and does not accept even his mother's money. His friends fit or sonny increase his unhappiness as they seek to force on him something which they, themselves did not care to take: career, way of life and ideals. So Nirada is entangled in a situation of his making - lonely life in miserable conditions - and encounter with the monster: the city of Calcutta. His individuality evokes our admiration. He is true to his feelings and beliefs.

Ghams who has been painting landscapes switches over to human figures. Amle, his model is vibrant with life, moving, growing and exhibiting an inexhaustible source of beauty, colour and form. He realizes that the human touch is essential for making Art living and meaningful. His model feels drawn to him, because of his reticence about himself, his Art and his
family. His insight into nature helps him to develop insight into human beings. Sharma looks with wonder at his model, feels the warmth and vitality of her presence and believes he knows the entire history of her hand before he begins to paint it. Mirada is relieved as Sharma has crawled away from his "eternal little spiders and their terrible great webs." Sharma is now completely transformed; he has risen above nature; his earlier paintings are surpassed by these human and meritorious works. He has come back to the world of human beings from his isolation and preoccupation with nature.

**Bye, Bye, Blackbird**

Social and individual violence is rooted in prejudice and intolerance; we come across a number of unusual episodes and happenings in Anita Desai's novels that convince us of the universality of prejudice. English and Indian characters act on prejudices; we find a great deal of talking in the novel which may be annoying to many readers. B. Ramachandra Rao comments:

"Two of the three main characters are the very talkative Dev and Adit Sen. They talk and talk and talk. There is a great deal of argument, attitudinising, mouthing of hatred for England, expressions of love for England."

Anita Desai draws the character of Sarah who is
culturally alienated; suffers loss of identity on account of immigration and marriage and who is treated by society with contempt and derision; social prejudice and violence arise from the conflict between provincialism and cosmopolitanism.

She marries "a vag"; she is greeted with expressions like "Hurry, hurry Mrs. Curry" and "Where's the fire, pussy cat" on the roads. She walks, drawing across her face a mask of secrecy.

In her marriage she had become nameless, she had shed her name as she had shed her ancestry and identity. Sarah's condition is pathetic, deplorable and pitiable.

Anita Desai's portrayal is poignant and moving. Sarah feels that she is merely playing roles. "Her face was only a mask, her body only a costume."

But unreality had surged the paper walls of the fort, turning them soggy, making the pages float away on dim waves. In the centre she sat, feeling the waves rock her, and then the fear and the questioning began. Who was she — Mrs. Sen who had been married in ered and gold Saree brocade sari one burning, bronzed day in September, or Mrs. Sen, the Head's secretary, who sent out the bills and took in the changes, kept order in the school and was known for her efficiency? Both these creatures were frauds, each had a large, shadowed element of charade about it. Then she briskly dealt with letters and bills in her room under the stairs, she felt an intruder but, equally, she was playing a part when she tapped her fingers to the altar music on Adit's records or ground spices for a curry she did not care to eat. 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. They were roles — and when she was not playing them, she was nobody. Her face was only a mask, her body only a costume. 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, with great sadness, if she would never 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.

Anita Desai suggests almost a mystic dialogue between the individual and the locale. The novel locates finally draws the outsider into itself. In the novel she deals with the issue of the alien's accommodation with a tradition. Dev who initially cynical and critical, resistant and unyielding finally settles down in London. Anita Desai inserts London advertisement and slogans as they flash on Dev's mind and become part of his life unconsciously. Dev's alignment is romantic. He yields to the magic of England: geographically as well as mentally. Adit thinks that he is attracted by the magic of England:

... the magic of England - her grace, her peace, her abundance, and the embroidery of her history and traditions — and the susceptibility of the Indian mind to these elements, trained and prepared as it was since its schooldays to receive, to understand and appreciate these very qualities.
Dev is fed up with London life; is assailed by hustle and bustle, cacophony, perpetual din and noise and shallowness and sham. The nightmare brings his spirits down. Unable to bear its onslaught, he moves to the countryside at the week-end. Though it ended in a settled grey-fade out of regret and apprehension for the sense, it brings him a new sense of adventure, an adventure, not of discovery but of recognition. He is profoundly impressed by nature. His soul is opened and is filled with nature's healing touch. Dev's encounter with nature is vividly described:

He climbed over a stile into a meadow of waist-high grasses, of purple and loose strife, of thistles and daisies, and at the bottom of it lay the river Test, as slow and placid as a wandering cow. Here he sat down, on the bank, and felt the sun gently knead his back. Sunlit weeds bent to the gentle current, trout and minnows darted in and out of the shelter of weeds - but calmly, unfrightenedly, all of life a musical dream to them. Across the river cows grazed solemnly. One of them looked up, noticed him and ambled up to the river's edge to stare across it at him. He sat still, scarcely breathing. The other cows noticed too and followed and soon, the entire herd was lined up along the bank, gazing at him with huge, wondering eyes, as children at a zoo will stare at a chimpanzee. For a worried moment he wondered if they would take it into their heads to cross the shallow river in order to get near him, perhaps taste him with their long rough tongues, and prod him, exploringly, with their short horns. They looked intelligent enough to think of crossing by the foot-bridge, one by one. But no, they looked away at last and fell to grazing again.
He breathed more easily and wondered if they would have treated every intruder to this deep scrutiny, or did they see in him, his dark skin and black eyes, something alien and exotic? For the first time in England, a thought of this color did not upset him as unjust or foolish - he saw it as fitting into the pattern of nature.

Adit's inner landscape is Indian whereas Sou's is English. The experiences of both enrich the novel. Anita Naisi suggests the connection between the inner landscape and the outer. The disturbing experience brings to the surface what is within them. The experience makes Adit nostalgic of what was natural to his soul; the experience of India. He sees "Even in the outspread hair about (Sarah's) shoulders that India Landscape." The novelist describes his embrace

...signified only that the first shock of the memory of its sternness and poverty was beginning to end and he was beginning to see its wild, wide grandeur, its supreme grandeur, its loneliness and black, glittering enchantment.

Kamala Markandaya, in her *Norther Man is an Immigrant*, presents Srinivas as an alien who has settled in England and tries to assimilate the British culture assiduously. There is a blending of the best in the East and the West in his relation with Mrs. Pickering. When his wife Vasantha dies and he immerses her ashes with sandalwood and the bangles water in the Thames, he symbolises the persistence and vitality of Indian culture. Srinivas loses his cultural identity, slowly,
imperceptibly. But Dev is always in confusion. He does not know his own identity — nor can he even try to search for it!

Adit leaves for India, but he stays on. As he walks out of the Waterloo station, he feels triumphant and happy. But immediately afterwards, he feels uneasy and uncertain.

While buying the ticket he felt certain . . . and then not so certain . . . . that he saw a glint of scorn in the conductor's eye, the abrupt way in which he handed him his ticket and then kept him waiting for his change. He wondered if the old lady beside whom he sat down did not clutch her hand-bag and leave away from him as though she suspected a small. But, he told himself, it didn't matter. 20

Dev's quest for identity shows him as a changeable and capricious observer, foreigner and a receptive admirer of British culture. Anita Desai brings out this dichotomy vividly.

In this growing uncertainty he feels the divisions inside him divided further, and even redivided once more. . . . There are days in which the life of an alien appears enthrallingly rich and beautiful to him, and that of a homebody too dull, too stale to return to. Ever then he hears a word in the tube or notices an expression on an English face that overturns his latest decision and, drawing himself together, he feels he can never bear to be the unwanted immigrant but must return to his own land, however abject or dull, where he has, at least, a place in the sun, security, status and freedom. 21

Dev is weak, feeble, fragile, incapable of any intense feeling arising out of suffering and a creature of circumstances,
hesitant, doubting and wavering. A few references are to the point in this context. Santha Rama Ram's *Remember the House* shows us the Indian girl, Baba Goray subjected to the clash of the East and West: the cultural acceptance of the West posing a hard and painful issue. She comes to understand the terms in which life should be lived, makes intelligent adjustments and comes out victorious. "Ukenkwo", Chinua Achebe's character resists the foreigners - the Europeans (the locusts) instigated by IBO society. The cultural clash reaches a critical stage and the helpless victim who wants to resist has no alternative but death. In this suicide is not an act of cowardice, but moral victory. Dev, unlike Baba Goray or Ukenkwo is superficial: a man of bombastic words and not deep or genuine feeling or decisive and right action: a thundering cloud without rain. His dilemmas, hesitation and movements show a perpetually conforming or passively accepting nature with no depth, no pathos, no striking end.

Adit prefers life in England on account of the prospects, pleasures and luxury, the material attractions. His attitude is practical and pragmatic. Though he is fond of hilsa fish cooked by his mother and wrapped in banana leaves, likes his sisters clad in saris, loves home life in India, and is interested in music, the melody of the *sitar* or *Shehnai*, he is prepared to forget them and give them up. His conversation with Dev makes his view clear.
What I can't understand about you is... if you long that much for miles, fish and the sitar, why don't you get the hell out of it here and go home where these things fall into your lap for the asking? Is that the life you crave... what keeps you from having it?

Adit replies:

Ah, but when I'm there - and I was, you know, for four months, looking for a job before I married Sarah—I take these things for granted again and I only notice the laziness of the clerks & the unpunctuality of the buses and trains, and the beggars and the flies and the stench... and the boredom. Now yer, the boredom of it. Then I'm mad to get back to England and the nice warm pubs and pick up a glass of Guinness and oye the girls and be happy again.

In the first part of the novel Adit is shown as a merry, jolly, cheerful and sociable busy body and adventurer. He is fond of the crowded bus, steamy smell of the crowds and loves the warmth of an evening pub. In the latter part he gains depth. He is seized by melancholy after spending a week with Sarah's parents at Hampshire. He feels that he is possessed by a black magician—his perception of everything in distorted. Seeing the river Test, he remembers the rivers of India, dried, full of mud and slush or in spate, furiously breaking the banks or swamping and flooding crop fields and wiping villages. His journey through Hampshire reminds him of barren rocks and dust, clumsy huts, barren, leafless-
flowerless and fruitless trees. A feeling of getting drowned in quicksands steals over him. He feels mental agony. When the news of Pakistani attack on India is known, he explodes:

I can't stand it Sarah. I tell you. I've had enough. It's all got to end now.
There must be change. A... a big change.
I've got to do it. You... you understand?
Now don't stop me, don't say anything, I've made up my mind... .

We are reminded of Sanad Shivpal in Mayura Banegal's Time to be Happy who returns home after wandering on the way. Adit realises his identity and chooses to do away with his mask, unreal self, his fancies and memories. Whereas Dev does not undergo the ordeal of suffering or suffer pain arising out of involvement in cultural conflict, Adit shows himself capable of emotional intensity and exhibits noble dimension of his personality.

Adit's character seems to have some glaring defects. Though he attains depth of feeling and chooses Indian culture after bitter mental anguish, he is self-centred. Sarah, his English wife knows this well but Adit is incapable of marital sympathy, humane and urban approach and deep attachment born of genuine understanding; he screams,

'She'll never come with me,' Adit shouted, pointing at Sarah. 'She's got cold feet.'
She is seen to it that I have burnt my boats and am ready to go, then she breaks it to me. Always gently, always quietly. But I knew it all along. She hasn’t the courage, she is backing out...

The character of Sarah is drawn impressively, sympathetically and brilliantly: she has depth of feeling and tenacity of purpose. She gets over the problem of cultural alienation; is calm and composed and is not affected by Adit’s frenzy and fury. She is not excited when her friends get into heated discussions, she is understood in his vehemence of words and wavering half-opinions. Adit’s mental tension and imbalance are ably poised and countered by her disarming calmness and unquestioning acceptance of his plans. She is balanced and realistic in her approach. Her dream of India and fascination are not affected by what is rough or crude or repelling, the uncouth, fictitious or fake or deceptive in the life of India. Though she is sick, she chooses to agree to Adit’s proposal of returning to India. Her discussions with Lina about India reveal her rational attitude and cautious approach. Adit’s reply to her when she discloses motherhood namely that his son will be born in India, shakes her a good deal. Her mind is wrenched and split by East-West conflict. But she suppresses her agitation and pain and simply says that they will have tea. Adit is neither sensitive nor understanding; born and brought up in England, Sarah has to sever her connection and adopt an alien culture; abruptly she suffers mental torture and agony. Leaving England
means death to her sensitive personality: Adit shows his incapacity to understand her. to heal her wounded and split person and to offer sympathy and succour. She is the victim of a real dilemma, a painful weaning - not mere immigration - from the hearth and home, the land and people who are hers since birth:

Silent, frozen on the diwan, Sarah and Adit held hands like a pair of children, feeling Bengal, feeling India seep into their rooms like a flooded river, drowning all that had been English in it, all that had been theirs, friendly and private and comfortable, drowning it all and replacing it with the emptiness and sorrow, the despair and rage, the flat grey melancholy and the black glamour of India. They themselves were tossed about by the flood like floating and then became a part of it, the black flood.

Anita Desai, however, does not elaborate or picture Sarah's feelings of forced separation, alienation and painful acculturisation. Sarah feels intensely but overcomes her problems: her quiet and balanced response hides volcanic turmoil and chaos within. We cannot help thinking that the novelist has not cared to exploit the possibilities of this situation charged with tensions, agony and pathos, the pangs of death and throes of birth.

Oye, Oye Blackbird! is at best an interesting sketch of three characters, a quibble and not a moving story so essential for a successful novel. Novels derive their power
and appeal through the living interactions of characters on perplexing or trying or disturbing conditions. Conflict must be embedded in situations and embodied in characters. Achebe, the African novelist, Wilson Harris, the West Indian Artist or Patrick White, the Australian moralist or Raja Rao, the the Indian exponent of Yoga and Indian culture have distinguished themselves, not through fiery and destructive revolt of their characters, and clashes of consciousness of a purely mental nature but through spirited and unyielding interaction with disturbing and disquieting conditions confronting them. Sarah is a silent sufferer, capable of intense feeling and remarkable steadfastness. She is triumphant because she is calm, balanced and unshaken even when she is subjected to the frenzy, indifference and heart-breaking cultural alienation occasioned by her marriage with Adit. Dev and Adit are highly talkative, argumentative, self-centred and given to perpetual, often wild expression of their thoughts, opinions and feelings. We know their mental reactions only and not their total personalities.

Where Shall We Go This Summer?

Violence and reverence for life are favourite themes for modern novelists. Lawrence, Hemingway, Faulkner and others have dealt with it in all its complexity and intensity. Anita Desai displays profound knowledge and insight in her descriptions.
But whereas Laurence, Hemingway and others project the
pervading violence in the context of social and moral forces
affecting individual relationship in society, Anita Desai
elucidates the experiences and feelings of a woman who takes a
limited view from the standpoint of family and limited area of
domestic relationships. Sita’s alienation and anguish are
painted on a limited and restricted canvas of family and
relationships. Anita Desai could have attempted the delineation
of Sita’s alienation on a broad canvas: in terms of society
and country at large. We find only a number of statements of
her opinions. Logical demonstration cannot help her to tackle
the situation. She makes use of narrative resources to
communicate her alienation. But they do not cohere into an
aesthetic whole. She could have lent depth and intensity to
the intended goal. Strategies of narration are too abrupt to
work a pattern and achieve unity of impression. Sita’s
consciousness is centred in the island; she was afraid of it
once; but now she is attracted by it as his father was
attracted before: it becomes the focal point of her interest
and attention she narrates.

The island had been buried beneath her
consciousness deliberately, for years.
Its black magic, its subtle glamour had
grown too huge, had engulfed her at a time
when she was still very young and quite
alone. She had grown afraid of it, been
relieved to leave it and come to the
mainland with Raman. The mainland - the
very word implied solidity, security: the solidity of streets, the security of houses. She had not realized then that living there would teach her that life was a crust of dull tedium, of hopeless disappointment — but a thin crust, a flimsy crust that, at every second or third step, broke apart so that she tumbled in, with the most awful sensation, into a crashed pile of debris. She had no longer the nerve or the optimism to continue. No, she refused to walk another step. She would turn, go back and find the island once more.

In Where Shall We Go This Summer? Anita Desai presents the mental life of Sita and her search for liberation. Sita cannot adjust herself in the flat where her husband, and in-laws live. Later she moves to a flat where she lives with her husband and children. The people there are business-like, hard, practical and dull; they intrude upon her privacy. They are commonplace, totally unacceptable and vulgar, rude. Their vegetarian complacency and stolidity, shock, humiliate and infuriate her.

... She took their insularity and complacency as well as the aggression and violence of others as affronts upon her own living nerves. ...36

Every sensitive individual is confronted with the existential problem of boredom, tedium and absurdity of life in this world. Sita faces it squarely but feels helpless and powerless. Her husband is absorbed in business activities and children become independent. She finds herself completely
entangled in unending boredom and monotony. Her husband is puzzled with her feelings of boredom and tedium. Anita Desai puts it vividly:

... She herself looking on it, saw it, stretched out so vast, so flat, so deep, that in fright she scrambled about it, searching for a few of those moments that proclaimed her still alive, not quite drowned and dead.  \[37\]

Sita's condition reminds us of Jean Paul Sartre's *Nausea*, an existentialist novel of rare merit. Antoine Roquentin is gripped by nausea, tormented and driven to distraction. Modern man in the materialistic world falls a prey to a tortuous feeling of boredom. It is a bane, a curse and a crippling aftermath of scientific and technological progress. Sita's married life is assailed by loneliness and boredom—an existentialist nausea. Anita offers a positive solution to the problem in this novel.

Whereas Sita is confronted with existentialist *Nausea*, necessitating appropriate reaction: either of acceptance or surrender, her Father symbolizes nullity, inaction. Both desire ideal society, universal peace, plenty, freedom from fear, want and anxiety. But Sita is anxious to escape from the existential predicament and settle in Manali to a life of peace and stability. Her Father considers life on Manali as life in a peaceful, pleasant ashram far from the madding crowd.
Sita views it as a piece of magic, "a magic mirror." The picture of father is that seen through Sita's eyes and so the contrast is not really adequate.

Her father is considered as a Messiah as he brings water to the island and the inhabitants are taught profitable ways of farming and production. But Sita comes to know his defects and serious shortcomings. He is not a superman; the water in the well is not sweet and his miracle cures are suspect. The relationship between Phoolmaya and her father is open to doubt. He is amoral and immoral. His carnality and incestuous disposition towards his own daughter, Sita's elder sister Sekha who later becomes a national celebrity is discovered by Sita to her consternation. So his real nature is vicious, licentious and adulterous.

Sita feels disappointed with the inhabitants of Manali including Moses who are utterly changed with the passage of time. She tries to recapture the magical glory and glamour of the past, unmindful of the effect of the passage of time. Her second visit disillusioned her - she realises that change is inevitable. Consequently she chooses to withdraw into the "protective chrysalis of childhood" as Naya in Cry the Peacock, to get over her final disappointment. The islanders also get disappointed with her. Those who once praised her father, now condemn her, comparing Sita with her father. Her visit is
unsuccessful because she is not objective; she cannot evaluate her past with detachment.

The novelist describes Sita's balance of reality and illusion: the external and the internal. Sita's "That's all" has a ring of finality about it. The fire of passion has purged and purified her. She feels liberated and exultant.

She stood still, straddling the line where the water met the sand, clashed and separated, and felt herself released and freed. Immensely tired now, all emptied out, the drama drained, the passion crumpled, she felt so light that she could have risen and floated out to sea, a black sea-bird. But she did not. The wind jumped up and buffeted her so that she could not stand still and she began to trail after him, knowing she would follow him, follow the trail of footprints he had laid out of her. Like the freed sea-bird at evening, she wheeled around and began to circle about and then dropped lower and lower towards her home.38

Sita always feels very restless when she is alone with him.

agitated by the queerest, most horrible sensations.39

The memories of her childhood and Father's messianic ministrations to the inhabitants of the island are hidden in her "subconscious." His sainthood gave him enormous power. He became selfish, vain and authoritative in contrast to his profession of saintliness, charity, service and liberation of the citizens. They were ignorant, gullible and poor. This gave him an advantage which he exploited for his own ignoble
selfish ends. He played the role of a saviour artfully making himself powerful, vain and dictatorial. Sita comes to know this truth.

self-sacrifice and service place power in a man's hand, ennoble and enlarge a human being into a superhuman being (especially in a setting of ignorance and poverty and gullibility) and how, once this superhumanity is recognised... it can be used as a means to power and glory, not of a cause (a cause is abstract, unattractive to the poor and ignorant) but of one's own self-solid, primary, and obvious as an idol in the temple of the simple. He had fought, whole-heartedly and earnestly, for a cause, and won. What could he go on doing then? He himself became a cause, and won again. Won. The island belonged to him. 40

Sita is sensitive and intelligent. She analyses, confronts and utilizes the past critically—seeing through her father's viles, stratagems and charlatanism. She comes to terms with the situation when she grows into a young woman; her disillusionment of her father's sainthood and superhuman powers results in marriage with the son of her father's best friend, Ramen. He is practical, shrewd and business-like. But he cannot understand Sita's conflict or despair. Sita feels unable to bear the "Vegetarian complacency" of his household, or the "subhuman placidity of" his business associates. She desperately seeks quiet, understanding and sympathy. When she becomes pregnant for the fifth time, she breaks down on reading the headlines of the newspaper about the
Vietnam war or the report on the conditions in a Rhodesian jail. Her musings are revelatory and interesting.

certain now that civilisation had been created by the godlike efforts of the few . . . bettering her and her fish-foetue so that survival seemed hopeless.41

Her husband asks where they shall go this summer. Sita insists on visiting the island to escape from the din, confusion and conformity of life in Bombay. But Raman does not like the proposal as there are no doctors, hospitals or telephones there. When he remarks that she will have to put up with much trouble and hardship, she spurts out: "But I don't want to have the baby. . . . I want to keep it, don't you understand?"

Sita is completely disillusioned and desires to shake off all responsibilities. She wishes to be free to be unperturbed.

She had escaped from duties and responsibilities, from order and routine, from life and the city, to uninhabited island. She had refused to give birth to a child in a world not fit to receive the child. She had the imagination to offer it an alternative - a life un-lived, a life switched. She had cried out her great "No" but now the time had come for her epitaph to be written - the face per viltate in gran ripluta. Very soon now that epitaph would have to be written.42

Sita is subjected to mental disturbance by the attitude of
her in-laws, the unending noise and the unwanted intrusion and interference of Raman's associates. She decides to challenge the conventions and move away to a quiet and soothing environment. She knows that this may crush her and land her in greater hardships. Her daughter and youngest son are kidnapped to the magic island. She is sensitive and cannot bear violence. Once she has tried to save a young eagle from the attack of crows crowded on the city's roof-tops. She cannot witness the sight of her son poking the jellyfish curiously:

Sita remained at a distance and regarded the creature spilling across the shell-scattered sandbar. . . . It appeared to her to be the brain of the opaque 'mind' of some gigantic underwater creature that had lived all its life far beneath the level where light penetrated and that had, in the creature's tormented death pangs, burst forth from the fine white skull—washed and washed again to that unearthly white—and risen to the surface of the sea, but quickly surrendered its few moments of momentum to the wash and draw of the waves.43

Anita Desai has the gift of describing her characters and situations or the background and fleeting thoughts in minute detail. Miran is frightening and adhesive; Moses is portly and clumsy in his lungi. Hinaka is adamant and Karan is impatient. They leave a lasting impression on the reader's mind; Sita's confused mind is described vividly.

'Oh,' she said, muddling her hair with her hand, muddling the sound with her feet, suddenly anxious to close this conversation and resume the silence of the past.44
The novelist excels in vivid description. Raman is portrayed in a graphic manner:

He never hesitated—everything was so clear to him and simple; life must be continued and all its business—Minska's admission to medical college gained, new child safely brought forth, the children reared, the factory seen to, a salary spent.

Karan is delineated interestingly. He insists on having his father's pen and the reader feels convinced. The conversation showing his keenness to return to Bombay to possess one, two or three dinky cars in quite fresh and amusing to life and impressive:

'Will we go to Bombay, now?'
'Later.'
'In two minutes?'
'No, later.'
'In ten minutes?'
'No later.'
'Shall I count hundred? After I've counted a hundred, will we go?'

Anita Desai provides interesting conversation between Sita and Raman: from different viewpoints, when they discuss Minska's admission to the medical college while Karan goes on asking for a new pen. Unlike Maya, she can communicate her thoughts and make necessary adjustments.

Sita is serious, contemplative and capable of quick
decision and bold action. Anita Desai also seems to be serious and subjective. She is humorous at only one place in the whole novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* It is light and funny in contrast to the serious tone and texture of the whole novel. In the early part of the novel, a minor character Joseph retorts Moses effectively: The joke is unexpected but refreshingly welcome and appreciable.

"The monsoon is coming."
"No!" they all cried in disbelief.
"No one has come in twenty years," said Ali, cruelly.
"No one will come now."
"No?" roared Moses. "Then why did she send me twenty rupees!" He nearly broke the glass as he slammed it down for emphasis.
"For a lundi, you said," said Joseph, the careless sceptic.

*Fire on the Mountain*

Character-portrayal is the most conspicuous feature of Anita Desai's novels and we come across quite a few memorable characters in each novel. Her primary concern is the creation of female protagonists living in a world of their own and swayed by problems and passions peculiar to their nature. Whereas in many Indo-English novels, the characters are delineated smoothly and completely, Anita Desai makes them enigmatic. This is a unique feature and it helps us to get
glimpse of the deeper conflicts in the innermost recesses.
Story and action are relegated to the background while living,
dynamic characters dominate. The action in her novels is a
part of superb texture.

Anita Desai deserves credit for the stylistic and
structural techniques and these are fully exploited in
Fire on the Mountain (1977), The Peacock (1963) and where
Shall We Go This Summer? (1975). We find here extra-ordinary
female protagonists soothed with despair and driven into a
life of solitude. Materially well-off, they are emotionally
disturbed and there is a "divine discontent" in them that is
unquenchable.

Men drive them to this stage of private agony. Their
suffering is portrayed in a realistic manner. There is
however a basic difference from the material suffering we
come across in Kamla Markandaya’s novels.

In her novel, Fire on the Mountain, Anita Desai deals
with the complex problems of crime, sex, virgin widows, old
age, loneliness and reconciliation with change brought about
by the passage of time. Ila Jos, a devoted welfare officer in
a village dedicates herself to the service of the villagers,
removal of superstitions, health and medical education,
social reform and literacy. Nanda Kaul listens to the
reminiscences of her hair-raising experiences as a welfare
officer narrated with the skill of a "dramatic raconteur."

Before leaving her, Ila Dee tells her how she has tried to prevent Groot Singh, a villager from marrying off his seven year old daughter to a widower having six children, a quarter of an acre of land and two goats. She then starts on her return journey to her residence, in a hurry to reach home before dark. On her way, she is met, intercepted, assaulted fiercely, raped and murdered by Groot Singh, all unexpectedly.

The news of the rape and murder of Ila Dee stuns, dozes and shocks Nanda Kaul. The description is a master-piece by Anita Dee: showing marvellous verbal economy; Nanda Kaul is paralysed; gripped with the horror of the ghostly murder, she recounts ravingly.

But Nanda Kaul had ceased to listen. She had dropped the telephone, with her head still thrown back, far back, she gasped: No, no, it is a lie! No, it cannot be, it was a lie - Ila was not raped, not dead, it was all a lie, all. She had lied to Raka, lied about everything. Her father had never been to Tibet - he had bought the little Buddha from a travelling pedlar. They had not had bears and leopards in their home, nothing but overfed dogs and bad-tempered parrots. Her had her husband loved and cherished her and kept her like a queen— he had only done enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David, the mathematics mistress, whom he had not married because she was a Christian but whom he had loved, all his life loved.
...and her children - the children were all alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them. She did not live here alone by choice - she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing. All those graces and glories with which she had tried to captivate Raka were only a fabrication; they helped her to sleep at night, they were tranquilizer pills. She had lied to Raka. All she had lied, too. She, too, had lied, had tried. No, she wanted to tell the man on the phone, No, she wanted to cry, but could not make a sound. Instead, it choked and swelled inside her throat. She twisted her head, then hung it down, down, let it hang...;

Suffering an emotional blow after her husband's death, Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain retreats to a remote villa in the Himalayas. There is a metamorphosis in her attitude. Previously she was meticulous about the material world and its comforts and etiquette but now it gives place to introspection, even nihilism, laying bare the facts that what all she had believed in was found to be "fake."

When a woman lives alone, her house should be extremely dilapidated, the mud wall should be falling to pieces, and if there is a pond it should be overgrown with water plants. It is not essential that the garden be covered with sage-brush, but wood should be growing through the sand in patches, for this gives the place a poignantly desolate look.

I greatly dislike a woman's house when it is clear she has scurried about with a knowing look on her face, arranging everything just as it should be, and when the gate is tightly shut.

Nanda now prefers a life of isolation and seclusion.
She wants to identify herself with the emptiness of her Carignano abode and be in communion with the pines, rocks and mountains.

'To be a tree, no more and no less' is all she is prepared to undertake. All she wants is to be alone, to have Carignano to herself, in this period of her life 'when stillness and calm were all that she wished to entertain.'

Anita Desai uses apt imagery to bring home Nanda's yearning for isolation and tranquillity. A shattered marble pillar or a lizard on a wall symbolise the sense of seclusion.

A tree trunk could not harbour irritation, nor a pillar annoyance. She would imitate death, like a lizard. No one would dare rouse her. . . .

Nanda avoids company, even her kith and kin. She treats her daughter, grand daughter and old acquaintance with contempt. Anita Desai uses morbid imagery to highlight Nanda's sense of seclusion and passionate search for a new identity.

Raka's arrival ruffles the serenity of Nanda and becomes a hindrance to her privacy.

'with self-pity and pain, certain that she was alone and no one would hear.' Now in Raka's presence 'she could never groan aloud again; the child would hear.'
Nanda looked upon Raka as an intruder, an unwelcome guest in her alienated world. Raka too shares Nanda's sense of seclusion. Both try to safeguard their spirit of independence and sense of seclusion.

'a mosquito flown up from the plains to tease and worry'. Earlier Raka, which literally means the moon, is ironically likened to one of 'those dark crickets that leap in fright but do not sing, or a mosquito, minute and fine, on thin, precarious legs.' The old woman and the child prowl round one another in a stately well-mannered way, each guarding her independence and privacy. Both of them are identified as 'components of the barreness and stillness of the Carignano garden.'54

While Nanda's seclusion is deliberate and self-imposed, there is an air of spontaneity about Raka's privacy.

Nanda Kaul turned a look on her (Raka) that was reproachful rather than welcoming. ... But Raka ignored her. She ignored her so calmly, so totally that it made Nanda breathless. She eyed the child with apprehension now, wondering at this total rejection, so natural, instinctive and effortless when compared with her own planned and willful rejection of the child.55

A queer situation develops now. Nanda and Raka have to live under the same roof physically and spiritually live in their own worlds. They have to be together and at the same time keep themselves aloof from each other. "It was not so simple to exist and yet appear not to exist."56
The following lines focus the sharp contrast between the two protagonists.

If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, her great-granddaughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct. She had not arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice—she was born to it, simply.57

The description of the secluded, isolated existence of these two characters is exquisite. Anita Desai invests even the minutest details with a compelling intensity.

Nanda Kaul likes privacy, stasis and introversion. Raka on the other hand, loves movement, activity and extravasion. She often disappeared silently, totally, not to return for hours." She could be always seen:

... scrambling up a stony hillside, grasping at tufts of grass or bushes of Spanish broom, her small white-knickered bottom showing above a pair of desperately clinging heels. Or wandering down a lane in a slow, straying manner, stopping to strip a thorny bush of its few berries or to examine an insect under a leaf. Then she would round a boulder or drop from the lip of a cliff and vanish.58

Nanda Kaul is indifferent because she spent long years in hard work; in duty and obligation. But Raka is "a recluse by nature, by instinct" she had not arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice. She was born to it simply.
Tho distinction that Anita Desai makes between the two characters is subtle and persuasive. It is almost metaphysical: Nanda Kaul's indifference is born out of 'vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation' but Raka is a 'recluse by nature, by instinct' for 'she had not arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice - she was born to it, simply.'

Anita considers that the grown-up individual, the adult always seeks detachment and withdrawal but rarely finds them. They become attached and involved to the extent that superhuman efforts are needed to rise above them. Anita Desai takes up the theme of existential predicament: life of long suffering, unmitigated hardship; agonising alienation - that does not even afford the satisfaction of loneliness or withdrawal. Finally her characters develop life-hating character as the urge for liberation cannot find fulfilment. They withdraw from life; live lonely lives or act perversely. The dance at the club pictures this vividly.

Bunches of balloons sighed and swayed to the music, then suddenly shot up and squeaked with alarm as a lady mouse ran out from under them, her whiskers trembling like antennae and a long tail losing handfuls of fur across the floor. She was being chased by a man who had his hair combed down over his eyes and wore a scarf around his neck like a noose before it is tightened. He caught her by the tail, she jumped into his arms, they threw up their knees, laughed and turned. Two balloons exploded, bang-bang, without being pricked. Their shreds lay in a corner like rubber tears.
For Nanda it is now a moment of self-realisation. Her sense of fulfilment crumbles and she is frustrated with the emptiness of her life. There is a complete transformation in her attitude. She tries to endear herself to Raka, exploit her curiosity and woo her with anecdotes. But Raka proves to be too cautious to yield to her cajoling.

Reminiscences of childhood rekindle Nanda’s maternal instincts. She makes a frantic effort to get over her sense of seclusion and intimately associate herself with Raka’s life.

Raka, you really are a great-grandchild of mine, aren’t you? You are more like me than any of my children or grandchildren. You are exactly like me, Raka.

Raka’s profound attachment to Carignano brings about a remarkable transformation in Nanda. She reconciles herself to the myths that have covered up the grim realities of her past. Raka does not seem to be an intruder but fits in quietly. So much so Nanda toys with the idea of making a will. But as she disfavours anyone’s coming to Carignano, the idea becomes an anathema to her. At the same time she does not want Raka to leave.

belonged to no one else, had no meaning
for anyone else. Raka alone understood
Carignano, knew what Carignano stood for -
she alone valued that...
The visit of Ila Das, another female protagonist, proves fatal. Ila Das is loquacious, her voice is exasperating. She presents a striking contrast to Nanda. While Nanda leads a life of seclusion without a sense of fulfilment, Ila involves herself in welfare activities. Her failure brings home the startling truth that there is no solace on earth except the longing for the bonds of affection.

Nanda's dream world receives a shattering blow. Raka sets ablaze the entire hillsides. Nanda realises the futility of her vision of life.

She did not live alone by choice . . . she lived here because she was forced to do, reduced to doing.

The dichotomy in the lives and attitudes of the female protagonists of the novel brings home a profound message. Life becomes a torture if one does not learn to reconcile oneself to its realities. Anita Desai's female protagonists are not frail or pitiable but they are unpredictable and queer. There is a tragic flaw in them that dooms them to failure.

Endowed with a gift for subtle suggestion, Anita Desai establishes an inextricable co-relation with the landscape and the psychic condition of her characters. She has a keen awareness of the outer world and also the perception of a painter.
The invents subjective experience and emotional conflicts with an objective reality.

She was not sure if it was poignant, ironical or merely irritating that Raka herself remained totally unaware of her dependence, was indeed as independent and solitary as ever. Watching her wandering amongst the rocks and agaves of the ravine, tossing a horse chestnut rhythmically from hand to hand, Nande Kaul wondered if she at all realized how solitary she was. She certainly never asked nor bothered to see if there were a letter for her, or news. Solitude never disturbed her.

This superb delineation of character is Anita Desai's chief strength. The striking symbolism enhances the intensity. The fire that Raka sets has a profound symbolic implication. It becomes an all consuming force of extinction.

The uniqueness of Anita Desai lies in the profound exploration of innermost recesses of the characters she portrays.

Only the individual, the solitary being, is of true interest. One must be alone, silent, in order to think or contemplate, or write.

She has no commitment to any feminist movement but her main concern is with the individuals who vibrate with life with all their emotional conflicts and imbalances.

discover its significance by plunging below the surface and plumbing the depths
then illuminating those depths till they
become a more lucid, brilliant and
explicable reflection of the visible world.

The novelist rediscovers the significance of life
penetrating to its depths. Existence which apparently seems
to be futile on the surface, yields a new meaning as she
explores its depths through the protagonists who pulsate with
life, despite the imbalances.

**Fleer Light of Day**

In Anita Desai's *Fleer Light of Day*, her theme is life
and not withdrawal. Sim is a study in contrast of all Anita
Desai's female characters, she stands unique and imposing.
Unlike the other tragic characters, she is not cursed with the
trauma of a shattered childhood or incompatible marriage.
Sim symbolises the benign, archetypal mother—a metaphor used
to advantage—for reasserting and reaffirming the life themes.
D.H. Lawrence's "Ship of Death" seems to have suggested to
Anita Desai the idea of Sim's mastery of her own death—wish.
Whereas her counterparts, Naya and Sita are smitten by
existential nullity, anguish and morbidity, Sim transcends them.
Like the mother she denies herself that her children might
live. Her negation and affirmation assume a spiritual
dimension.

The mother symbolises the beneficial and benign love
and sacrifice Anita Desai writes impressively about her
sustaining presence—indirectly, suggestively. Mira Masi,
the widowed aunt nurses the children when the mother neglects
them. After Mira Masi is gone, Jim acts as the foster-mother
of her brothers and sisters. The mother who bears, the
mother who cares and the mother who shares—the three aspects
are deftly portrayed by the novelist. Jim sustains the family
and the house which metaphysically stands for tradition or
cultural heritage.

We learn from Salil’s remarks that Tara is obsessed
with her childhood memories that swell and surge in her mind
drowning all her acquired habits and experiences. Her
personality is broken to pieces and she feels weak and helpless
as she was in her childhood.

Tara is unable to comprehend the passage of time. Her
intense obsession with childhood can be explained by this
inability. Later she recognises its significance; learns
that existentially time changes, distorts or destroys various
things and that one should be resilient and adjustable, if
he wants to live in this world. She becomes aware of a
shocking and changed form of relationship. An economical way
of living in her old family strikes her.

In part II of the novel, Anita Desai sketches the life
of Aunt Mira, a virgin widow, adding pathos and dwelling on
the tragic fate, falling to the lot of innocent women in contemporary society. Mira is suffering from a strange disease, intermittent strokes of delirium or violent fits, stupor and spasms. She is obsessed with the image of the well in which the bride-like cow was once drowned. In her last hysterical fit she recounts the incident, so pathetically, symbolic of her own broken and blasted life; she was condemned to virgin widowed—a monstrous social practice crippling and blunting young life—in Hindu society.

Only on one night did she rouse herself out of the stupor that had lasted permanent, and then she tore at her clothes as if they were a net, tore at invisible things that seemed attached to her throat and fingers and hair, even screamed 'Let me go—let me jump into the well—let me!' She screamed that intermittently all through the night, like an owl, or nightjar starting out of the silence, waking him. She seemed obsessed by the idea of the well—the hidden, scummy pool in which the bride-like cow they had once had, had drowned, and to which she seemed drawn. Him held her wrists all night, wondering why of all things in this house and garden it was the well she wanted, to drown in that green scum that had never shown a ripple in its blackened crust since the cow's death... Now it seemed to encroach on the aunt's enclosing darkness like a dark flood and she seemed helpless to resist it—on the contrary, hopelessly attracted by it.

Mira is a different type of character, altogether. She is novel, self-sacrificing and restrained in her emotions and controlled in her thoughts. Anita Desai describes the gradual
growth of her relationship and intimacy with Dr. Biwas who is sent to her house by her father's business partner for the treatment of Raja. He visits her almost everyday. As they come to know each other, Dim confides in him and even discusses family problems with him. On his invitation, she goes with him to Bose and Davico's to listen to concerts. He recounts his happy days in Germany and expresses his liking for the Bose's keen interest in music. Dim now gets to know the versatile nature and the proficiency of Dr. Biwas in playing on the violin. She does not, however, encourage him to love her lest she get entangled emotionally and neglect her aunt and little brother. She rises above the existential predicament through her sacrificing spirit and ceaseless service.

Dr. Biwas's invitation for a tea party is accepted by him and she attends it at his place. His mother is staying with him. Her son's hard work and his high sense of duty are praised by her. She says

He... he is the only one who knows what work is, work, work, nothing but work. Did anybody ever work so hard? He was killing himself.

She asks Dr. Biwas to play on his violin for her for entertainment and appreciation, she remarks

I don't understand all this western music he plays, but perhaps you can.
After a while she tells her that "He wants someone who understands." 71

But Sim is annoyed and depressed. She is disgusted and disconcerted with the presumptive attitude and disquieting implication of her remarks. She returns to her place immediately. On being asked by Raja whether she has approved the proposition of becoming her daughter-in-law, she erupts angrily.

"Daughter-in-law?" Dr. Sivag's mother - just don't talk to me about her - about them - I hope I never have to see Dr. Sivag again - he gives me the creeps - he's - he's just . . . 72

Dr. Sivag observes Sim's devotion and loving care for Aunt Airc; Raja and Baba, her unremitting and spirited ministration and service. He realizes the reason for her refusal to marry.

'Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated your life to others - to your sick brother and your aged aunt and your little brother who will be dependant on you all his life. You have sacrificed your own life for them.' 73

Anita Desai describes many episodes of the shared part of Sim, Torn and Raja, in Part I of her novel Fire on the Mountain. These main characters remember or discuss very spiritedly.

The pleasant days and events of the past are obsessively
111
In their memory. They are parts of their real life, prior to the partition of India. In Part I she presents life in 1947, the turmoil and agony of people suddenly uprooted from their homes: their misfortunes and miseries are drawn movingly. In Part III the experiences are elaborately dwelt upon and commented. The uncouth, disorderly narration in part I is artistically connected with Part III. The repetition of episodes reveals a feeling for beauty, rhythm and colour. The novel, as a whole is enriched by the inclusion of episodes and happenings which are artistically blended and portrayed with emphasis on the inner life of the protagonists. Tara as a child, discovers a snail in the garden. Her joy is natural and vibrant: exhilarating, innocent and pervasive.

Suddenly she stopped with a shout: she spied something under the rose bushes—a gleam of pearly white. Perhaps a jewel, a ring: Tara was always expecting to find treasure, to make her fortune, discover herself a princess. She stopped to part the leaves that hid it and saw the pale, whorled orb of a stopped snail. For a while she stayed on her knees, crushed with disappointment, then lifted it onto a leaf and immediately delight gushed up as in a newly mined well at seeing the small creature unfold, tentatively protrude its antennae and begin to slide forward on a stream of slime. 'Look, Mama, look what I've found,' she cried, darting forwards, and of course it tumbled off the leaf and when the mother turned to look, there was Tara staring at the slimy leaf, then searching for the lost creature in the mud. 74

Tara retains the quality of enjoying natural sights.
Even after she becomes the mother of two grown-up daughters, she evinces the same child-like joy and thrill when she espies a snail in her garden. These episodes not only indicate her obsession with childhood memories and escape mechanism but fuse them, into a whole: obviously she has not outgrown the stage of fanciful wonder and intense delight characterising childhood. Anita Desai also mentions two episodes of her childhood: her father injecting her ailing mother daily and the death of her cow by drowning in a well. The former impresses her that her father is killing her mother and the latter the certainty of death, the tragedy which is inevitable. These incidents have already been mentioned in Part I. Their elaboration serves the purpose of creating a unified impression. The essentially hypersensitive nature of the character is impressively revealed in these descriptions.

Anita Desai's description of Tara's mother who is past middle age and ailing from severe diabetes, feeling perplexed and worried about her fourth pregnancy reminds us of Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer who feels "paranoid" fear and consuming morbidity when confronted with undesired fifth pregnancy. Both Tara and Sita are subject to mental suffering, torments and anxiety. Their obsession and deepening misery seem to echo the novelist's own fear and discomfiture of unwanted pregnancy, especially if we bear in mind that she is the mother of four children. She raises a
burning issue: of planned child-bearing which assumes great importance as it is vitally connected with women, their social life and personal health. Unplanned parenthood is a menace and a curse that spells ruin and collapse, physical breakdown and mental agony in the highly competitive and insecure modern society.

Anita Desai’s moving portrayal of Aunt Mira opens the reader’s eyes to the tragedy of countless virgin widows, victims of monstrous social evils and silent sufferers, condemned to a life of misery, ignominy, callous in difference neglect and apathy. She was a cousin of her mother’s.

Aunt Mira was not exactly an aunt, she was a cousin of the mother’s, a poor relation who had been widowed at the age of fifteen and had lived with her husband’s family ever since as maid of all work, groaning shabbier and skinnier and seedier with the years. Her pathetic plight, her life of unending daily chores, cooking, massaging her mother-in-law’s legs, nursing the babies, a tale of Joe, agony and condemnation is drawn skilfully and poignantly.

Of course she aged. Not only was her hair white but she was nearly bald. At least that saved her from being used by her brothers-in-law who would have put the widow to a different use had she been more appetising. Since she was not, they eyed her unpleasing person sullenly and made jokes loudly enough for her to overhear.
There was laughter, till they grew bored.
She sat with them so long that she
began to bore. They suspected her being
a parasite. It was time she was turned
out. Another household could find some
use for her: cracked pot, torn rag, picked
base.

Bin is requested by Tara to attend the marriage of Raja's
oldest daughter in "Jodphur," but she is full of animosity
and scorn for Bin. She is offended by Raja's indifference
and feeling of pride and superiority. With disgust she says
to Tara:

"If you want to talk about Raja again,
I'm bored with him... utterly bored.
It is too rich to be interesting any more,
too fat and too successful. Rich, fat and
successful people are boring. I'm not
interested, Tara."

Tara wants to remove Bin's misunderstanding and rancour
she desires that Bin should forget the past and live in
peace, forgiving the mistakes of others. She tells Bin:

"It is wrong to allow him to follow the path of
such misunderstanding. Finally says to Bin,
'You should go and visit them, Bin, and see
for yourself how it is. There's the wedding.
They want you there. Here's a letter. Let
us read it to you. . . .'"

"It is unable to carry on the insurance business of her
father's after his death. She divides to sell her share to
. . . her. Bin tells us angrily"
'If I sell, it'll mean the end of that part of our income. It was too small to count anyway, but it did cover some of the expenses. With my salary, I'll be able to pay the rent, keep on the house. I'll manage - but I might have to send you to live with Raja. I came to ask you - what would you think of that? Are you willing to go and live with Raja in Hyderabad?"'

Later she regrets her angry speech and hasty outburst. She sees that Baba is hurt. She realises her mistake, misunderstanding and misapprehension. Baba's helplessness stirs her pity. All illusions and dark thoughts are dispelled "by the clear light of day." The dense misty web of her misapprehension disappears from her eyes. She realizes that old memory had wiped out the vital truth of change from her mind. She becomes introspective, tolerant and sees things as they are: objectively and dispassionately. She learns to accommodate, reconcile and overcome feelings of bitterness and rancour. Her life rises far above insomnia, withdrawal, alienation and anguish. Her nobility, heroism, forgiveness, love and self-sacrifice symbolise forces which counteract all destructive, disintegrating impulses. They are positive, creative, sustaining, ensuring permanence in change, continuity in discontinuity, integrity in dissimpiarousness.
CHAPTER IV

Notes


6. Ibid., p. 20.


8. Ibid., p. 83.

9. Ibid., p. 93.

10. Ibid., p. 96.

11. Ibid., p. 97.

12. Ibid., p. 98.


16. Ibid., p. 33.

17. Ibid., p. 35.

18. Ibid., p. 191.

20 Ibid., p. 61.
21 Ibid., p.270.
24 Ibid., p.39.
26 Ibid., pp.194-195.
27 Ibid., p.207.
29 Ibid., p.96.
30 Ibid., pp.54-55.
31 Ibid., p.54-55.
32 Ibid., p.230.
33 Ibid., p.246.
34 Ibid., p.256.
36 Ibid., p.33.
37 Ibid., pp.33-34.
38 Ibid., pp.106-109.
39 Ibid., p.58.
40 Ibid., pp.54-55.
41 Ibid., p.37.
42 Ibid., pp.101-102.
Ibid., p. 99.
44 Ibid., p. 108.
46 Ibid., p. 193.
47 Ibid., pp. 4-5.

49 Ibid., p. 145.

50 The Pillow Book of Sui Shanagon ("when a woman Lives Alone")
52 Ibid., p. 23.
53 Ibid., p. 34.
54 Ibid., p. 43.
55 Ibid., p. 47.
56 Ibid., p. 47.
57 Ibid., p. 46.
58 Ibid., p. 46.
59 Ibid., p. 46.
60 Ibid., p. 58-70.
61 Ibid., p. 91.
62 Ibid., p. 64.
63 Ibid., p. 80.
64 Ibid., p. 145.
65 Ibid., p. 79.


69 Ibid., p. 91.

70 Ibid., p. 91.

71 Ibid., p. 91.

72 Ibid., p. 91.

73 Ibid., p. 97.

74 Ibid., pp. 102-103.

75 Ibid., p. 104.

76 Ibid., p. 106.

77 Ibid., p. 143.

78 Ibid., p. 145.

79 Ibid., p. 143.