CHAPTER V
TEXT AND CONTEXT
Anita Desai’s novels are concerned with the portrayal of the most troubled part of her protagonist’s life. While her minute perception of the external world situates her protagonist, the use of images, symbols and sounds vividly map the experiences and emotions of a bruised and battered individual. For e.g. Bimla, the Protagonist in Clear Light of Day, is wounded by the callous behaviour of her parents and her brother, Raja, and compares her relations to mosquitoes. This comparision occurs not less than three times in the novel to allude to the domestic disharmony — the root cause of her frustration and her wounded self. In one of her reminiscences, we see the articulation of the above feeling:

They had come like mosquitoes - Tara and Bakul, and behind them the Misras, and somewhere in the distance Raja and Benazir - only to torment her, and mosquitoes - like, sip her blood. All of them fed on her blood, at some time or the other had fed - it must have been good blood, sweet and nourishing. Now, when they are full, they rose in swarms, humming away, running their backs on her.

The above passage graphs the role of memory in the shaping of Bim’s self. It indicates her journey into the past — her world of childhood feelings with nostalgia. In this context the use of mosquitoes as an image is appropriate and convincing in delineating the psyche of the Protagonist.

Likewise, the monotony and boredom of Nanda Kaul’s life is superbly described by the narrator. It exhibits the vacuum in her life created by the extramarital affair of her Vice-Chancellor husband with Miss David.
She would barely have splashed her face with some water and combed out her hair when the baby would come crawling in, the first to hear her stir, the most insistent in its needs. Lifting it into her arms, she would go to the kitchen to see the milk taken out of the ice-box, the layer of cream drawn off, the row of mugs on a tray filled and carried out to the green table on the veranda around which the children already sat on their low cane stools— the little girls still having their long hair plaited and then fresh cotton dresses buttoned, and the boys throwing themselves backwards and kicking the table legs and clamouring with hunger. Then there was the bread to be spread with butter, jam jars opened and dug into, knives taken from babies and boys, girls questioned about homework, servants summoned to mop up spilt milk and fetch tea, and life would swirl on again, in an eddy, a whirlpool of which she was the still fixed eye in the centre. 

The passage begins with the description of the duties and responsibilities of a housewife but the image of the whirlpool concluding the paragraph voices Nanda Kaul's distaste for family surrounding. Her husband's indiscretion disturbs her composure and her genial spirits.

In order to show how Desai's characters react to a particular condition, she weaves an artistic design capturing a significant situation with poetic images and a graceful rhythm. To picturize the mental chaos, she frequently mingles past with present with a hint of future and with uniting symbols. For e.g., 'Peacock' and the 'Albino astrologer' in Cry, the Peacock and 'Fire' in Fire on the Mountain signify death. Such images deepen a reader's awareness and perception of a delineated character.

Anita Desai's novels do not have a familiar beginning where the novels begin with the childhood of a protagonist and concludes with her old age. Story, action and drama mean little to her except in so far as they emanate directly from the
dreams and actions of her characters. Shyam Asani, commenting on the structure of the novels of Anita Desai says:

Whatever action there is in her novels, is part of “the integral whole composed of the human psyche, the human situation, the outer and the inner rhythms”.

Each novel by Anita Desai is a marvel of technical brilliance and dexterity. In order to impart exactitude to her themes and to provide deep insight into the character’s psyche, she lays stress on the internal landscape against the physical backdrop. Flashes, asides and abstract landscape illuminate the individual psychology and the perception of the visible world of the characters in a story. For e.g. Whenever Monisha (Voices in the City) wants to run away from the house of her husband, she feels the bars of the window of her room imprisoning her. Quite often, she cries out her wish -

I long to thrust my head out of the window-and cannot the bars were closely set ...

These bars signify her fear of having very little chances to escape from middle-class traditional patterns of life. “The closely barred windows” also provide a hint to her impending suicide - her attempt to liberate her soul from the confinement of the physical framework. These features may be seen in all the novels of Desai and forms the content of this chapter. I have taken up the novels individually to probe into the structural design for highlighting their distinctive features.

Structurally, Cry, the Peacock is divided into three parts which can be literally described as the beginning, the middle and the end. The first part serves as a prologue while the third appears to be an epilogue - both sections being balanced by death. These two sections are taken over by the Omniscient narrator while the second part is entirely Maya’s commentary, rendered in first person.
The first section of the novel dramatically projects the contrastive natures of Gautama and Maya through their individual responses to the death of their pet dog, Toto. The authorial comments successfully puts Maya’s sensitivity and Gautama’s detachment in silent war with each other. The opening chapter therefore presents not only an important incident but also arouses the reader’s curiosity successfully. Toto’s death is not merely an incident created to place the characters in an interesting situation for a suspense-evoking exposition, rather it is a piece of information to help the readers mind in perceiving an impression of the protagonist, Maya.

Part II is a first-person rendering. It runs to the length of seven chapters. Here the abnormality of Maya is made more implicit through her picturesque descriptions of the world around her. Her sensuous perceptions depict her intense love for rich living. Realizing that she is not emotionally and morally strong, she looks for a saviour in vain. Her poetic verses are now removed by “childhood lullaby” which she gently murmurs to herself to find an escape in her childhood memories.

With growing morbidity the childhood memories take an exaggerated and sinister colouring. She remembers:

...the finely groomed hand that places silvers of fruit upon my plate seem made of alabaster and ivory, fashioned by those magic carves of ivory that sit beside the Taj Mahal, creating one humble replica of the inamorata’s mausoleum after another.

By such remembrances of the protagonist, the narrator focuses our attention on the labyrinths of Maya’s mind to reveal the cause of her extreme loneliness and despair which ultimately ruin her mental equilibrium. The rich and the varied experiences of her sheltered past are evoked through her monologues to highlight her escapism and impracticality.
This part is all in all a wide canvas of Maya’s mental space. Desai has deftly fathomed it with the help of Maya’s recollection of her childhood, projected through the use of flashback technique. The echoes of the prophecy of the albino astrologer - that in the fourth year of her marriage, either, she or her husband would die - becomes central to this part. It is this which creates a total picture of irrevocable doom. The narrative advances to the fulfillment of the prophecy, leading the novel to a crescendo at the end of part two. It is this blend of the reality and the illusion, the innumerable sensuous images comprising of colours, scents, perfumes with the weather of emotional concerns and intense passions, creating an intense experience for the readers. For e.g.

I tore myself away from them, (jasmine buds) having bruised them with my kisses, and trembling, flung then against the mirror, at that fleeting image to which they belonged, and backed out of the room which was now terrorized by the vast, purple shadows of a dreadful night. 6

Such passages cleverly reveal Desai’s power of imaging temperamental turmoil. Maya’s luxuriant thoughts and rich symbols, produce a complex harmony. The subtle interplay of illusion and reality textualise her advancement to the final stage of insanity lending the narrative the echoes of a tragic poem. K. Meera Bai observes:

Maya’s outbursts, sentimental as well as neurotic, have the tremendous force of a volcanic outburst and make the reader spellbound as though anaesthetized by the intensity of her feelings. For an analytical reader, at times, they sound overcharged and incredible. But the outbursts do suggest that there is something uncanny about Maya. 7

Cry, the Peacock has straight narration, uncomplicated by multiple - points of view. The plot unweaves at sure and swift pace. There is no second plot, no political or
philosophical digressions or extraneous characterizations. The narrative is continuous and blended beautifully with the protagonist’s monologues. The focus is always on the main character; the plot is unfolded step by step, there is a rapid denouement leading to the final catastrophe.

Much is said and implied in the novel by use of symbolism. Maya’s internalised suffering is made explicit through imagery. Imagery of insanity and aridity pronounce death. Allusion to the Moon, drum, desert and lizard speak of strange forebodings. Imagery of the vegetative world suggest freedom and richness like the bird, wind, flower and the tree. The imagery of pit, corridor and well suggest her dread for isolation and fear:

The low clouds lowering, the strange light altering, shade by shade, drove me down a long corridor in which windows grew more and more infrequent, till there were none left at all, and darkness was the inevitable, the only physical matter left, thick and black and full of presences, a well of it. The edge of the well was slimy, wet and hideous, but a well must have an edge and he who enters a well must touch the edge. The well had to be entered. This much I knew. But in the well - what? what?

Assessing the function of symbol and metaphors Dr. K.K. Sharma said:

Cry the Peacock is a typically “feminine” novel, a novel of sensibility rather than of action. It has the quality of an orchid and a flute about it. It concerns almost wholly with the terrors of existence, and it achieves its effects through a series of exploding and multiplying metaphors.

Maya, the protagonist is after an illusory life, hence her name justifies her predicament. Her obsession with beauty and evil is suggested through the albino astrologer, Maya’s father who looks like a silver oak with silver hair and white jasmines. Red coloured images - the red ruby, red roses and the red flame of the matchstick
are also used to express her lust for life and love. The peacock-dance in ecstasy is likened to the inner dance of fears and desires in the mind of the protagonist. Finally, the moon - a symbol of both love and lunacy occurs towards the close of the novel, marking the end of her inner conflicts. The dance of the peacock and the chase of the shadow of the demon in Kathakali dance are the echoes of the prophecy of the albino astrologer.

There is little of external action, and not much of conversation. There is noticeable compatibility between narration and narrative technique. Commenting on the style used by Anita Desai, K.R. Iyengar rightly says:

She has tried to forge a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness of the stream of consciousness of her principal characters.10

Voices in the City bears a marked difference in point of view from Cry the Peacock. This novel is a third-person rendering of the 'three Voices' - Monisha, Nirode and Amla who feel tortured by their shallow existence in the "monster" metropolis - Calcutta. In this novel too, Anita Desai explores the inner cosmic world of the major characters to fathom their conscious and subconscious minds and to provide meaning to their every physical act or gesture. In this regard K.R. Srinivas Iyengar very aptly observes:

... in Anita Desai's two novels, the inner climate, the climate of sensibility that lures or clears or rumbles like thunder or suddenly blazes forth like lightning, is more compelling than the outer weather, the physical geography of the visible action.11

Voices in the City is divided into four parts - part I "Nirode", Part II "Monisha", Part III "Amla" and Part IV "Mother". The city of Calcutta forms the background against which the survival of Nirode, Monisha and Amla is projected. These three characters
along with their mother and a host of minor characters like Jiban, Davy, Dharma etc are integral to the narrative because of being functionally related in highlighting the thematic concerns. The characters major as well as minor fall into well-defined groups. For e.g. Nirode, Amla and Monisha stand for a life of doubt, frustration and disillusionment whereas the minor characters like the Irishman Davy, Dharma the painter, Lila Chatterjee, Jit Nair and Sonny's father stand for peace and tranquility. The novel is carefully constructed on lines of contrast to dramatically emphasise the spiritual crises of the three main characters. Commenting on the structure of the novel, Dr Kunj Bala Goel writes:

Structurally, the novel is sound. Nevertheless the reader does not feel as much engrossed in the narrative as he did while reading the first novel, because the language used, gives the impression that here the novelist is more concerned with the presentation of her philosophy than with the exploration of her character’s psyches. For instance, despite the rude tone, abusive words and other lexical items denoting non-conformity, all of which match with the description of Nirode's personality the character - Nirode remains unconvincing and the reader is unmoved. Nirode's experiences concerning different vocations and aspects of life remain at the level of statement and reportage and his psychic turbulence seems to be unreal. The real does not feel involved in them, because the language seems contrived and does not give an impression that this attitude is an intrinsic part of Nirode's personality. Nevertheless, some parts of this section (section-I) like Arun's departure for higher studies at Howrah and Nirode and David at Firpos with Sunny and his father are dramatically touching and effective owing to the skillful handling of language. 12

In part - II “Monisha” Anita Desai adopts the diary-mode of narration to expose the miserable empty life of the protagonist - Monisha, along with the comments of the Omniscient Narrator which analyses the changing responses of Monisha
and her siblings simultaneously. The diary of Monisha presents the dilemma that she faces and records the impression of those who cluster her surrounding.

This part of the novel is comparatively more concrete as the meaninglessness of Monisha's life is effectively painted with the help of symbols like - the barred windows and the bleeding dove. Her plight is well described by Amla, who notices:

Her head protruding from the dark window, was like that of a stuffed rag doll with a very white face nodding insecurely on its neck, its eyebrows and mouth painted unnaturally dark. 13

Her comments on her relationship with Jiban exposes the fact that a large portion of her misery is rooted in her awareness of absence of pure love. She says:

If only love existed that is not binding, that is free of rules, obligations, complicity and all stirrings of mind or conscience, then - but there is no such. It is not there in my relationship with Jiban, which is filled only by loneliness and a desperate urge to succeed, and once plunged me into the most calamitous pleasures and pains, fears and regrets and never again with it possess me.14

B Ramchandra Rao believes that Part II of the novel is weak in concretizing the uncompromising nature of Monisha:

The failure in presenting the character of Monisha is more pronounced. She is not a personality at all. She is very vaguely drawn and flits like a ghost in the consciousness of her brother and her younger sister.15

The mental battles of Nirode and the reminiscences and analysis of Amla, deftly outlines Monisha's crises if not caricature her to a full-length portraiture. Besides their callous withdrawal springs from a common origin - their mother, which is stressed through their reflections and interactions. Dr Mrs. Kunj Bala Goel holds an altogether different opinion about this section
Part II - “Monisha” - views the meaninglessness of life from the female point of view. It is comparatively more concrete and appealing than part one due to the better harmony between theme and its expression. The creation of the atmosphere of the Bow - Bazar house and the employment of a few significant symbols like the barred windows and the bleeding doves are effective. At times the expression of Monisha’s helpless, pitiable condition in her husband’s middle class joint family is touching. Like Part I, this also sometimes tends to be a statement on meaninglessness, drudgery, lack of privacy, alienation and claustrophobia, and therefore loses some of its impact. ¹⁶

‘Amla’ - Part III surfaces the gradual temperamental changes in Nirode and Monisha. Because Amla is lively, the atmosphere hovering this section is totally different. Her youthful excitement and wonder is well-expressed through cocktail parties, dinners and dances. Her aesthetic sensibility finds expression through her paintings and her associations with the painter Dharma. Dr. Kunj Bala Goel voices her appreciation by saying:

“Amla” part three, seems to be the most satisfying part of the novel. Mrs. Desai employs the dramatic and symbolical mode in this section. While the changes in Amla’s relations with Dharma have been depicted in terms of paintings, her realisation concerning the triviality and artificiality of life in Calcutta comes alive through the dramatic presentation of the party at the Basus. The deep revelation concerning violence and death dawns on her effectively through the symbolical presentation of the events occurring at the racecourse.¹⁷

This section of the novel widens the canvas and makes it populous. Minor characters like Dharma, his wife Gita Devi, Jit Nair and the Basus crowd this part to bring to life a whole city and to project the spiritual problem in a convincing manner.

The language of this section is highly evocative. Amla’s secret passive suffering is suggested through a number of animal
images. She visualises her relationship with Jiban to be as charming as a Tibetan turquoise on her finger. She, often dreams of "a glaucous fleshly worm" coming out of the Tibetan turquoise, "Crawling on her finger" and "leaving a trail of slime." 

Part IV is the briefest section of the novel and it marks a reunion between the long separated mother and the nowhere-man Nirode along with Amla, a traveller to success and harmony in life. There is a long soliloquy of Monisha which prepares the reader for her pathetic end. Apart from the suicide, no other eventful happening takes place in the novel. Here the dreariness, the brutality of the violent city Calcutta is poignantly worked out. Kali, of the famous Kali Temple in Calcutta assimilates the mother - the creator of the three principal characters Nirode, Monisha and Amla. 

Dr Madhusudan Prasad Comments:

While in her first novel, Delhi and Lucknow reflect the state of mind of Maya, in Voices in the City Calcutta decidedly plays a much more vital role. It is, in fact, a very powerful character in the novel. Anita Desai has successfully captured the very characteristic tempo of Calcutta. She had depicted almost all the necessary details of Calcutta with a remarkable fidelity in order to bring Calcutta to throbbing life. Without meaning any exaggeration, Voices in the City is, in a way, an epic on Calcutta.

To sum up, Voices in the City is a powerful novel; however, rather inferior to Cry the Peacock in poetic texture and brilliant character portrayal, Voices in the City is no less a significant novel. It is Desai's successful attempt to neatly structure a crowded metropolis like Calcutta and to fathom the dark regions of inner worlds of her characters with apt symbols and telling imagery.

Bye-Bye Blackbird, with its rural and urban England as its setting traces the journey of two Indian immigrants towards their new home. This two hundred and
A thirty-page novel is divided into three parts. The first section entitled ‘Arrival’ begins with the recording of the omniscient narrator that highlights the conflict between the love for one’s native land and the adopted country. Of the fifty pages of the first section nearly half of the length contains long descriptions of English life and the alien surrounding. Adit and Dev are focussed on the lines of attitudinal differences. Where as Adit is all praises for English life, culture and material advancement, Dev is prepared to denounce that is English. His ranting and retorting sounds mechanical therefore his agreements are unconvincing to the readers. Talking to Adit he says:

The trouble with you immigrants... is that you go soft. If any one in India told you to turn off your radio, you wouldn't dream of doing it you might even pull out a knife and blood would spill. Over here all you do is shut up and look sat upon.

Dev's grudge against English way of living sounds funny. The houses, flats, streets and square are dead and lifeless to him as he is not familiar with the kind of life it contained.

Part II - Discovery and Recognition runs to a length of one hundred and nineteen pages and is the longest of the three. Here the characters, both Indian and English, keep airing their prejudices which amounts to a great deal of talking in the novel. This rather arrests movement of the novel. The verbal encounters between Dev and Adit does define ‘the real’ and ‘the imaginative’ response to a common locale. Adit's approach is scientific where as Dev's is charged with freshly acquired affinity for his new-home. For e.g., when Dev and Adit visit the London power station, Dev bursts out excitedly

"... I believe - I believe the electricity of London is generated by that sacrificial bonfire, right in the innermost heart of that temple we ought to stand up and bow, Adit. We ought to
kneel down and pray. We ought to sing out a hymn - the Vedic hymn to Fire -".

His idolatrous attitude to the power station shows how Dev is caught between acceptance and rejection. This part of the novel is primarily seen through Dev's dialogues and comments. Dev's psychic state now become the core of this section. Most of the drama described here is not appealing as it is related to Dev's mind and not to his soul. If compared to Deven, Nirode and Adit, Dev appears to be a feeble character. He talks a lot but does not mean it sincerely. At one time he adores London and the very second moment he loathes it. He is much in the frame of Shakespeare's Caliban. When Dev is made a butt of insolence, then he remembers his native world. This is not worked out in a direct mode, rather suggestive and symbolical hints are provided to get the meaning under the surface word-structure. For example, when Dev wants to find out the price of a gold icon from Russia and is told that he could not even be told the price, then his spiritual anguish is recorded as:

He stands there staring at the man whose smile interrupts his view of the icon which had begun to glow more alluringly than even in its dark corner, and suddenly he felt himself melting way, melting to pieces, flowing on several different currents at a time, trying vainly to collect the pieces and hold them together with inept fingers.

Further the encounters narrated in this section are uninteresting being stereotyped. With irony and sarcasm, the British formality and the Indian informality are brought face to face. The party at Emma Moffit's house and Adit's conversation with Mrs. Miller is illustrative of this feature. Towards the close of this section the alien Dev becomes 'an insider' and 'the insider'. Adit is gradually removing the shell of 'an insider' to become again an outsider.
Here Sarah, an outsider in her own familiar and native world, is depicted with great care. Enough room is provided to her inner struggle and sufferings. Her emotions and feelings largely win the reader's sympathy. She is devoted to Adit and considers her relation with him more significant than everything else. She is convincing in her suffering and dilemma along with her perception of life. But Sarah is not given much chance to interact during the cross-cultural debates of Adit and Dev. Had Sarah been included in it the culture-debate would have been more sincere and convincing. Harimohan Prasad writes:

> In her suffering we find the real dilemma of isolation and not a statement of immigration. ...Sarah’s suffering has real intensity, but the novelist fails to exploit the possibilities in her character. The novelist leaves her half-way. Perhaps the writer is not able to supply the required voltage of power that would have lighted her fully.²³

Besides characterisation, physical landscaping too is rather slurred. The much appreciated landscaping of 'Cry, the Peacock' and 'Voices in the City' is missing here.

The idyllic England and the mechanised London are captured through a camera's eye. There is not much of interaction between characters and milieu here. The English countryside traps Dev to settle down in London and releases Adit to decide to leave London for good but the language does not seem to be in harmony with the crisis created. The power of the landscape is not conveyed in its functional impact, which is another noticeable weakness of the novel. Dr Kunj Bala Goel remarks:

> It is generally a tourist's view of England that seems to have been given. The author's camera seems to have been put on a trolley that tends to be moving all the time, focussing different panoramas and various objects, sometimes taking close-up and
sometimes scenes with wide angles. Generally without affecting, anyone deeply, most of the scenes tend to be gliding away, leaving room for the new ones to come. At some places, the images reflect Dev's changing attitude to England, but in the case of Adit they almost fail to express the change of his attitude.

The third or the final section entitled 'Departure' is full of symbolical connotations. This section runs to a length of sixty one pages and marks a hasty end to the novel. Adit changing place with Dev and bidding farewell to London marks his 'departure' from the alien soil. Sarah too has her departure from the disgusting world of native jeers and sneers. But Sarah's departure remains mystical to the readers, as Desai’s narrative does not provide plausible reasons that makes an English woman marry an Indian man and face the scorn of the society she is born in. Her decision to follow her husband to India is as startling as Dev shunning his patriotic feelings and assimilating throbs of cosmopolitanism. Likewise, Adit's transformation into a nationalist is rather vague and mystical. A week-end's stay at Hampshire village with Sarah's parents leaves him totally shattered. He is seized by moods of melancholy and out of its tragic intensity finds his real self. 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 a 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."

Sarah surrenders meekly to the decision of her husband with the characteristic mode of an Indian wife. The narrator describes her acquiescence to the decision as:

She could not tell what effect the smallest refusal or contradiction might have on him - he might start beating his chest and complaining of being misunderstood, he might start screaming accusations at her, he might shut himself up and
weep... anything was possible in his highly strung and dramatic condition. She dreaded such a reaction. Rather she would sacrifice anything, anything at all, in order to maintain, however superficially, a semblance of order and discipline in her house, in her relationship with him.26

The metaphor of journey is aptly chosen and it rightly concurs with the theme of the novel. Adit is the black migratory bird who bids 'bye- bye' to the magic land—England. Sarah is no longer a white bird after her nuptial ties with Adit, therefore the metaphor of journey engulfs her 'departure' too. The title has more in its fold. For Dev, it suggests the 'departure' of gloom that had engulfed him at the start of the novel which marks his arrival at Adit's threshold in London. The mystical answer given by the narrator describes the working of foreign landscape which now has Dev in its trap:

Somewhere, at some point that summer, England's green and gold fingers had let go off Adit and clutched at Dev instead. England had let Adit drop and fall away as if she had done with him or realised that he had done with her, and caught and enmeshed his friend Dev. It was as though this were an arbitrary act of England's, an abstract law to which Adit and Dev had quite unwittingly succumbed.27

The trisection part of the novel does not fully justify the pattern of the story. The situation and character do not find any horizon, therefore characters remain just theatrical against the London backdrop. Pulsations of life are faintly treated here and there in the length of the story. For example, when Adit contemplates his life as an outsider in England or when Sarah broods over her future with hardly any options.

The Language of the novel too is not forceful and fails in the objective descriptions of the characters. Language should necessarily be a tool of visual images and emotional expressiveness. But here the language fails to embody the significance
that the novelist desired to instill. For example, there are numerous references to Dev being addressed as a 'Wog' which disturb his peace of mind. But when the passages following such incidents are scrutinised, the verbal texture does not show any sign of its psychological effect on the sufferer. This shows the narrative to fall short of psychological probings. Similarly the novel is wreathed with images but no image is as powerful and symbolically significant as the 'peacock' of Cry, the Peacock, "Kali" of Voices in the City and 'Fire' in Fire on the Mountain. Certain words are used in the novel in order to create an authentic atmosphere to the novel. For example: Indian words like "fil-um", "pull-ece", Lahore - wallahs; yar; pakoras and chutney, retain the Indianness of the immigrants. Dr Kunj Bala Goel writes in this context:

...one can say that apart from the structural faults and unimpressive characterization, the novel seems to have failed owing to the novelist's inability to relate theme and language effectively. If despite all this, the novel survives, it is because of Mrs. Desai's eye for detail, her synaesthetic imagery and picturesque description specially of the English countryside.

Like Bye-Bye Blackbird, Where shall we go this summer ? is structured in three well-defined parts (See Fig. 5.1). The first part of the novel titled "Monsoon 67" is devoted to Sita's journey to the magic island along with Menaka and Karan. The novel opens on an urban setting and the pettiness, horror and hypocrisy of everyday life is unravelled through a number of stark images. This is done with a purpose to highlight the trauma induced to a hypersensitive protagonist. The image of a crow attacking a young eagle is successful in projecting the helplessness Sita realises in her nonconformist attitude to dull and monotonous life.

The pattern of monsoon winds is applied to the novel since its very beginning to draw comparison with the growing tumult in Sita's mind. With the
"Where Shall We Go This Summer?"

**Key**
- Page 1-30: Motherhood
- Page 102-157: Reminiscences of childhood
- Page 67-100: Reminiscences of marital life
- Page 31-58: [Blank]
Monsoon as a backdrop, Sita's vision grows subjective whereby she recoils from gaiety and settles down quietly and calmly. Her embrace of normalcy at the close of the novel shows her much saner than Maya and Monisha and objectively bears a similarity to the quietness after a torrential monsoon shower.

The story unfolds from Sita's point of view, therefore the image of Raman, Menaka, Karan, the ayah, the cook and the surrounding world is depicted as Sita's mind perceives it. The subjective details of internal and external worlds provide necessarily an opportunity to a judicious reader to study the character-speaker critically. This is no easy a task as there are no apparent definite lines where abnormality shrouds normalcy. In addition it is the use of retrospective narration which further heightens the articulation of the intensity of Sita's suffering (See Fig. 7). This section treats characterization as consistently as in Cry the Peacock and Fire on the Mountain. The comparison drawn between Sita and Raman is as convincing as of Maya and Gautama - the chief characters of Cry the Peacock. Here Sita narrates the street fight of the ayah to her husband to win her sympathy and his participation in her sense of aggressiveness at the sight of violence. Nevertheless, Raman takes it as another instance of her melodrama, revealing his practical and pragmatic outlook. To Sita's distress seems contrived and theatrical to her children too and they find her unbearable. Her state of tension rooted in her alienated sensibility is wonderfully conveyed in a racy manner. Image piled over image shows her incapacity to identify her 'being' with the surrounding milieu. With the same rapid style images of violence follow in quick succession to function as a co-relative of her mounting distress and despair. The omniscient narrator describes how Sita wrongly believes the violence of others as calculated affronts on her being.
Transitioin Of The Plot
Karan kicked over a tower of blocks and howled with maniacal glee to see them tumble; Menaka sat calmly tearing her Sunday watercolours into long strips of meaningless colour; her husband casually handed her the newspaper on his way out to office. They all hammered at her with cruel fists - the fallen blocks, the torn watercolours, the headlines about the war in Vietnam, the photograph of a woman weeping over a small grave, another of a crowd outside Rhodesian jail; articles about the perfidy of Pakistan, the virtuousness of own India... There were hand grenades all, hurled at her....

The section closes with the information that Sita intends to go to Manori to escape from the destructive milieu and to move towards something of the future created out of her illusion of the past. Here, we encounter one of the favourite themes of Anita Desai - a struggle between illusion and reality. The instrument of unreality makes Maya descend to insanity; Monisha commits suicide, kill Nanda with the blow of sudden shock and Sita rebel against the familiar pattern.

The second part entitled Winter '47 deals with Sita's life at Manori twenty years before her second visit to the Island. Here the characters in picture are Sita, Rekha, Jivan and Sita's brother, Sita's father and some natives of the Island. Further, the Island bears a sharp contrast to Bombay - the city of money and exhaustion. Sita's shift from Bombay to Manori is not a journey from rural to urban setting rather it is a match to her changed mental conditions - her boredom with reality and her longing for illusion. This section has wonderful passages of minute details showing the innocence of the villagers and the hypocrisy of those who rule over them. The social message too is wonderfully projected along with the unfolding of Sita's psyche. The following passage illustrates this feature.
The well was dug - no more a miracle perhaps, than the wells in any village, but somehow it seemed one. The very presence of the father, watching and directing his chelas, all in white, all still pure and clear as glass after their prayers and devotions, made it seem one... The first bucketful was drawn out and father ladled out the water to each of those who had helped with the digging.

"Sweet!" they cried, ecstatic, as they cupped their hands beneath the ladle and drew in mouthfuls of water, "Sweet!".

Sita also came forward and her father, after hesitating for a second, smiled and filled her cupped hand from the ladle. She drank and pulled a face, understanding in an instant his hesitation, for it was not sweet. But she was either too loyal or too disappointed to say so in front of that large, waiting circle of chelas and villagers. Only later, down on the beach with her brother, she confessed to its awful taste - and felt contrite, all night, for her betrayal, her failure to find the well water sweet.

This passage not only highlights the blind adoration of the ignorant classes for the magician or the demi-Gods, but it also focuses the muddledom that Sita faces trying to fathom the reality in the words of those with whom she interacts. The mystery of the words of her villagers is as baffling as is the glory associated with her father's image. Further, this mystery is heightened by the unidentified parentage of Rekha. Rekha's smile at the sight of her dying father appears unusual to Sita. The relation between Deedar and Rekha, further suggests Sita's weakness to study and sense what is hidden and secret. This section, elaborately shows how Sita is dominated by the memories of her past and also reveals her unwillingness to objectively evaluate her past.

Section III of the novel titled as 'Monsoon 67' marks Sita's visit to the island and her consequent failure in rediscovering the passion of life. Her visit to
Manori is her wishful search to find the lost threads of life. On having failed miserably, she packs her bags to accompany Raman back to Bombay. This closes the novel on a happy end.

Here the rustic locale gives a picturesque quality to the novel. The island and the islanders are painted with meticulous care. Therefore, we remember the broad-built Moses with his lungi; the pocked face, Champa; the issueless fisherwoman, Phoolmaya; the old Kanti Amma and some others. Their dress, their language and their emotions, and their innocence uncorrupted all constitute to their distinctiveness.

"Who are you?"

It was a fisherwoman - one could tell by the way her drenched Sari was pulled up between her legs and tucked in at the waist, by her spread feet and enormous toes made for gripping the fishing lines and nets of her trade...

"You are Babaji's daughter", the old woman said in a Konkani dialect as raw and harsh as wet fishing lines. "I brought oil for Babaji once, and coconuts, and he blessed me with a son. So I have brought something for you today."

The incoherence of their dialogues is also in rhythm with the thematic weather of the novel, rural in contrast with the urban along with reality against illusion.

"What is your name?"

"Phoolmaya", said the old woman, suddenly spitting open into a yellow smile.

"Phoolmaya - Sita stared at her... How did you know I am here?" She asked instead. "Moses told. Now I Will tell in the village. They will all bring you fish".

"How is your son?" Sita asked, now knowing how to thank her...

"A big man" the woman said with almost voluptuous satisfaction
"will you give me tobacco? Babaji always gave me tobacco."

Thus the language of the novel - its description and narration - coheres with the theme. The novel successfully carries an authentic Indian colour which echoes specific textual pattern imparting power and intensity. Given below are a few examples:

1. Champa had touched his feet with her forehead... P.7).
2. "Hroo, he yelped at the bullock, 'hroo, hroo'!" P.217).
3. "This is how they did it in the fil-um." P.4).
4. The "original inhabitants" of Jeevan Ashram, dressed in throbbing shades of pink and orange. P. 103).

The disciples of Sita's father are referred by the Indian word - "chela" to suggest the wizardry of the complex man in white.

Apart from the above mentioned Indian nouns, qualifiers and cultural modes, Indian English is sometimes used by Anita Desai to create a lively and realistic atmosphere by enhancing the scope of the language. For e.g. Joseph is known to illiterate people of Manori to name a few - Moses, Jamila and Ali as 'Joseph of the diesel-oil pump' P.8), and not "Joseph - the owner of the diesel-oilpump." Likewise we come across non-English tag like: "All dressed up for the market, are you ?" P.8). The other interesting Indian feature is the use of kinship term to denote a specific person and not a relation as is done in English - Twenty rupees! who would send a present like that - your mother - in-law ? P.8).

Observing the local colour, Mrs. Meenakshi Mukherjee has rightly commented:

Anita Desai is a rare example of an Indo-Anglian writer who achieves that difficult task of blending the English language to her purpose without either a self-conscious attempt of sounding Indian or seeking the anonymous elegance of public school English.
Like where shall we go this summer?, Fire on the Mountain is also divided into three parts. The three sections deal neatly with a specific event. The first part has Nanda Kaul living in perfect isolation in her hilltop retreat Carignano. She hovers between past and present when the future obtrudes in the shape of a letter announcing the impending arrival of an unwanted great-grand child. Here the loneliness of Nanda Kaul is stressed though Kasauli hills and her separate entity without any trace of belonging. She, like an escapist wants to drift along the flow of time but fragmented moments of the past impinge upon her consciousness. The image of the plains harks Nanda Kaul back to her distasteful tenure as wife without identity. This disturbs the tempo of her otherwise unhappy life. It is a recurrent image and it evokes an immediate response in the reader’s mind. Kasauli hills create an indolent atmosphere suggesting little work and endless rest compared to Nanda Kaul’s hectic life while discharging her duty as a Vice-Chancellor’s wife.

To bring out the marked difference between the two phases of her life—Nanda Kaul as Vice Chancellor’s wife in Punjab and Nanda Kaul at Carignano as a great-grand mother of Raka, Anita Desai makes constant use of the flashback technique so that a multidimensional effect of the passage of time is revealed. Desai’s prefers flashback technique to chronological sequence of ‘life’ which includes the depiction of human perception of time (See Fig. 2.3). Hence Nanda Kaul’s frequent recourse to nostalgia gives us a picture of her mind and its workings. And by her use of memory, Desai has captured the very fluidity of the inner rhythm of life. Desai’s attempt here has been to remove the narrative from the limits of clock and calendar. Time does not flow in a forward movement but there are constant references to the past (See Fig. 5.4, 5.6, 5.8).

R S Sharma in his book Anita Desai writes:
FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN - CHAPTER X

KEY

EXTERNAL DOMAIN

INTERNAL DOMAIN

NUMBER OF LINES

NUMBER OF PARAGRAPHS
Textual Artefact of "Fire On The Mountain"
Textual Artifact Of "Fire On The Mountain"

Part III
Nanda Kaul unconsciously seeks to freeze time into a motionless constancy, but Time keeps moving through her past which she recapitulates as she reacts to her present surroundings.  

The narrative - the isolation in the lives of three characters - Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das is completed in a few summer days in the small Himalayan town called Kasauli but the entire panorama of the lives of the protagonists unfolds either in the authorial voice or the musings of the characters themselves. The chronicle of clock-time is not in a forward sequential movement but with frequent references to the past as an end product of the stimuli generated through visual images perceived by the characters. Awareness of time oscillates and transcends the limits of explicit framework and provides opportunity and room for the events to unfold themselves. Nanda Kaul and Raka want to drift along the flow of Time but the past swarms upon their consciousness creating ripples in the living stream. Nanda Kaul refuses to accept the Clock-Time since she wants life to be static. However the rape and murder of Ila Das forces her to accept the inexorable otherness of time that Nanda Kaul desperately seeks to disown.

Part II, the longest, is composed of twenty one chapters describes Raka’s intrusion in Nanda Kaul’s lonely existence and her stay at Carignano. The two are hostile to each other in their withdrawn ways but gradually a change for good creeps into Nanda Kaul’s attitude to Raka. Sheer hostility is erased by indifference which in turn transmutes in acceptance. Admiration and finally affection marks Nanda’s attitude towards Raka which shadows in a way her advancement towards positive vision in life.

Part III describes in detail the visit of Ila Das, a childhood friend of Nanda Kaul. Born in an aristocratic family, she is reduced by time and circumstance
to such a state of poverty that she cannot buy even half a kilo of cornmeal. Her problems unlike Nanda Kaul's and Raka's are clearly financial. The narrator vividly describes Ila's struggle against the vagaries of time but submits to its cruelty as it overcomes her in the figure of Preet Singh. The novel concludes rather violently with the rape and murder of Ila and the death of Nanda Kaul. The setting of the sun marks the close of the lives and darkness is accepted time for sinister happenings.

Fire on the Mountain, is therefore predominantly concerned with the lives of two friends who have been treated differently by time the destroyer and time, the preserver.

Fire on the Mountain is a simple and easy-to-read book. The technique adopted further adds to the simple form of the novel. The chapters in the various sections are scenes and the changes in the scenes provide movement in the otherwise static novel. The authorial voice provides all details and descriptions. The narration swerves between subjective and objective within chapters, paragraphs and sentences too. The transition from external to internal descriptions is done in perfect control.

The shift is smooth, shadowing the dexterity of the narrator for e.g.:

The postman seemed unable to undertake him hypnotised by the boy's whimsical progress, he stopped and kept behind while Nanda Kaul slit-eyed burned on the knoll. Hurry man she mentally snapped - get it over with .... she could not imagine.  

From the present, we are made to descend the corridors of bygone time. The beginning of chapter II illustrates it:

Chapter II

The postman could imagine nothing but he knew a few things.
He had known the house before it was Nanda Kaul's.  

Flashback technique is put to constant use in order to establish coordination between story and the chronological progress of clock-time Desai does
not aim at realism but to project the perception of circumstances and to highlight the working of the psyche in terms of "attitude to life." Her frequent use of memory to evoke the past is to capture the fluidity of the inner rhythm of life.

A large part of the story is told by the Omniscient narrator as silence is the dominant note. A few dialogues between Nanda Kaul and Raka, Raka and Ramlal, and Ila and Nanda Kaul forms the speech - pattern. Much emphasis is given to gestures and musing, and we come to this conclusion that the mind of human being create the dimensions of time and space.

The title symbol 'fire' is significantly used in the novel. It is not connotatively related to death, rather it works in a comparative and suggestive way. It becomes a natural part of the thematic stream and lends force to the environment. Like the peacock in Cry, the Peacock and Goddess Kali in Voices in the City, fire hovers throughout the novel. In the beginning forest fire has been symbolically hinted and verbally sketched to suggest its morbid overtones. For e.g. in Part II - Chapter VI, the sun is seen setting, putting the clouds on fire.

Next there is a mention of an English lady putting a beautiful cottage on fire. Then, we have a reference of forest fire breaking out on its own, devouring trees and plants hungrily. At the close of the novel, Raka sets the forest on fire when on the other side Nanda is killed by the shocking news of Ila's rape and murder. The forest fire ultimately devours all, reminding the readers of its interlinked associative significance, giving the world of the novel an appreciable dimension.

Clear light of the Day, a nomination for the prized Booker Award has all ingredients of a gripping novel. It is well - constructed, has a good story and contains subtle touches of humour. Although the main event in focus is the partition
but it is clear that Desai is not interested in mere chronology, but in making clear the meaninglessness of life in a small family. The novel is divided into four untitled parts. The four sections suggest the three fold effect of time - the passing of time with the ticks of the clock, the voyage from youth to age, and the historical time - a chronicle of national events.

Structurally, Part I and Part IV deals with the present interspersed with past memories while Part II is devoted to the political scenario. Part III takes us to the childhood of the Das children. Part I opens with the koels providing a lyrical background to Tara’s musings and contemplations. Bim’s reminiscences of her childhood take up most part of Part II while Part III is given over to Tara’s point of view. Part IV, the final section is given wholly to the two sisters and is rounded off with Bim who undergoes transformation and achieves a conformist like attitude to life. Anita Desai’s artistic economy in bringing the past and the present to explore the mental realms of the characters is masterly. Commenting on the technique of telescoping the past and the present to pursue the remote mental associations and suggestions, Mr Brijraj Singh writes.

Indeed, even the most casual reader of Clear Light of Day, is likely to be impressed with his weaving of past and present into single and unified whole. An incident occurs, or words are spoken, or a scene is described in the present: this leads effortlessly to the recreation of past incidents, words and scenes: the past is explored and then just as effortlessly we move back to the present with greater illumination only to take this light of understanding back to the recessed and shadowy events of the past.  

Juxtaposing present against past, Desai images two states of mind of one characters - one belonging to the past and another to the present. This also makes us aware of the different aspects of reality and enhances our understanding of
a character. For e.g. to bring out the temperamental differences between Bim and Tara

the Omniscient narrator says:

It seemed to Tara that there had been far more roses in it when she was a child - luscious shaggy pink ones, small crisp white ones tinged with green, silky yellow ones that smelt of tea - and not just these small negligible crimson heads that lolled weakly on their stems. Tara had grown to know then on their mornings who she had trailed up and down after her mother who was expecting her youngest child. Tara had danced and skipped after her, chattering, till she spied something flashing from under a pile of fallen rose petals - a pearl, or a silver ring? - and swooped upon it with a cry that broke into her mother’s reverie and made her stop and frown. Tara had excitedly swept aside the petals and uncovered - a small, balanched snail. Her face wrinkling with disgust, her mother turned and paced on without a word, leaving Tara on her knees to contemplate the quality of disillusion.

But here was Bim, gray and heavy now and not so unlike their mother in appearance only awake, watchful, gazing at her with her fullest attention and appraisal. Bim laughed when she saw Tara panting slightly in her eagerness.

Tara laughed back ‘Bim, the old rose walk is still here’ of course, said Bim, only the roses grow smaller and sicker every year...

This passage is full of words and phrases that are indicative of time, and recollections that are also aspects of time. “When”, “till”, “instantly”, “still”, “every year” and “on those morning” suggest two contrasting images - one of the dreamy past and another of the pathetic present.

Thematically, the novel embodies two perspectives symbolically - the violent and the diseased world of the adults and the fairy-world of the young. Childhood days are given prominence to reveal the aftermath of improper nurturing
This domestic drama is portrayed against the background of the partition of violence. Visible violence begets blood-shed and absurdity but invisible violence of which Raja, Bim, Tara and Baba are victims results in bitterness and despair. Seema Jena commenting on structure of the novel writes:

The plot succeeds in featuring the vision of the author which explains that love, understanding and forgiveness are qualities which triumph over despair and destruction.

Through the Omniscient narrator, Desai is able to unravel the dark corridors of consciousness of each of her characters, their thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories and speculations. Yet the novel does not lose coherence or artistic design. The language is racy and refined for e.g. giving an account of Bim’s victory over all prejudices and grievances and forgiving all against whom she had nourished such thoughts, the Omniscient narrator says:

That soil contained all time, past and future, in it. It was dark with time, rich with time. It was where her deepest self lived and the deepest selves of her sister and brothers and all those who shared that time with her...

Once again in In custody the locale of inner and outer drama is Delhi. The only perceptible change at one glance is Anita Desai’s preference to a male protagonist unlike that of Bim, the female protagonist of Clean Light of Day. The domesticity of familial surrounding is this time replaced by the man’s world of money and trade. Wisely, Desai uses this - the growing technology rapid rise of industry, consumer values along with gradual degeneration of aesthetic sensibility and notions of human existence as a backdrop to emphasize Deven’s estrangement and his loss of identity in the Western - economic setting. His lamentation powerfully expresses his anguish at being a Lecturer of Hindi.
'We are in the wrong department. We took up the wrong subject. We should have taken Physics, Chemistry, Microbiology, Computer technology - Something Scientific, Something American. Then we could have had a future'.

We have another instance where his artistic aspirations are attacked by the College authorities - representative of a society that glorifies science and technology. When his request to his College authorities for money to purchase a tape recorder to tape Nur's interview is turned down he feels lost and is pushed into further sense of defeat.

He was perfectly aware that funds were made readily available to the Science departments, that the Sciences were the rajas of the empire with the humanities pushed to the dustier corners where they languished.

Deven, surrounded with the experiences of various shades and complexities of the college and the family is portrayed as a marginal character. He stands all though the length of the novel on the periphery of action and in vain forces his way on the road of fame. His sense of defeat on the professional front and a lack of togetherness in the world of belongingness is faithfully captured by the novelist. His despair - ridden state is described as:

Deven had been more a poet than a professor when he married Sarla,... and for the wife of a poet she seemed too prosaic. Of course she had not been his choice.

The discord in the family is presented as:

He understood because, like her, he had been defeated too, like her he was a victim. Although each understood the secret truth about the other, it did not bring about any closeness of spirit, any comradeship.

In the above passage words like 'defeated' and 'victim' construct Deven's state of loneliness accentuated as 'disillusionment'. In order to seek gratification, Deven accepts Murad's proposal to interview Nur at Delhi for his magazine "Awaaz".
In all there are eleven chapters of which chapter three to chapter ten is a record of Deven’s shuffling between Mirpore and Delhi. Here we find how Deven doggedly pursuing his venture, although obstruction stares him sharply at every stage. Resistance from Nur’s wife, arrangement of funds for the recording,

Deven’s predicament run parallel in match with that of Nur - the old now defunct poet of Urdu. The novel is rather a portrait of Deven’s society than of Deven himself. The material of which it is made is life in Mirpore and in Delhi - the fantasy world of the great poet of past - Nur now lost in oblivion and is a corrupt and a defunct old man. It becomes clear right from the very beginning of the novel that Deven’s life at Mirpore is devoid of glamour that he desires; the halo of recognition and fame. He shifts to Delhi with a tissue of fantasies to rise high up on the pedestal of public recognition. His superficial notions make him belief that existence in the ebb and flow of Mirpore with Sarla and Mana around is virtually a non - life. In this passage the quality of Deven’s life is precisely evoked, and evaluated in Deven’s musings:

It was to him as God had leaned over a cloud and called for him to come up, and angels might have been drawing him up these ancient splintered stairs to meet the deity: so jubilantly, so gratefully did he rise. This, surely, was the summons for which he had been waiting all these empty years, only he had not known it would assume this form. In his mortal myopia and stupidity, he had expected it to come from Sarla when he married her, or from the head of the department at his college, who alone could promote and denote and alter his situations in life, or even from Murad who, after all, lived in the metropolis and edited a magazine. The poetry he had read and memorized lay beneath all these visible lips of his submerged existence, and he had thought of it more as a source of comfort and consolation than as a promise of salvation. He had never conceived of a summons expressed in
a voice so leonine, splendid and commanding, a voice that could grasp him, as it were, by the roots of his hair and haul him up from the level on which he existed - mean, disordered and hopeless - into another, higher sphere. Another realm it would surely be if his God dwelt there, the domain of poetry, beauty and illumination.

Caught in magnificent resonant lines of Urdu poetry of Nur, Deven enters the dingy house to elicit an interview from the poet of past glory. Deven is so weak in his understanding that the dilapidated survival of the poet does not come as a surprise. The fever of his elation retains its peak, which is not plausible to readers.

Deven's enthusiasm, which runs not less than for hundred pages comes as a surprise. Although he realises in the first fifty pages of the novel that the sublime world of art and the artist is fully disorganised and has become messy with the values of business and commerce. The plot is inferior in sublimity to Clear Light of Day. Uncharacteristic of Anita Desai's craftsmanship, the entire drama is rooted in liberation of his 'being' from his hitherto marginality, lending very little psychological tautness as the narrative embodies his vision and his speculations. The entire substance seems more like a reporting of the past and the present with little insight into the consciousness of the misadventures of Deven.

Sarla, wife of Deven appear little on the surface of the narrative. She is there to reveal Deven as a man with familial ties and to measure his sense of responsibility towards his son and life-partner. Malashri Lal remarks:

Had Desai developed Sarla, the conflict between traditional "Wifely" acceptances and her perceptive opposition to Deven's foolhardiness, the novel In Custody may have had a richer texture.

This novel shows a shift from the woman centred narrative to a male centred one. Here Deven is no tragic a figure although Desai sketches how his potential goes waste
and Deven, disillusioned and lost, returns home to intolerable domesticity - the company of his long suffering wife from whom he had run away. He is transformed from an escapist into a realist who is ready to face reality with all its relative problems. Along with his discovery of his identity he realises that art is a mode of projecting a vision which perfects life and not that the two are exclusively different hemispheres:

If art, if poetry could be made to submit their answers, not merely to contain them within perfect, unblemished shapes but to release them and make them available, then - he thought, then-. 47

The entire drama of Deven denouncing his philosophical tradition and his plunge in the western culture resulting in his disillusionment and later his retreat to his philosophical way of thinking is projected against the backdrop of growing technology. This feature stamp the novel as a typical product of the modern age. The final experience of Deven is, therefore, an extraordinary achievement in which the past deciphers making room for the present to constantly assert itself. The essence of the novel is beautifully brought out by Mrinalini Solanki:

"He now differentiates between the real and the concrete, the illusory and the deceptive. He now intends to replace nightmare by reality illusion by facts of life." 48

Baumgartner's Bombay is one of the best works of Anita Desai. The title is after the name of the protagonist, a Jew who travels from Germany to India in search of a "home". Hugo's vision of the turbulent city Calcutta and then Bombay constitutes the theme of the novel.

A major part of the novel is an elaborate study of Hugo's unhappy childhood, troubles at refugee camp and later the difficulties he faces in surviving in post-independent India. Much like In Custody, the novel is focussed on Hugo with
a few characters like- Lotte, Kanti, Kurt and his cats which make his world and at the same time define his living pattern. He looks like a 'Sahib' but is unlike the type. Because of this he is a curio to shopkeepers, canteen owners, watchmen, neighbours, pavement dwellers and all who contribute to the noisy and crowded solidness of the urban scene. Lotte, his life-long companion is made to run parallel to the loneliness of Baumgartner. Physically, she is Hugo's better version and is much vibrant and cheerful than Hugo, facing equal amount of oddities as her companion does. Her days begin with a glass of wine and ends with a dance in the Grand Hotel. Unlike Hugo, she values her present and is not troubled much by the quality of life. The ambience of pleasure scattered effortlessly by her reminds one of Ila Das.

That metropolis are devoid of human warmth is once again asserted by Desai after Voices in the City. Bombay with its ugliness exiles Hugo and Lotte and their distress knows no end. In the wide brutal world they remain marginal entities symbolising human dignity and traditional values of living in togetherness. The strength of the novel lies in this fact that it is a rich novel about human dignity and courage told with extraordinary sympathy and courage:

Baumgartner could not for the life of him see what use it was to make money or have money in the camp, but most were passionately devoted to the making and earning of what they believed indispensable to life.

From the point of view of time, the action of novels begins after the independence of India. The flash-back technique used here supplies us with a few dates so that we can relive the period. The past and the present, both at personal and national level identified with the force of consciousness questions the growing hollowness of human life. With the flow of time, an atmosphere of decay is created.
The novel is clearly a structural as well as thematic triumph. It raises the pertinent issue of love and sympathy. Hugo’s aimless wondering and fervent cries for belongingness marks the novel sections, sophisticated and complex. Shashi Khanna

Comments:

Her latest novel Baumgartner’s Bombay gives evidence of maturity in the use of the traditional elements in the novel also. Her special contribution is that she has tried to break new grounds in the field of fiction-writing.50

Structurally The Village by the Sea makes a simple pattern. The novel opens in the third person with the exposition of Hari’s cause of escape from family responsibilities and his native place Thul. Five of the thirteen chapter story is devoted for the ‘elaboration’ of Hari’s misery, disgust and later escape to Bombay. Remaining seven chapters describe the life of Hari at Bombay on parallel lines with Lila playing a foster mother to the whole family at Thul. This part of the story also makes the coming back of the Hari to Thul as ‘return of the Native’. The central theme of the hero’s quest for a mode of survival to help his parents, brother and sister escape from the financial problems leads to a convincing denouement.

The story has a natural rhythm, opening very slowly picking up as Hari’s resentment increases with his father’s alcoholic ways and his mother’s deteriorating health. Adequate details are supplied through external exploration to emphasise the harsh realities surrounding the loveless and poor protagonist.
“Debt, debt, debt”, Hari gnashed his teeth. “Father’s always in debt because of of toddy.” He got up and turned away from the dead dog and his wailing sisters, and walked out of the house. He would get away. He would go to Rewas. To Bombay. And never come back to this sad house, his frightened sisters, his ill mother, his drunken father. He would leave them and run, run as far away as he could.51

Chapter II successfully paints the indifferent and callous attitude of his father. This is a sufficient reason for the protagonist’s unhappiness. Because he is maturing faster as compared to other boys of his age, he does not like being dependant on his parents for his basic necessities like food, clothing, shelter or care of his father. The future of the family nags him:

He would have to find them husbands, and buy them their wedding finery - Silk Saris and gold jewellery - and arrange their weddings to which the whole village would have to be invited. The bridegrooms might demand a dowry - a bicycle or even a scooter. Gold buttons, coins and jewellery. A piece of land... He must have a job if he was to find his sisters a way out of this dark gloomy house and the illness and drunkenness and hopelessness that surrounded them like the shadows of the night.52

“Gloomy house”, “The illness”, “drunkenness” and “hopelessness” are enough clues for the readers to conjure his plight. His present state of uncertainty forms the substance for the final drama.

Chapter seven to chapter eleven provide enough details of the struggle that Hari puts in order to realise his dream. It also reveals Lila’s share of household duties for her mother is bed-ridden. She is different from her age-group for at the tender age of thirteen, she proves to be an independent person. She also points to new paths by assuming the role of a breadwinner, a homemaker and a nurse. She proves to be a thrifty, facing all hardships and even holding down two jobs. As an
anchor and a moral force, she withstands all onslaughts and helps her family to survive odd days.

Enough narrative time is given to the description of hardships that Hari undergoes in Bombay. He slogs day in and out working in Jagu's restaurant. Mr. Panwallah, the old watchmender adds enough sunshine to his otherwise industrious living. He encourages Hari to learn to put his hands to good use, propagating dignity of labour as Lila does. Here Desai shows how Hari begins to brighten up and looks happy and alive:

He felt he could not bear the shame and humiliation of finding his way into it and asking for work. He was no longer the frightened confused boy who crawled into a hole where he could find shelter and protection. He knew he could make choices and decisions now... It was wonderful to be able to choose what you wanted to do in life, and choose he would.53

Chapter twelve marks a qualitative transition in Hari's life. This chapter begins with Hari's return to Thul, this time the means of travel is not ferry but bus. Here we have a fine illustration of Desai's mode of adopting suggestion to convey maximum of idea and action through images - "Hari came back to Thul not by ferry after all but by bus".54 The physical transformation is reflected in harmony with Hari's life advancing towards betterment. Hari is surprised to see:

...the highway was being widened, a railway bridge under construction, old large trees cut down and bulldozers and steamroller at work, but the rice still stood golden and ripe in the fields, the low hills beyond them were violet and bronze, the sky clear and blue.55

The charge overwhelms him and he vows to himself:

He would change it all...he would rebuilt the house, he would work on it now that he was home and make it bright and cheerful and happy."
The novel closes on a note of happiness and contentment - Hari’s mother is out of Alibagh hospital, healthy and recovered and his father becomes a devoted husband and a responsible head of the family. Hari plans to start a poultry farm and also plans a small watchmending shop.

The Village by The Sea contains enough drama to capture the interest and curiosity of young readers. Hari and Lila become an epitome of courage and labour. That their efforts bring new life to a poverty-stricken family is an note of inspiration to the readers. The novel flows in chronological chain of events. Therefore there is no such complexity as we find in Fire on the Mountain, Where Shall we go this Summer? and Cry, the Peacock.

Anita Desai shows a remarkable ability to perceive realities in the minute perception of the use of sounds, colours, images and symbols, to provide an insight into the inner domains of her characters for e.g. the peacock bears strong association with Maya’s mental agonies. She also identifies herself with caged monkeys, birds and bears which expresses her frustrating interpersonal relationship in marriage. There are repetitive references to a peacock as a “a reminder of death”, “an illfated lover”, and “a reminder of death”. Its dancing image is established as a symbol of love, romance and beauty to signify Maya’s demand of love from her mate. Further, its cry “pia pia” invokes the pangs of unsatiated love in Maya. Other associative images which pretend horror and death are that of lizards and snakes flicking their tongues. The rhythmic movement of the moon, the dancing bear, the Kathakali dancer and the beats of the drum carry a sinister effect and unravel Maya’s private world occupied by the fast approaching death.
Anita Desai depicts the inner longings of women protagonists through the images of birds. Here birds do not symbolise the freedom of will, thought and action, but the violence in nature to which the delicate creatures are subjected. The cooings of the pigeons with which the book *Clear Light of Day* opens reveals Tara's uneasiness at the sight of the disorderliness of her parental house. Sita *Where shall we go this summer?* Seeing the crows feasting on the dead eagle thinks:

...this crow theatre - murder, infanticide, incest, theft and robbery all were much practised by these rough raucous rasping tatlerdemalions. 57

Animal and insect imagery are also used with reference to the protagonists to suggest their conceptual image of their individuality and the external reality around. For e.g. the humble inhabitants of Manori are likened to goats to suggest their existence without individuation. It also runs as a contrastive image to Sita as non-feeling and non-leaving human beings. Raka seems to Nanda "Like one of those dark crickets that leap up in fright but do not sing, or a mosquito, minute and fine on thin precarious legs" ... 58 This telling image shows that life is not at all pleasing to Nanda. That she holds life trivial is apparent in overlooking Raka's presence in Carignano as an insignificant bug, mosquito or cricket.

Animal imagery in the form of hens, hoopoe parrots, and pigeons heighten the danger that invade the quietness of their surrounding and suggest their desire to be left all by themselves. The sound made by these birds disturb Nanda Kaul who wants all 'stillness' The birds reveal movement, set against stillness of Cariganano - a demand of the protagonist to escape into the world of non-involvement. This brings into focus the inner world.
The botanical images of 'pine trees' is repeated for not less than six times in Fire on the mountain to emphasise through repetitions Nanda Kaul's inner urge to merge with her natural environment. 'Bouganvillaes' are used as an image to reveal Maya's longing for a world of tender joy.

The other significant images which recur in Desai's novels are those of mountains, rocks, tree trunks and cicadas. Nanda Kaul identifies herself with "a charred tree trunk". "Parched hedges" is associated with the dismal reality of the world to foreground the aridity of Deven's world. "The palm trees" appear as watchful animate beings like geese on the Manori islands to intensify her fear of the external reality.

Desai also uses concrete structures to patternise the welter of feelings. Nanda's sense of intense loneliness is painted through the sketch of Carignano on Kasauli Hills, which is far off from the active human life. In Custody carries the same process of objectifying the psyche of the protagonists. Deven's life and the structure of his house at Mirpore compliments Deven's predicament. This also provides an inkling to Deven's life in near future. His life in his house share same quality of existence.

Likewise, Nur's house is enveloped in semi-darkness which hints at the decline of his poetic worth. It also symbolises the gloom of his domestic life. The pink house where the recording of Nur's poem and memories goes on the top to signify Deven's illusory world. Hira Niwas the house where Baumgarnter stays is a dilapidated building with "stars, worn into hollows as the centre and each had raised dust..."

If Cariganono embodies the process of ageing, barreness, loneliness, decay and death, Manori islands (Where shall we go this summer?) symbolises the pristine world of innocence, purity and miracle. Like Nanda, Sita too escapes from duties, from responsibilities, from order and routine in an unlivable world. The assaults of existence
forces them to accept the grim truth that reality is inescapable. This also brings home the idea that man and society are inter-dependent.

Further sound images are used to evoke a sense of hostility on perceiving the world around. For e.g. Music of the street singers frightens Monisha for she is unable to relate herself to music as others in the family do. Similarly Baba’s gramophone in Clear light of Day irritates Tara and Bim as its music makes conversation impossible. This shows how Desai fuses natural landscape with the protagonist’s inner milieu to provide vividness to her narrative.

Stellar images are as evocative as animal and bird imagery. The image of the ‘comet’ in In Custody is as forceful in the story as is the image of a ‘house’. It becomes very interpretative symbol in the novel. It prefigures how Deven would meddle with his otherwise smooth domestic and professional life. His attempt to track down Nur for an interview is equally bad, as the sight of the Ominous comet:

... the comet was something to be feared, he just remembered it was a bad omen not lucky. He could not have said why he was frightened. 

The trap of new agony which Deven gets into is borne out of his literary endeavour to interview Nur, aptly demonstrates his vision of the stars “even the stars were smothered in mirk” ...

Through mechanical imagery, Desai deals with another significant idea which has great relevance to the modern materialistic world. Nur believes that the vehicles made of steel are traps and imprisonments. Though devised to gain time, are in real, self-destructive. People are imprisoned in their urge to overtake time:

A vehicle made of steel is only a steel trap. Man is not set free by the aeroplane, he is trapped in it.
Likewise the whistle a train reminds Deven of prisoners who are shut behind the bars:

He bit down on a cigarette cursing it; why was there always a train whistle in the dark calling over vast spaces to all who belong to travel and more on? It promised nothing, it merely reminded presences of their...

The "indestructible prison" or "the cruel trap" would soon be put to live is suggested by "a pile of coiled wires". Further "the fences of rusted barbed wires" indicates his drab and uneventful existence. Such mechanical images are also used in depicting the much lured dream of Sarla:

She dreamt the magazine dream of marriage; herself, stepping out of the car with a plastic shopping bag full of groceries and feeling them into gleaming refrigerator, then rushing to the telephone placed on a lace-doily upon a three legged table and excitedly ringing up her friends to invite them to see a picture show with her and her husband who was beaming at her from behind a flowered curtain.

World like 'cars', 'refrigerator', 'telephone' and 'lace-doily' suggest Sarla's desire for prosperity and happiness. 'Excitedly ringing' and 'gleaming' emote the resultant joy and contentment. Further it adds more emphasis to Sarla's frustrations for affluence.

Along with the images of animals, insects and those concerning houses Desai uses trains, trams, bus and ships to symbolise a character's wish to withdraw from the dull and mundane living. It also focuses the weakness of a mind in comprehending reality. Deven's frequent boarding of bus suggests his illusion that "one could so easily and quickly free oneself from what had come, to see him not only the entire world since he had no existence outside... Every reference to train image symbolises Nirode's congenital failure from making a withdrawal from the nightmarish world of site and sound.
The externality or the world of doings and happenings also depict the principal characters in contrast to those who inhabit their world internally and externally. All her women protagonists react with unusual strangeness against the male sensitivity. Gautama holds world in the images of neatly arranged pots and pan, which shows his taste for rational and orderly life. Raman and Jiban who are also practical and man of business have a totally different vision to life. Raman does not show any reaction at the sight of crows fighting amongst themselves which surprises the hypersensitive Sita. Likewise Monisha is surprise to find her husband showing no interest at the sight of easily available and neatly arranged books of literature. These women protagonist have different scale of values far beyond the comprehension of their partners. To Gautama the peacocks are just ‘dancing’ but to Maya they are shrieking out intense mating calls while dancing. The two distinct reactions to the same scene records the hieroglyphics of the two minds in disparity.

This is how Desai uses language to concretize the inner world of her protagonists; to measure their dry and drab existence, and to objectify their process of defeat and awareness of reality.
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