ANITA DESAI

Anita Desai is one of the most distinguished among the younger set of Indian-English novelists. She has half a dozen novels and collections of short stories to her credit. She was awarded the Sahitya Akademi award for her novel Fire On The Mountain in 1978. Her novel, Where Shall We Go This Summer has won the award for Excellence in Writing from the Federation of Indian Publishers and Authors' Guild of India in 1979. Another novel, Clear Light of Day was nominated for the Booker McConnell Prize in 1980.

Born in 1937 of Bengali-German parents, she was educated in Delhi. She began writing at an early age for the children and later turned her hand to full fledged novel writing. She has been a member of the Advisory Board for English of the National Academy of Letters in Delhi and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London. Presently, she is based in London from where she has published a children's novel that has been awarded the Booker Prize for Commonwealth literature. Her novels are : Cry, The Peacock, Voices in the City, Bye Bye Black Bird, where
the existential problem of alienation of the emancipated, modern woman, through maladjustment in marriage. The maladjustment in other relationships due to stress and strain of the modern age, also finds a place together with the central theme. She has repeatedly tried to project the idea that a blissful conjugal life is a rainbow-coloured dream of a romantic mind, or wishful thinking of an immature intellect. In a marriage, adjustment for a woman means deleting her individuality, her innerself, her conscience, so that the ideal couple represents the self-satisfied, vain-glorious husband and his legally bonded woman slave. Anita Desai believes that one Nora will not make much difference and women will continue to pay the supreme price for the meal ticket.

Her first novel, Cry, the Peacock sets the pattern for other novels. The title of this novel sensitivity relates the spiritual agony of Maya, the half-child, half-woman, romantic heroine of the novel. It is a symbolical representation of Maya who identifies herself with the peacocks in the agony and ecstasy of their fatal love experience : "Now that I understand their call, I wept for them and I wept for myself, knowing their words to the mine" (P.97).

Maya's marriage to Gautam is more or less, a marriage of convenience, a sealing of friendship between two like-minded, mature guardians of Maya (P.40). A match between two more different individuals is difficult to conceive : Maya with her "round,
childish face, pretty, plump and pampered... the small, shell-like ears curling around petty ignorance; the soft overfull lips... the long curled lashes and very heavy, very dark brows, the silly collection of curls, a flower pinned to them - a pink flower, a child's choice of a posy" (P.105), and Gautam with his tall, thin, stooped form, greying hair, pallid skin, nicotine-stained long, bony fingers, practical, matter of fact approach and clumsy mannerisms. This alienation afflicts their spirits in an uncompromising fashion: Gautam touches without feeling and Maya feels without touching.

Were they to follow the usual procedure of an ordinary marriage that turns the partners into weary strangers in the course of time, there would have been nothing amiss. But a Lesai heroine cannot succumb to circumstances. Maya tries to preserve her deep, torturous love for Gautam with childish pleadings. "is there nothing", I whispered, "is there nothing in you that should be touched ever so slightly if I told you, I live my life for you"? (P.114). From an ordinary, pampered, hypersensitive, child-bride, Maya is transformed within four years, into a neurotic, homicidal manic.

Cry, the Peacock does not portray even a single contented marriage in the real sense. Maya is shocked at the apathy, hypocrisy and hatred revealed through other marriages around her. Her own mother is conspicuously absent from memory, she does not
mention a photograph, a keep-sake or any conversation with her father about her mother. Gautam's parents lived an unnatural married life, each too busy with his or her vocation to bother about the other. They maintained a semblance of normality. Her friend Leila bears a cross of her own. Married to a tubercular patient for love, she raves at the mockery of marriage, yet forbears all the childish vagaries of her dependent husband and travelling swiftly on the agonized course of nervous breakdown.

Mr. and Mrs. Lall are pen portraits of hypocrisy personified, and Mrs. Lall reveals it in no uncertain terms. The Sikh wife publicly denounces her husband as a charlatan and opportunist revealing the deep-seated antipathy of a mal-adjusted marriage.

Nila, a divorcee, declares: "After ten years with that rabbit I married, I have learnt to do everything myself" (P.162). Even plump, pampered Pom complains petulantly against Kailash who is not ready to have a separate establishment. Mrs. Sapru pleads tearfully with Maya's lawyer father only to earn his disdain.

Taken in totality, all these marriages present a queerly disturbing fact that far from being singular occurrences, maladjusted conjugal lives are the normal, even inevitable ingredients of life.

The maladjustment problem signifying the existential struggle is continued in the parent-child and brother-sister relationships also. Maya's father disowns Arjun who ran away from home; Gautam's father is unaware that he owes any responsibility to his children;
Mr. & Mrs. Lall treat their children as unnecessary burdens. Arjun and Maya or Gautam and Nila are unable to understand and appreciate each other's difficulties. There is distance and apathy between the brothers and sisters.

Anita Desai evolves the 'Stream of Consciousness' technique in an original way in her novels to usher in a new genre that has been named as poetic novel. She herself quite candidly admits her allergy to write 'Social Documents'. Limited as her material is, it is flimsy enough to be exhausted prematurely unless substantiated and sustained by a super-excellent, poetically inspired prose and deep, cathartic character-delineations. *Cry, the Peacock*, her first, poetry-novel, can boast of originality in the theme itself, but the treatment of theme in technical terms falls short in spite her language power.

The structure of the plot varies in a small measure with each of her novels, but generally it falls into an uneven division of three parts. *Cry, the Peacock* also follows this pattern: a prologue of about two pages, seven chapters having a total of about a hundred pages and an epilogue of about nine pages. The author-commentator plays the role of the Greek chorus in the prologue and epilogue, while the first person narrative method is employed in the main part of the story. But this method involves a difficulty, for, as the narrative part is in the past, recalled from the memory, and as Maya does not mention of keeping
a diary, it seems unrealistic that an inmate of a mental asylum would be able to narrate a story with such detailed coherence.

In *Cry, the Peacock* the locale is New Delhi. Maya lives a dual life and as she juxtaposes her moods according to the 'Stream of Consciousness' technique of flash backs and present flashes, the locale is also shifted providing an impetus to the plot and character development. "It is another spring, a far more idyllic one, for it is at home, in Lucknow" (P.26), thus begins the childhood memory, bringing in a glow of soft, sheltered happiness, to which Maya longs to return time and again. After barely four years of married life, the Delhi house has become a wall less prison for her, where she "was not allowed the healing passion of a fit of crying" (P.8).

The Lucknow house, the place where she tries to go back again and again in her moments of unhappiness, takes her back in its shelter. It is as if poetic justice has been done to Maya, who goes back to a second, if abnormal childhood, to experience freedom from reason and soulhood.

Anita Desai is a compulsively subjective novelist. Her heroines are either her alter ego or the products of her own experience. Other characters in her novel are distinctly cast in a subjective mould that brings in the limited range and repetitive strain of characterizations in almost all of her novels. Two main characteristics are found in her heroines, either they
are emotional and sensitive to the point of neurosis or there is a rock-like stability and granite-hard defiance to the meaningless social obligations and customs.

The heroine of *Cry, the Peacock*, Maya belongs to the first kind. Immature, highly emotional as she is, her blind hunger for love meets defeat because it is too possessive, too impractical for the people around her, specially for Gautam. She suffers a childhood mental scar that shatters her mental balance. Ravaged by a fever that leaves her physically and mentally weak, she assumes a kind of stoic patience, a resigned calm to wait for the tragic fate, that is hers to bear. Characteristically her actions express this element of neurosis: she never walks but either runs or flees; slams the doors, crashes the mirror, screams violently throws back Gautam's hands and beats the pillow furiously to calm herself. Other times, she lies on the bed for the whole day or sits on the chair doing nothing, sunk into the oblivion of deepest melancholy. Like the hypersensitive girl she is, her taste is wounded by garish, violent colours; heavy, aromatic food and drink, and vulgar manner of joking and laughing. Like all Reeli's heroine, Maya is also in intense love with poetry, music, sculpture, almost anything that personified beauty and purity.

Gautam, a successful, practising lawyer has the dry, practical mind of his vocation. Women and emotion range in the same category with him: both are to be restrained and kept in their respective
places. He has the added disadvantage of marrying a very young girl because she pleased him as a new toy to while away his leisure. In fact, if he had chosen carefully and married an ordinary woman, he might have led a peaceful, if not overly happy life. He cannot, for the life of him, understand why Maya is so upset and tries his best to bring her back to normalcy.

Other characters are used as foils to highlight the characteristics of Gautam and Maya. Maya's father is diametrically opposite to Gautam's mother as much as Maya is to Gautam. They belong to different, social strata. Maya's father, a famous lawyer, represents the self-centered affluent class. He has at best a condescending attitude to people like Gautam's mother who is a social worker. She is capable of giving selfless love to Maya perhaps even more than Maya's father. She is used to a large family, little privacy and fewer material comforts.

Leila, Nila and Pom are counterfoils to Maya; capable and practical, they do not let their lives slide downwards in a neurotic euphoria but tackle the situations as best they can.

Mrs. Desai is an inveterate user of symbols and imagery in her novels. An astounding amount of symbols and images, drawn from nature and society, bird and beasts, seasons and colours are used in Cy, the Peacock with amazing effect. The albino priest symbolises the danger that threatens Maya's marriage. He haunts her in
fearful reveries as her neurosis develops. The kathakali dancers, the dance of death by Shiva with the drum beats becoming louder and louder, the torturous dance motions of the mountain bear and the cabaret dancers dancing to advertise their merchandise, all are symbols of the spiritual conflict, going on in Maya's mind.

The peacock symbolically represents Maya, who awaits her tragic fate, ironically uttering the same cry 'Lover I die', only it is not she but Sautam who is killed by the frenzy of frustrated assion. Animals and insects like Maya's dog Toto, the thirsty monkeys and snakes attracted by the white scented flowers, the lizard flexing its body, the little crikets, moths and butterflies are used for symbolical effect.

The summer season always brings in dissatsfation, weariness and death. Maya, exhausted with the summer, cries out: "Will the summer never end? Will the monsoon never come?" (P.172), symbolically referring to her physical and mental torture, and seeking the end of it all. Flowers and fruits are used with startling symbolical effect with unusual images. Maya's sensitive nature is fired by the "Golden globules of fruit glowing amidst glossy foliage as in an alien song" (P.201).

The planets are an integral part of her imagery. The sun is her enemy: "In the East the Sun glared, one eye glared, so white, so hot that before its gaze, each object dead or alive, cringed."
The moon is more deadly for its whiteness is the albino colour: "I can't go out to bed in the garden to be watched over by the moon, the ghost-white moon, that sees all, forgets nothing (p.163). It is under the hypnotic influence of the moon that Maya pushes Gautam to his death.

Like all romantic writers, Anita Desai breach colour in her novels. Colour to her, is the vital instrument by which she can mould her atmosphere and theme. All the characters are divided symbolically into two colour groups; the delicate, emotional, imaginative, romantic poetic minds prefer exquisitely blended, warm, soft and vibrant colours. The common place, plastic, uncouth, out for the drab, disharmonious, violently disturbing garish tones.

The natural objects like trees, flowers, birds and animals are splashed lavishly with colour: "Down the street, the silk-cotton trees were the first to flower: their huge scarlet blooms, thick petalled, solid podded that made blood bobs in the blue, then cropped to the asphalt and were squashed into soft yellowish miasma... as they burst, these aery-faery puffs of silver-streaked whiteness were released" (p.34). The blending of colour, sensation and sight to create imagery is a unique gift of Anita Desai: "Gautam sat smoking elegant wreaths of white into the violet warmth" (p.151).

An acidic humour imparts the bitter-lemon taste to her novels. Fastidious to the point of cynicism, she cannot overlook
those little singularities and idiosyncrasies that characterise the general brand of people. In _Cry, the Peacock_, Gautam remarks after Maya's hysterical outburst: "Frankly, if a man were to react to the sight of pregnancy by bursting into tears, no court of law would consider him sane or sober" (P. 65). Maya's caustic observation: "if mothers enjoy the clumsy drooling of their babies while they eat... then I enjoy similarly his helplessness in matters practical" (P. 93), express her indifference to Gautam. The ironical and contumaciously humorous depiction of a hypocritical society where fiction is more admired than the truth is superb in sarcasm.

Her second novel, _Voices in the City_ continues the theme of maladjusted marriage with a wider aspect. It is not only the husband and wife, who are faced with this existential predicament but the impact is also left on their children, relations, friends and even acquaintances. The title is ambiguous. Does it mean that Calcutta itself hypnotises the characters with its different kinds of haunting voices or does it express the thought that the characters themselves are lost, wandering, disembodied voices, desperately seeking some kind of anchor? In any case, it is suggestive enough to relate to the theme.

_Voices in the City_ presents the most grotesque picture of married life, turns both the partners lusting after each other's blood in the course of a few years. In Maya, the neurosis is
involuntary and uncontrolled, with Nirone's father, it is a process of deliberate physical and spiritual destruction. He transforms himself from an easy-going, sports-loving, fond father into a drunkard, debased and dishonourable creature. The mother is hardened from a sensitive, accomplished, beautiful young woman into a coldly practical and possessive woman, lacking all human warmth and tenderness even for her own children.

Manisha and Jiban form the most usual and pathetic example of a maladjusted marriage. Manisha's tortuous journey towards her terrible death, paints her spiritual and physical transformation in black, mourning colours. From a quiet, sensitive, beautiful, mildly self-centered girl, she turns into a career, neurotic, diary-writing woman: "her head was like that of a stuffed ragdoll with a very white face, nodding insecurely on its neck, its eyebrows and mouth painted unnaturally dark". She lives in Jiban's house, shares Jiban's bed, serves Jiban's family, is accused of stealing Jiban's money and it is Jiban who gently covers her charred body and begs forgiveness from her relatives.

The miniatures around the main characters show no redeeming flashes of conjugal bliss. Aunt Leila hates men, particularly her obese and self-satisfied husband, dead long ago. Nira has lived through a spectacularly short-lived marriage. Sonny's two sisters
Lila and Nina present pathetic spectacles:

"Lila had married for a title and lived now in squalid penury, in a crumpling house, in which she took paying guests who drank or wrote her insulting letters. Nina had married for money and it was her husband who drank and wrote scandalous notes to other women." (P.84).

Jit Nair and Sarla, are continuously threatened by acute maladjustment based on intense distrust and disgust for each other. For Mr. Basu, Mrs. Basu is an attractive plaything, and he suffers her whims as long as they are not too unbearable. Arun's wife, the nurse with her large bony hands and world of cettol and disinfectants has nothing common with him. Dharma candidly admits that married relationships are never straightforward and made to order.

Sonny's father remembers with a guffaw: "Bapulour was there for my wife and for the occasional visit to reassure the tenants, so to speak" (P.76), equating both as negligible but necessary evils. The quiet, little bose is more like a domestic animal and trots to his wife for her hilsa fish cooked in mustard oil. Thus, at best, marriage is a farce, at worst it is a malignancy that destroys body, mind and soul completely and irrevocably.

The theme of maladjustment repeats the parent-child and brother-sister syndrome, taking in the different aspects. Nirode's relation with his mother borders on the obnoxious complex as his
dream shows. In his childhood, he "grovelled over her long white toes" (p. 232), signifying the surrender of his manhood to her terrible destroying powers. The deep dark hatred for his mother and his fantastic and dreadful offering of himself as a sacrifice to her brings in a completely new dimension in psychological study.

With Arun, this disbalance relationship is in a lower key but obviously he escapes from this mother-world to cut off all ties and begin a fresh life, as the letters show. He marries a wife quite unlike his mother. Manisha herself admits that love "is not there in my relationship with mother which is filled with an inbred and invalid sense of duty of honour, of concern. Besides, she is too whole and complete in herself to need our little offerings—actually need them, not merely their symbols and exercises which she demands and collects with touching arccour" (p. 135). This is evident in her treatment of Amla: "She glanced quickly up at her daughter and the swiftness with which she looked away reiterated her rejection - Yes? she enquired with such asperity that Amla felt weak and breathless" (p. 255).

Amla's thinking turns the relationship with their father into an unnatural, if not impossible channel. "Or was it because father did, unconsciously spite their daughters who were unavailable to them? (p. 198), she concludes when she tries to find out the reason for selecting Jiban as a bridegroom for Manisha. But perhaps the most disturbing aspect is found in Sharma and his wife who "had
committed the terrible sin of casting out a young daughter" (P.229) that destroyed them gradually, turning them into self-exiled prisoners.

The disturbed relation among the four brothers and sisters is painted in Manisha's words: "I discover... the vital element that is missing... the element of love... we possess a darker, fiercer element—fear" (P.135). Anila's mother makes "a frigid little gesture of recognition" (p. 224) to her half sister, acknowledging the distant relationship.

Voices in the City has a wider canvas than Cry, the Peacock. It is a social-chronicle, showing an entire era in the transitional phase; the bureaucracy and their henchman, the political consciousness among the restive students, the transitional period in conservative homes where new values enter and the old values still linger the refugee problem, the too loud, too strident declaration of independence by the newly emancipated Bengali women and their bowing like counterparts imprisoned behind solid, black-bars, the decaying glamour of feudalism hiding behind hypocrisy, all this and many other find their place in the novel. In spite of her allergy to social documents, Anita Desai's pen is capable of painting a realistic social picture in her novels.

Voices in the City is divided into four parts, first, a single chapter of about a hundred and eight pages with the title 'Nirode', secondly, about thirty one pages comprising of a
diary-titled 'Manisha, her diary', thirdly ninety three pages with the title 'Amla' and lastly twenty two pages having the title 'Mother'. An author-narrated story in three parts, describing three of the four characters and the related situations, Manisha, the remaining character is delineated through the novel method of diary writing. A combination of first person narrative with authorial description as this, gives complete freedom to the stream of consciousness technique while painting the realistic social picture. Mrs. Desai also uses the epistolery form in a compact fashion when much of character and situation is expressed through the letters of mother and Amla.

Like CRY, the Peacock, it is also a tragic novel, ending with Manisha's violent death and Nirode's complete break from sanity. The love element is understated in Nirode's case but is clearly expressed in Amla. The psycho-analytical approach in the delineation of a neurotic character is nearly equally divided between Manisha and Nirode.

Voices in the city demands attention for its locale, the Calcutta city that has a living character of its own. An out and out Calcutta may hesitate to agree with Anita Desai in her deadly description of the doom that awaits this city. The strangulation of Calcutta on the three brothers and sisters that seems to end with the final sacrifice is something weird and fantastic.
It is significant to point out the reactions of different characters about Calcutta. Dharna says "to me, it is a dead city, I do not return to visit a tomb" (P.53). Nirode gives it another fifty years, "and then it will be gone, beastly, blood-thirsty Calcutta" (P.96). From Manisha comes the furious tirade: "This Calcutta that holds its head between its knees and grins toothlessly up at me from beneath a bottom, black with the dirt that it site on" (P.116).

For Amla, Calcutta posed a challenge and acted as an inspiration at first. But after only a number of days, she finds: "This monster city that lived no normal, healthy, red blooded life, but one that was subterranean, underlit, stealthy and odorous of mortality, had captured, enchanted or disenchanted, both her sister and brother" (P. 150).

Desai has tried to link Nirode, Manisha and Amla through this chain of neurosis about Calcutta, the death city, the city of Kali, as if they are fellow victims for sacrificing to the brutal deity.

Perhaps, there is, after all, a potent reason for all this, hidden at the subconscious level of autobiographical approach. Bengali-German by birth Mrs. Desai has never appreciated her father's heritage and expressed a clear aversion to anything Bengali, not only in this novel, but in her other novels also.
Anita Desai herself admits: "According to the critics, I ought to be writing half my work in Bengali, the other half in German. As it happens, I have never written a word in either language. It has also been commented that "an intelligent and meticulous writer like Anita Desai could be so careless in her generalisation, when she bluntly stated that hardly any women wrote in India until independence and those who have written novels since then have done so only in English". It is indeed disheartening to note that personal bias has influenced Mrs. Desai to such an extent that she refuses to recognise such doyens of pre-independence and post-independence Bengali women novelists as Madhurani Devi, Shailabala Ghose, Ashapurna Devi and Mahasweta Devi who ushered in a new era of modern fiction in Bengali literature, the two last named are recipients of the Gyanpith Awards for their unique literary efforts. This is also true of other major Indian languages like Urdu, Hindi, Marathi, Tamil and Punjabi etc. This sort of naivete causes chagrin no doubt, but then, a writer must have his or her personal madness with or without method.

A versatile character-painter Anita Desai excels herself in *Voices in the City*. Her Mirooe is a comprehensive portrait of a frustrated bohemian young man, the representative of a transitional period. Threatened by the acute sense of insecurity that is the legacy of his generation, Mirooe suffers like a caged bird, encircled on all sides by the vagaries of a ruthless destiny. Love-starved as he is, his soul is tainted by the imagined physical
attraction of his mother to major Chacha. An insane longing, for revenge makes him damn his mother to everlasting hell, repulsing every little gesture of love from her side. And yet, he is haunted even in his dreams by this love-hate relationship, so that, his psychic reserve breaks down to leave him a derelict at the end.

All his actions, conversation and manner express a rebellious attitude like that of a child who is constantly afraid of being hurt. i.e., who rescues a little bird from painful death, throws burning cigarette stubs to Sonny's dogs to hurt them. He wrote his play with his blood and yet considers it "the most obscure incidence of my life, the most futile thing I ever did" (p. 101). It is not simply despair that he suffers from, it is a deep-based anguish, a cancer that slowly eats away the core of his spirit and destroys his manhood.

Maanisha and Aila are the two faces of Maya in *The Peacock*. Opposite as they are to each other in certain characteristics (Maanisha being an introvert and Aila an extrovert), they possess the same incurably romantic spirit. Young and beautiful, both begin life with a spirit of starry-eyed adventure in life that is irrevocably throttled down by the circumstances in Maanisha's case: "They put me away in a steel container, a thick glass cubicle and I have lived in it, all my life, without a touch of love or hate or warmth in me" (p. 247). Childless like Maya in
Cry, the peacock, she cries with agony "what a waste... I have not given birth, I have not attended death..." (P. 24). In Anla is depicted the rise and fall of an entire experience. An exquisite little chirping bird, soaring high in the deep blues, Anla is at first dismayed, then shocked and later shattered completely by "the rot that sets in overnight, without warning" (P. 174).

Even in love, her destiny pursues her. The ecstasy and agony of love that she experiences in her one-sided love affair with Dharma, the middle aged artist with a family history, leaves her shaken and empty. There is no catharsis in her love because however artistically Dharma puts it, he has used her young body and impressionable mind to give a new direction to his portrait painting. And in the end, he makes her realize without any ambiguity that he cannot leave his wife for her (P. 231).

It is in Mother's character that realism and mysticism embrace each other, so completely, so unrestrainedly that the originality in character creation is fully justified. She seems to be an unearthly creature, a super-human being who becomes for her children the personification of the deity of destruction. "She was a woman fulfilled by the great tragedy of her daughter's suicide and it was, he saw, what she had always needed to fulfill her tragedy" (P. 252).
The physical beauty and the characteristic majesty that she has make her far superior to others. Her self-containedness, the detached watchfulness, the quality of morality in her character is a unique feature that drives Arjoo to his awful realization. "Don't you see in her face, in her beauty, the amalgamation of death and life? Isn't it perfect and inevitable that she should pour blood into our veins when we are born and drain it from us when we die?" (p. 256).

The vignettes are drawn with loving care to provide counterfoils to the main characters. Dharma, David, Sonny, Aunt Leila, Sita Levi, Sonny's father, Sit Nair, Max's father Jiban and countless others are unforgettable portraits drawn with warm, vibrant colours. The different worlds of the artist, the businessman, the bohemian, the money-less zamindars, the placid office-goers, the freedom fighters and the orthodox Bengali wives, find their places with unmistakable charm and ease. Contrasting with the super-emotional and neurotic central characters, these provide a well-balanced and sane world of practical living.

Voices in the City expresses most clearly the philosophical outlook of Mrs. Desai. Deeply interested in existential philosophy, Mrs. Desai expresses through Manisha, the deep gloom she suffers from loss of freedom of individuality:

"To pretend to have forgotten,
   to pretend to believe in these
p Pettiness of our mean existence
is that right? (P. 121)

This thought is symbolically expressed through the dove's stigmata:
"How can it be possible? How can they live, eat, work, sing
bleeding through life?" (P. 121).

Mrs. Desai's third novel *Bye Bye Blackbird* presents a love
story in the background of the immigration problem. The title is
directly related to the theme and signifies that England has said
goodbye to one blackbird (Adit) but has offered a cuckoo's nest
to another (Dev).

The strain of maladjusted marriage continues in this novel
also in the garb of a social problem. Adit and Sarah, Jassa and
Bella are the victims of alien culture—maladjustments on the
social level. Both Adit and Sarah are playing theatrical roles,
Adit, that of the successful, foreign-based Indian, while Sarah
maintains the facade of a happily married British life into an
over enthusiastic family of Indian in-laws who are awaiting to
welcome her with outstretched hands, as soon as she decides to
visit India.

In reality, both are afraid of the instantaneous rejection,
vicious distrust and mocking pity from their own people, trans­
forming them into involuntary escapists. Adit sacrifices every
little bit of self-respect and loyalty to become a perfect 'babu'
and considers it to be the height of achievement. Sarah dies a slow spiritual death through her intense, unfulfilled longing to escape from the mundane and drudgery-filled world of an English home.

An identical case is that of Samar and Bella. At the party, Bella bursts out, "Just think, if they had caught an Indian doing it, they would have gone on and on about immigrants in London and how would you have felt getting a bad name for your people? Now that she had come to the crux of the matter so long bottled up out of a wifely fact, she could barely strain herself" (p. 214).

Through them is presented a highly volatile situation: "Two Indians, Two English women, frozen in the stances of players on the stage... somewhere in a locked closet, a slab of marble like a blank grave stone awaiting an engraving, a grave and a bunch of flowers" (p. 214). At the very outset, these marriages are marked with clear, burning strokes that brand them with the inevitable mark of Cain:

"Mala, the Punjabi wife laughed too, but Bella and Sarah sat in stiff silence, their Anglo-Saxon faces passive. They had learnt exactly how much of this foreign land was theirs to tread and given up early attempts out of curiosity and a desire to join, to interpret jokes" (p. 28).

A maladjusted marriage has changed Mala and Jasbir for
worse: Jasbir into an overloud, unpolished, careless buffon all his attention on good, spicy Indian food, and make into a dishevelled, impractical, impolite, idle young woman, who relates with relish the story of her young son, who shouts despairingly to his English hunters: "I am not black, I am not black, I am grey" (P.29). She is a transplanted tropical plant, dying a slow death in the cold and loveless climate of foreign land.

Mr. & Mrs. Roscommon James present an extraordinary repulsive and ignoble picture of maladjusted married life. In a single, bitter sentence, the whole lurid atmosphere becomes clear: "She scolded him in tones, that would lead any one not present in the room, to think she was speaking to an unusually naughty and tiresome dog; he never answered" (P.163). Sarah clearly identifies the cause of maladjustment with clash between egoistic tendencies of both her parents.

Even the negligible married couples invariably present scenes of loveless malevolent attitude. Mr. Miller opposes his wife and supports Adit, Mrs. Guanlidge growls at her husband each morning, out of doubt, Christine Langford casually mentions a friend seeking divorce, she herself married for money. Adit's typical retort: "the married couples in India are not in parks, they are at home, quarrelling" (P.74), finally sums up Mrs. Deenai's viewpoint about marriages in general.
Bye Bye Blackbird presents a giant existential problem, inseparable from its political and economic aspects in the form of the East-West encounter. Are they emigrants as Dev says or immigrants as Adit declares, is it their proportion that is wrong or the values?

Mrs. Lassai also presents the fakes, the opportunists, the hypocrites who take advantage of the credulous India-lovers to ruin whatever respect and admiration may be wrested from the decent and sane elements of the English society. Emma is such a victim to be duped by the swami and the sitarist. Krishnamurthy is an example of countless fake business men, busily operating in London. They drag down the Indians in the eyes of the Englishmen, for they stand as representatives of their own country in a foreign land.

An author-narrated story, Bye Bye Blackbird, is divided into three parts: 'Arrival', 'Discovery and Recognition' and 'Departure'. The subtitles are significant. Dev, a blackbird arrives in London with jaundiced eyes, ready to criticise, scorn and denounce everything English. He discovers the grandeur, the magic, the lure of England and recognises the identification of his own spirit with it. Meanwhile, Adit, another blackbird also discovers that he cannot sever his ties from India and recognition of his own identification with his native land comes to him as a shock. Unnerved by this discovery, Adit feels London to be a prison to his body and spirit and departs for India, with the
hope that his unborn child would find its proper place in the land of its father.

Desai presents fantasy and reality through two contrasting locales of India and England. In their dreams and reveries, India comes alive to Sarah, Adit and Dev, while physically all three are present in England and live their daily routines. Sometimes the author over-draws to be entirely convincing when she speaks of the black grandeur of India, which is definitely a one-sided picture of poverty and perfidy. At other times she is taken to task for providing a guided tour through inland. Nevertheless, the locales come alive with swift sure strokes of a confident painter.

As is usual with Mrs. Desai, she has a set of three central characters, brothers and sisters, husband, wife and lover or three women in each novel. In this novel, Adit, Sarah and Dev form the pattern of the set. Adit's character proves to be most thought-provoking because his personality development is unexpected and sudden. For the first half of the novel, he is seen as an ordinary, young, Bengali babu, who is matter of fact, practical minded, conscious of the comforts and advantages of London, his job, and at the same time retains all the vices typical to his native race. A loud-mouthed, bragging nature, combined with the servile imitation of the Englishmen, does not put a favourable light on him. Further discredit is placed on him when he struts like the typical Indian husband, forcing his English wife to adopt his modes
of living and eating and scolding her in front of others. In fact, his shallowness of nature jerks Sarah's nerves, especially when they go to visit her parents.

Then the sudden change comes over him. The sense of non-belonging strikes him just like a bolt from the blue. It is, as if he recovers from a long period of amnesia, from a raging fever to find himself lost in an alien ground. His lifestyle is changed completely, his work at office suffers even his relation with Sarah becomes confused and bitter. He loses his joviality and his friends, and even his typical singing of the 'babu' song is stopped for ever. He wanders like a witless moron, his eyes fixed on his native land. The India-Pakistan war strikes the last blow to his diminishing reserve of patience and when Sarah announces her pregnancy, he strains at the leash like a frightened animal to leave England at any cost.

Lev presents the other side of the coin. He arrives in England, cynical and critical to his last breath. But his change to the other side is neither sudden, nor unexpected. In his native land he has studied English literature and he feels an affinity with the originals of what he has read as a student.

Moreover, he does not change only in emotional range like Adit, which cannot be relied on permanently. Lev also takes the material aspect, the daily living conditions into consideration.
He carefully notices the freedom that an ordinary individual enjoys in England. The English have a genius for preserving beauty and presenting it unspoilt as they have done with Byron's grave. He listens attentively when told "If there's one thing they can't stand the smell or sight of at home, it is bitterness... there is always a fresh start and a clear page and a shining Monday morning to live for" (p. 117). Reluctantly he appreciates Sarah's mother who makes neat packets of garbage and weighs them down with stones, the order and system of Wynn in her work; the apple tree with the signboard 'help yourself' and the easy friendliness of the British farmer. He starts on Adit's philosophy, which he would be forced to forget, sometime in future as Adit has done.

Sarah balances these two characters. Her reserved English personality is a counterfoil to these two flamboyant Indian characters. She has married for love, against all opposition and is victimised by her social position.

When Adit decides to leave England, Sarah seems to regain her identity. She leaves her chance of promotion, her neat, orderly and quiet London home, her parents and friends and turns to exotic India in search of her new identity: "I think you may be right, she said, 'I think when I go to India, I will not find it so strange after all. I am sure I shall feel quite at home very soon" (p. 259).
Where Shall We Go This Summer? is an extension of Cry, the Peacock. It provides a passionate commentary upon the maladjustment that renders Raman and Sita, the husband and wife, spiritually homeless.

Disaster-prone from the very beginning, Sita's marriage to Raman is already tottering on the verge of collapse, when Sita runs away to her childhood home in the hope of a miracle that would save her from giving birth to her fifth child, in the violence-rioted world around her. The sense of alienation as an existential problem is greater in this novel, than in others.

Sita's neurosis is the direct result of a clash between the hypocritical outer world and her inherent honesty that resists any compromise. The malignancy of maladjustment changes Sita into a creature "who lost all feminine, all maternal belief in child birth, all faith in it and began to fear it as yet one more act of violence and murder in a world that had more of them in it than she could take" (p. 50).

How terribly inadequate are the reasons given for this marriage, how pitifully insecure to build a marriage upon: "And finally out of pity, out of lust, out of a sudden will for adventure and because it was inevitable, he married her" (p. 59).

The maladjustment between Raman and Sita is based on clash of values, of principles, of even faith. This is not simply a
case of an emancipated woman revolting against the slavish bonds of marriage. It is much more than that, it is a question of the basic truth that is bitter and naked, and can neither be hidden, nor be halved to suit individuals.

This maladjustment seems to be a legacy of unhappy parents to their daughters regarding the Desai novels. Like Maya's father, Sita's father also has a painful history of married life. Her mother had run away and taken to be dead by her father and relatives. The parent-child incompatibility runs through the relationship between Sita and her father and Sita and her daughter Menaka. The maladjustment takes a subtle form when Desai deals with the relation between Jiban, Rekha and Sita, the set pattern of three, one brother and two sisters.

*Where Shall We Go This Summer* is divided into three parts: Summer'67, Winter'47 and Monsoon'67, the flash back technique is used to cover the past twenty years. The title of the novel is a sentence from *Cry, the Peacock*, when Maya's father asks her this question to mollify her after an emotional episode. Naman asks Sita this same question and her silent answer to him, signifies Sita's frenzied attempt to escape from her house to some other place where she will have spiritual comfort and peace.

An author-narrated story, this novel is a 'poetry-novel' in the broad sense: it depicts Anita Desai's capability in
characterisation and her poetic power in the descriptive passages of natural background. It has no social approach as is found in her other two novels. Thus, realism is at its minimum, the emphasis is on fantasy and fantacised episodes as in her first novel.

Unlike her heroines in the first three novels, Anita Basai has chosen a mature woman as the heroine of this novel. Sita is married to a businessman, is the mother of four children, lives in Bombay and is well read, knowing English, French, Hindi and Konkani. She is very talented and is interested in poetry, painting, music and philosophy.

She is the victim of neurosis that destroys her mental equilibrium and threatens her sanity still she decides to run away to Manori Island, seeking the miracle that will give her the power of not giving birth. But the magic power of the island belongs to her childhood fantasy and has disappeared with the passing of time. The bitter realization brings her back to reality and once again she retraces her steps towards the safety and security of her house in Bombay, to wait for the birth of her child. Thus, Sita has more maturity than Maya and controls her actions before a tragedy can take place. She is the more defeatist of the two also, since she accepts the humorum existence inspite of her refusal at first to compromise with it.

Thus Sita's neurosis is provoked by the monotonous existence of her daily routined life, that denies her any sense of involve-
ment. Her life is a long wait for the final climax that will shatter this placidity of a comfortable existence: "Life has no periods, no stretches. It simply swirled around, muddling and confusing, leading no where" (p. 155), she feels.

Raman, like Jautan is another victim of circumstances that have joined an ordinary man to an extraordinary woman. Middle aged, faded and stooped with the responsibilities of life that he takes so seriously, his expectations are so reasonable, so sensible so practical that no ordinary wife may deny them: "Perhaps one should be grateful if life is only a matter of disappointments, not disaster" (p. 143).

Mildly selfish and vain, he regards himself as a dutiful provider and husband any woman would be proud to share life with. The subtle difference between union of bodies and communion between minds does not strike him as an important part of his life. Fidelity to him means submission of the body regularly and with scrupulous care to one's spouse and be pleased about it and ready to express that pleasure.

Sita's father is painted with vibrant, if somewhat unrealistically shades of colour. A hero to his daughters, he holds the same fascination for Sita as mother does for Nirode in Voices in the City. Anita Desai's repetitive descriptions of certain types brings a strain of monotony for one recognises Maya's father with
his silver hair, long artistic fingers and fastidious habits in Sita's father also. He inherits the legacy of being a political worker at his weary end, from Gautam's father. The hint at his incestuous relationship with Rekha is an echo from the dormant desire in Nirod's father. The ambiguity in his character has been left undefined to create suspense. Was he an imposter, a black magician, an opportunist, a perfidious character who dazzled the villagers and his disciples by his characteristic aura of self-glorification or was he a healer, a saint, a selfless social worker who sacrificed all, even his wife's jewels to give spiritual consolation and physical comforts to his fellow-human beings:

"Yet no one could decide - the fact that all his biographers avoided this issue proved this - the precise nature of his experiment. Was it been religious or social? Or moral? No one ever defined it" (P.64).

In a strikingly original approach, Anita Desai brings in the physical ugliness of the man as his most dominating characteristic.

"He had been ugly, grotesquely ugly so as to arouse first notice, then pity, finally regard - a hypnotized kind of notice and regard. His heavy liddeon eyes had only, briefly, flashingly shown themselves and then were so myopic as to seem piercing, fearless to the susceptible. His body was pinguid, ponderous... His shoulders were so rounded
as to make him seem almost hunch-backed and that very rounded, bent attitude made him look so humble, so modest..." (p. 90).

The appearance matched the beggarly qualities of his intellect:

"He... had left school for politics when a boy and had not taken the opportunity, as other politicians had, of long periods in jail, to acquire what is known as a self-education" (p. 90).

Nekha and Jivan are vignettes that depict stark realism bordering on crude attempts to show the down-right uncouth, rather than clever handling of the simple oddity. Nekha, possibly the daughter of a mistress has a mysterious relationship with her father; physically uncouth and awkward, she is blessed with the voice of a Nightingale. She also knows her father's secrets as Jivan implies. A mysterious creature herself, she keeps her distance with her half-sister and brother, encouraging no confidence on either side.

Her father's death brings in a queer change in Nekha. Swiftly she sheds her passivity and prepares to leave: "Her smile made Sita shrink - it was so saurian, so malevolent cynical... she went, immediately, as though she had waited for and planned for this moment of release from the old man's love" (p. 99). Her becoming an A.I.M. artist is a bit of detail thrown into bring realism in the character.

Jivan, possessing a twisted mentality, lives for sadistic
pleasure. As a child he buries a live frog and plays the game of death. Sarcastically he hints at the tragedy of their mother and the mysterious relationship of Nekha with the rest of the family. At the first sign of his father's illness, he runs away and later involves himself in trade union activities. Sita loses all contact with both Nekha & Jivan after their father dies.

*Where We Shall Be* This Summer* suffers from repetition,* hyperbolism and incoherency. The magic touch that lifts *Cry, the Peacock* from the humdrum, run-of-the-mill, feminine novels, is less in evidence here. The characters have typical aspects like those of Ben Jonson and have lost the universality of Fielding. The incidents have nothing remarkable about them, certainly the ending is tame enough to be forgotten quickly. Even the descriptive power has lost its flight; earth bound and confusing, the language professes a harsher tone, a pedestrian quality when word after word, sentence after sentence is repeated to bring in monotony of ideas.

As is usual with her, Mrs. Desai depicts two locales side by side, to bring in the sense of claustrophobia that envelopes Sita. Her Bombay house has all the comforts that money can buy but lacks the peace of mind that comes only through spiritual blessings. Violence reigns supreme here, destroying her sanity with each tormenting incident.
She flies to the Manori Island, to the house at the top of the knoll, enclosed by the sea, a haven of serenity and calmness for Sita. Her father has named it Jivan Ashram, while Basai has incorrectly translated it as the Home of the Soul. It was an old-fashioned bungalow with age-old trees around and the wind whispering mysteriously. It does not have the modern amenities, but it gives back Sita her confidence in herself, her fearlessnes and her freedom of spirit.

Imagination may provoke one to read Fire on the Mountain as a continuation of Sita's life story, if the circumstances are changed a little. It is the story of the maladjusted marriage that belongs to the past, and the widowhood that brings freedom from one problem and involvement with another. It also points out the problem of marital maladjustment as a basic ingredient for disintegrating family life. The offspring of an adulterated marriage, tainted with alienation and frustration can only victimise themselves and others around them. What starts with Nanda Kaul as a hoax, played by fate on her life, ends with the violent longing for the all-destructive fire, in Rekha, her great-granddaughter.

Fire on the Mountain is Cry, the Peacock in reversal, Saya's place having been taken by the coldly-determined Nanda Kaul, who rejoices in her seclusion and loveless, attachmentless life. It is as if Saya's pleadings for warmth, for involvement have turned into a granite rock of hate and rejection in Nanda. But here, if
course, the maladjustment is not entirely psychological as in *Cry, the Peacock*. There is a strong reason, earthy and clear enough, and that is, the life-long faithlessness of Mr. Kaul to his wife, Nanda.

While Mr. Kaul keeps his beloved, Miss. Davidson, on the teaching staff, invites her for badminton parties, goes to drop her back at night and comes back stealthily to his separate bedroom, Nanda Kaul keeps the frozen smile on her face, looks after the family, his children, his house, shutting the doors, whistling away flies and mosquitoes, supervising cooks and servants. She is waiting, always waiting with a singular, burning, soul-destroying hatred for her husband to cease living, for the blessed widowhood, the exquisite solitude without man and children around.

Her granddaughter Tara suffers from chronic nervous-breakdown as a result of a maladjusted marriage. Naka, the great-granddaughter, the volatile little girl with the appearance of a cricket, quietly wishes everyone of her relatives to drop dead, with a violence that belies her appearance. Even the two married couples, who reside at Carignano earlier, present pictures of totally confused and maladjusted married life: Colonel MacCaugall, a companion and nurse-maid to his sickly wife and waiting resignedly for her death, and the terrified Pastor and his mad, killer of a wife, whose entire married life is a race between the hunter and the hunted. It was another legacy of a maladjusted marriage, whose
Life is a bitter irony of her fate.

*Fire on the Mountain* is a novel that spans four generations of a family. Nanda Kaul passes through a fiery life and escapes to Carignano in search of solitude. Naka, her great-grand daughter, escapes from a scarred childhood and seeks to lose herself in the solitude of the mountains. Both are afraid of the mountain fire that destroys the calm valley, both wait tensely for the nemesis, that would destroy their hard-earned solitude and feelings of freedom, the nemesis that is the outside world, that destroys Ila Las in blind vengeance.

*Fire on the Mountain* is divided into three parts with suggestive sub titles; part one has ten small chapters with the title *Nanda Kaul at Carignano*, part two has twenty one chapters with the heading, 'Naka comes to Carignano' and the last part, entitled 'Ila Las Leaves Carignano', has thirteen chapters. An author-narrated story, this novel presents the usual lesai technique of reality and fantasy in the episodes. Dramatic monologues, interior monologues and flash-backs are used to unfold the narrative. The ending is a violent one, characteristically lesai-like, imparting the gloomy, brooding tragic strain to the novel.

The locale is an entirely new one, the hill station of Kasauli. Like Sita in her island house, Nanda Kaul also feels safe and secluded in Carignano, the house in the hills. Carignano
stands for the refuge, the dream world, the life that all the three central characters, Nanda, Raka and Ila long for. Carignano stands bare and barren, similar to Nanda's own life, that also holds no pretension to love or attachment.

Mrs. Desai paints a contrasting locale for each character in this novel. For Nanda, it is the Vice-Chancellor's house that stands as the epitome of hypocrisy in her life. It is too crowded with people, trees, furniture and signify spiritual loneliness. For Raka, it is the wrecked home inhabited by a drunken father and a terrified mother. For Ila Das, whenever she spends her days at school, at home and at work, she suffers punishment for being an oddity and thus leaves the plain to hide herself away in the hills.

Each of them has a relief locale in the fantasy world that is as bright and colourful as they long for. For Nanda, it is the journey to Tibet and her father's house. For Raka it is the vast mountain-scape with a hidden history behind each stone, each tree, each little path. For Ila Das it is the outward appearance of the house of the Vice-Chancellor, where her friend and mentor reigns as the queen. The culmination of all their hopes, desires and dreams, comes with the forest fire that destroys with one savage, swift stroke all the greenery of the mountain-valley.

Raka is an unusual protagonist, a thin, nervous, emaciated, solitude-loving child, she possesses the century-old wisdom of an
unhappy soul. Her innocence has been snatched away and this has made her cautious, disbelieving all. A child, who has never experienced the warmth of loving arms around her and is therefore, incapable of either giving or receiving love. She is not calm like Naka, the moon, Nanda thought. But like her namesake, Naka hides the deep crater of mistrust and antipathy in her bosom.

Naka loves her freedom as much as Nanda does, perhaps more. Her childhood is haunted by terrible memories that leave a permanent scar on her soul: "... her father, home from a party, stumbling and crashing through the curtains of night, his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse, harsh filthy abuse that made Naka cower under her bed-clothes and wet the mattress in fright, feeling that stream of urine warm and weakening between her legs like a stream of blood and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes and wept."  

Her physical appearance with the paper-thin body, small, shorn head on a thin and delicate neck, a pair of extravagantly large and some what bulging eyes, unfortunately large and protruding ears, brown legs scratched and knees bruised, fingers stung by nettle, her hair brown under a layer of dust, dirty nails with scratched brown fingers, her total lack of interest in beautiful dresses or dolls to play with, present her as a pathetic figure of
a neglected and unwanted child.

Ila was is the fool if Nanaa is the tragic heroine of this play. Born with a voice, bordering on deformity, an appearance and mannerisms that always were embarrassing to speak the least, a credulous nature that earned her the derisive laughter, awarded to a simpleton, by the society in general, Ila was faces life with characteristic stoicly.

For all her apparent stupidity, Ila was comes out as wise as a Shakespearean fool in some of her statements: "How helpless our upbringing made us Nanaa. We thought we were being equipped with the very best-French lessons, piano lessons, English governesses—my, all that only to find it left us helpless, positively handicapped" (P.127). She understands the futility of her career of a well-fare officer and describes the rural people with a rare mixture of shrewdness and humour.

A pattern of Tara's neurosis comes out clearly through Asha's letter. Like Monisha, she must have been an incurably romantic girl, forced into a marriage with a diplomat a practical, worldly-wise, rich man, who having pushed himself up on the ladder of success, has the vices that are accepted as virtues in a polished society.

Unable to adjust herself to this glittering world of tinfoil and a victim to her husband's brutality and drinking, Tara is
reduced to a helpless jelly having nervous breakdowns and being shut off as an embarrassment. Even to her daughter, her memories are only of a shattered, martyr-like woman, who read to her in a tired voice and nothing more. Her rejection of the child, who is just recuperating from an attack of typhoid, by sending her to her great-grandmother, while she goes to join her husband in Geneva (however forced it was), created bitter feelings in Raka’s mind.

Anita Desai follows the stream of consciousness technique in presentation of the imagery and symbolism. Nanda Kaul does not like the noisy birds: the hoopoes with their shrill cries and incessant nest-making, the crows that disturb her at noon by fighting, the bony hens with their raucous tone. Three distinct images describe Nanda’s nature; the contradictory roles of the eagle and the cuckoo, the grey cat and the lapwing, and the hen and the worm, signifying in each case an intense longing for freedom and a great frustration, when thwarted in her bid to gain it. Her life’s changing pattern, from the Vice Chancellor’s house to that in Carignano, is like the rejuvenation of a charred tree trunk to the shining, ramrod stiff trunk of a pine, full of silvery needles, reaching high in search of air and light.

Raka enters Carignano as a Griket, silent and unobtrusive. The mountains provide her the much needed shelter and self-confidence and later on at Monkey Point, she exults in thought of being an eagle, soaring up with freedom and joy.
The rude rough and the dull characters have corresponding imagery in nature. The postman's ideal is the donkey, Ila's steps jumps up and down on her two feet with excitement like a puppy, the school boys' meaningless malice is like that of the langurs, long armed, careless, insulting, Breet Singh - a black shape, detaching itself like the vicious black panther, the telephone voice striking like a cobra with its announcement of the violent death of Ila was.

_Fire on the Mountain_ presents the time scheme peculiar to the 'stream of Consciousness' technique. It has the universal time contrasted with the mechanical time. Nanda Kaul, begins her morning, that can be any morning, anywhere at any hill house. Like Mrs. Lalloway, she prepares for her great grand daughter's coming and goes on thinking about her past. The mechanical time steps in and Raka and reality arrive together. In living with Raka, Nanda is limited by the real time, the clock time, but time and again the interior time takes over in her fantasies. As with Mrs. Lalloway, Nanda also comes back to the vivid reality of mechanismed time with a violently tragic shock, the rape and murder of Ila.

_Clear Light of Day_ presents the theme of maladjustment in marriage and other relationships on a more realistic and broad scale with sub-themes on social aspects.
The marriage maladjustment takes its cue from the chronic physical ailment of a diabetic wife that suffocates the whole family atmosphere. The heavy cloud of unrelieved gloom that accompanies the hopeless efforts of Bimal's mother to lead a normal life, alienates her from husband and children. Her whole marriage is a card house, an anaemic reproduction in faded water colour, of a flesh and blood marriage. She is a memory that nobody remembers after her death, least of all her husband. Maya and Tara escape from the gloomy house through marriage. Bimal stays on more because of necessity than by choice to look after her retarded brother, Baba, the mentally undeveloped child is the most pathetic victim of the apathetic parents who cannot bother about such minor problems and pursue their card games and club goings.

Tara and Bakul's conjugal life is a replica of that of Maya and Gautam, but with a lesser degree of frenzy and disturbance. Tara is less neurotic than Maya and Bakul is not as dehydrated in emotion as Gautam is.

It is a marriage of convenience for both. Bakul, a junior diplomat wants a young bride to be moulded according to his needs and Tara intensely longs to escape from the dark, forbidding, disease-rienced house into the glittering world of youth, laughter and comfort. Love is not the main point of consideration and both accept it as a form of biological need, no more, no less. It is wonderfully practical and peaceful for both no doubt. Ultimately,
emptiness haunts Tara, but being the wife of a diplomat, she deals with it with diplomacy and practical sense.

Aunt Mira's married life is more a portrait of a sinister social taboo than maladjustment in the real sense. Nevertheless the experience creates havoc in her personality development and is the root cause of insecurity and alienation from life in later stages. Her transformation into a paranoid alcoholic is an indirect result of this feeling of rootlessness.

The Mishra's daughters, Sarla and Jaya belong to the "once married" category, used and thrown away like old pieces of comfortless furniture. Jaya marries Benazir more for her property and Bimla clearly indicates that theirs is not an ideally happy union.

The rock of misunderstanding between Maja and Bimla, between Bimla and Tara and in a pathetic way, between Baba and his brother and sisters is to be removed if they are to get back to normalised relationships. As Bimla goes through a self-analysis after an emotional upheaval, she realizes that the darkness of misunderstanding and misrepresentation of facts and factors is slowly dissolving and the clear light of reason is bringing in, a warm, pulsating love, unchained by the memories of the dark, troubled past, that haunted the house. Thus the title is a symbolic one, derived from Nande Kaul's thoughts in Fire on the Mountain, when
she thinks about the "clear, unobstructed mass of light and air" (p.4) that lights up and cleans Carignano.

**Clear Light of Day** not only possesses a clear and directly interpreted title, it also presents mastery over characterization and plot-structure, the latter generally holding a secondary place with Desai. It presents three families with individual characters standing in their own rights. barring **Voices in the City**, the other novels of Desai do not present such a cross-section of humanity with social and political problems as the background. Nature and the supernatural also cooperate to bring in a new theme, hitherto unfound in the previous Desai novels.

The themes are distributed according to the structure of the novel. It is a composition of cinematic technique, interchanging and inter-mixing past and present. The 'Stream of consciousness' technique in flash back, interior monologues and psychological time is used with subtle effect. The novel is divided into four untitled chapters of uneven length, the first and the fourth signifying the present period and the second and the third presenting the past. It adopts the omniscient-narrator style by the novelist, with lars and simla reliving their memories and thinking about the present.

Desai has divided the social and political backgrounds according to the periods - past and present. The past presents
the anglicized Indians still following the British customs, refusing to pay attention to the writing on the wall. Simla’s parents, the Hyder Ali family, and the Mishra family, all show this anglicized trend in club-going, bridge-parties, dancing, sending their children to public schools and colleges to learn English language and literature. Bajra, Simla and Tara do not read Tagore even though Tagore is an integral part of every educated Bengali family. Gandhiji is mentioned in a fleeting reference because Bajra is concerned about the welfare of his Muslim friends. Even Mira Masi, who is a traditional Hindu widow, shows some surprisingly English trends: making scrap books out of birthday cards, which were rarely, if at all, found in the ordinary, Hindu joint family homes in the forties. Theosophical society meetings were a feature in the emancipated Bengali homes, that followed western traditions. It is unusual, to say the least, that Mira Masi should participate in such meetings, coming from a conservative home as of her in-laws. Most surprising is the description of an alcoholic Meera, singing English songs, taught by English nursery governesses to the children of the affluent class in the pre-independence days.

It is in characterization that the novelist has put her utmost concentration. Simla is a woman, leaning towards middle age with a tall, powerful figure and untimely grey hair. She is unmarried, a lecturer in history, is completely independence-loving, a blunt and sometimes down-right rude personality having a
no-nonsense attitude towards life. Careless in appearance and
casemor, she is ready to discuss any topic on earth without
inhibition, laughs loudly, smokes heavily and speaks out in
sarcastic criticism even against her brother and sister.

Always successful in school and social life, Sima is confi­
dent enough to handle people and situations expertly. Her affinity
is more with Raja and she competes with him in every sphere. It
is a kinship of blood and spirit, of hope and promise that goes
deeper than any other. And then comes the withdrawal, the refusal
to honour the promises on Raja's part, and Sima grows resentful
towards the circumstances that sever the bonds between her and
Raja. Raja's going away to start a new life, leaves her bitter
and cold towards her family.

Slowly she changes into a mean, miserly, critical spinster
from a responsible, competent, daredevil, vivacious young woman.
She talks to herself, gesturing with her hands, without realizing
it. She relieves her bitter experience of separation from Raja
again and again like an wounded animal, turns to attack the
meekest in her world, Baba - the retarded child.

The metamorphosis in Sim is too sudden to be realistic.
One day she is bitter and enraged at the whole shabby and decei­
ving world around her, the next day and night give her the required
coolness for self analysis, and self realization.
Lara is the foil to Simla. Tara is different from Simla in every respect: in appearance, in status, and in family relationships. A beautiful and charming figure, carefully moulded and dressed, Lara is the wife of a successful diplomat and mother of two beautiful girls, having money, position and family happiness. She lives an orderly life, in a beautifully maintained house and moves in the affluent circle, a far cry from Simla. And yet Tara comes back again and again to the old house, to Baba and Simla because she suffers from a guilt complex derived from the fact that she escapes from her responsibilities using Baku as the instrument and marriage as the channel.

Tara wanted to be a mother while Sim wanted to be a heroine when they grew up. Basically Tara is love-hungry, while Sim cannot bear any kind of sentimental demonstration or expression of love. Tara is attached to her mother and Mira Masi, feels for the Mishra sisters, and at school wants to help Miss Singh in her love affair. But paradoxically, she fears diseases and abnormality of any kind and thus avoids the diabetic mother, the alcoholic Mira Masi and under-developed Baba. She was notoriously unsuccessful in school and hated school as much as Simla loved it. She had a certain physical deformity while Simla was vigorous in body and mind. This inferiority complex has always made her a puppet in Sim's hands, even though sometimes Sim treats her with harshness.
Tara also suffers from a kind of neurotic fear that her father has slowly killed her mother by giving injections. It is these factors that lead her to hold on to Bakul as a means to escape from that atmosphere of death, melancholy and rejection, that envelops the house.

Raja, the elder brother, is a combination of Arjun, Nirode and Dev. In fact the characteristics of all these are repeated so often and so clearly that they hold a typical frame. Like Arjun, Raja is a born rebel and leaves home in revolt. Like Arjun and Nirode, Raja is democratic, has friends not in his social bracket, and intensely hates hypocrisy in any form. He has a deep, peculiarly painful involvement with Simla as Arjun has with Maya and Nirode with Manisha and Amla.

Raja is a romantic at heart and he wants to be a hero when he grows up. It is this romanticism that drives him to the poetry-sessions at Hyder Ali's house, and finally alienates him from his fellow-students at college. It is not the Muslim cause in general, that he advocates but it is his personal attachment and hero-worship for Hyder Ali, when he overrides the Hindu fanaticism and seeks support for the Muslims. Even Gandhiji's death to him is related to only a narrow political consciousness of the adverse effect on the Muslims in India. Thus, Raja's political consciousness is neither deep, nor wide like Nirode's.
A super selfish character, he considers the family with its disease, gloom and liabilities, a stone around his neck and cannot be bothered to look after his unmarried sister and mentally retarded brother, after his father's death. Inheriting his father-in-law's property, he even assures Bimala that he will not raise the rent on the house because Hyder Ali has been benevolent on his death bed.

Anita Desai's triumph card in the game of characterization is her depiction of the abnormal and the neurotic. It is here, that she has to set reality on a test and it is here again, that she comes out with flying colours.

Baba's is the most pathetic portrait in the gallery of the neurosis-ridden faces. A retarded child, unwanted and unloved by his aged, sick mother and neglected by his careless father, he gets temporary mother-love from Mira masi and tastes happiness for a while. Unconsciously therefore, he tries to stop time, to confine himself to that happy period of childhood, listening to old records, drinking milk instead of tea, and living in the half darkened room, where even the few pieces of furniture are old and unpolished.

Undernourished in body and mind, Baba, nevertheless, has deep, constant feelings of despair and depression at the interference of the outside world in his private one. He is afraid of this
unknown, dreadful, demon that has once punished him in his childhood. But the demon has stepped inside, in the person of his sisters who want him to be practical, to go out, to attend office, to tear whatever sanity he has into pieces, with their impatient commands.

Baba's world is concentrated in his hand, in the shape of the pebbles that Mira Masi has given him. They give him a reassurance that human company cannot, in the movement of scattering and collecting them back in his hand, Baba draws a source of mental strength.

Mira is a resurrection of Ila Das, one, a widow at fifteen, another, a spinster by compulsion. Ill use, chronic neglect and brutal lashes by society have turned both into ugly, aged, weary them.

Mira has a heart of gold. She is to the house, what it long needed, the affection, the care, the attachment that turns a house into a home. She plays with, and teaches him how to be self sufficient, she makes eatables Baba and knits and sews for them, she nurses Sim and Raja single handed when they have typhoid and minded Tara as well.

And thus, "the cracked pot, torn rag, picked bone" (Price) is changed into a life giving tree: "she fed them with her
nutrients, she sheared them in her own shade, she was the support on which they leaned as they grew" (P.111). Mira begins to forget the insecurity, the anxiety, the rootlessness that have dogged her steps. But her security is relative. As soon as the children begin to grow up, they have less need of her, she can not provide the answers to their queries and the withdrawal starts, surreptitiously at first, deliberate later. Mira, to drown this feeling of rejection, of insecurity, seeks wildly for an outlet and finds it in the bottles of alcohol, kept in the cupboard of Simala's father. Gradually she becomes a confirmed alcoholic, wrapped into the dizzy, unreal world of the drunkard. It is during one such moment, when Mira first loses all her sense and goes out naked to the horrified surprise of Simala and others. She dies a violent death as she wanders about in an alcoholic haze by jumping into a well.

Anita Desai has some singular and individual traits. Her style can be marked immediately out of a number of others for some remarkable devices used in her technique. The most important of these is to mould her sentences according to the high emotion expressed by the characters. Maya speaks in short jerky sentences, when brimming with emotion : "Only May" (C + P, P.172) or "Will it be fire? Will it be flood" (P.179). Some times she repeats the same word or sentence twice : "No one, no one else" (P.46) or "No time left, no time left at all" (P.57).
Anita Desai ends and begins the consecutive paragraphs with the same sentence to create a poetical effect. Generally it is used for the serious and emotional passages: Maya ends one monologue with the sentence "I sat as in a tomb" and begins the next one with the same sentence (p. 129). Sita ends dialogue with "you frighten me" and begins the next one with Raman with the same sentence (p. 47).

Another distinctive style is to use one or two sentences with the effect of a chorus in a drama or preface to a book. Lev begins his love-hate relationship with England by hunting for jobs. Each such adventure is prefaced with an italicised sentence "Happiness is egg shaped" in Bye Bye Blackbird.

Humouristic rhyming of sentences to highlight the emotion is another feature of her style: "Sita shouted for her sons. Then she shouted for stones" (p. 39), or "sahib going to a party, Lacy and tarty" howled the boys in Fire on the mountain. Sometimes long and short sentences are used for special pictorial effects.

In Voices in the City, Manisha writes:

"Miracle's play. Carelessly
I forget it on the bed and
Jiban seizes it"

These sentences create an effect of light and shade and pack a
wealth of meaning in their juxtapositional use.

What can be considered as a defect of Anita Desai is her tendency to repeat. She not only repeats themes, characters, situations and conversation, but in novel after novel she uses the same sentences, words, actions, colour, appearances, dresses, descriptions and even conclusions sometimes. But in spite of this, she definitely marks an original trail both in form and theme and her contribution to the development of Indian English fiction, is, without doubt, considerable in range and vision.
REFERENCES


8. Anita Desai, Where Shall We Go This Summer, (Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, 1982), P.36.


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