CHAPTER FIVE

ART OF FICTION

Anita Desai holds a prominent place among the younger group of Indian-English novelists. In her novels, she achieves that difficult task of moulding the English language and idiom to her purpose without a self-conscious attempt of sounding Indian. Known for her sensitivity in the structuring of the pattern of her novels, integrity of artistic vision, imaginative mind, keen observation, sharp awareness and competent craftmanship, she has become a much sought after writer by publishers and readers alike. (Asnani 15)

The purpose of this chapter is to focus on Desai's techniques she has effectively employed in her novels, to portray her artistic integrity and to point out the limitations of her fiction. Desai who has introduced innovative techniques and suitable novelistic devices occupies a unique position in the world of Indian English fiction. By expertly using new artistic methods she successfully explores inner and outer realities of human existence.
Unlike other Indian-English novelists Desai is not interested in a preconceived plot. For her the plot is the total development of an idea that enters one's consciousness. She rightly prefers the pattern and rhythm to a plot because the former is spontaneous, the latter artificial. Desai explains her mode of writing:

I start writing without having very much of a 'plot' in my mind or on paper -- only a very hazy idea of what the pattern of the book is to be. But it seems to work itself out as I go along, quite naturally and inevitably. I prefer the word "pattern" to "plot" as it sounds more natural -- and even better; if I dare use it it is Hopkins's word "inscape" while "plot" sounds arbitrary, heavy-handed and artificial, all that I wish to avoid. One should have pattern and then fit the characters, the setting and scenes into it -- each piece in keeping with the others and so forming a balanced whole.

(Ram, "Interview with Anita Desai" 30)

Most of her novels are usually divided into three or four unequal parts and they do not have a familiar beginning. One finds a constant intermingling of the past, present and future in her novels. In Cry, the Peacock that has extremely unproportionate three parts, Parts I and III are concisely written in the third person narrative technique. Part II is
presented in the first person narrative and the technique of the stream of consciousness is skilfully employed since the thoughts of Maya constantly flow through her psyche. Commenting on the first section of the novel that impliedly reveals the tension and conflicts between Maya and Gautama, Ramachandra Rao observes:

The brief opening section... succeeds in presenting two characters of opposed attitudes and contrasting temperaments, and suggests the possibility of this opposition leading to the ultimate destruction of the marriage. And this is achieved without the writer obtruding on the scene. The minor crisis foreshadows the more serious conflicts to come. ("Technique in the Novels of Anita Desai" 80)

In Voices in the City that is divided into four parts, Part I "Nirode," Part III "Amla," Part IV "Mother" are presented in the third person narrative. But in Part II "Monisha" Desai makes use of the technique of the diary to graphically portray the shattered married life of Monisha. Since she expresses her secrets which she can not share with others the diary device becomes handy.

Bye-Bye Blackbird is divided into three parts, Viz, "Arrival," "Discovery and Recognition" and "Departure" and it narrates the tale of Dev, Adit Sen and Sarah. Part I describes
the arrival of Dev in England and his painful experiences that intensely increase his Anglophobia. The second section shows an obvious change in the attitude of Dev towards England. The final section depicts a sea-change in the attitude of Adit towards England and portrays his departure to India. Desai has used the epic method of narration in this novel.

Where Shall We Go This Summer?, structurally similar to Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse, is divided into three sections in terms of time. The first part 'Monsoon '67' deals with the present and immediate past of Sita and describes her second visit to Manori and her inability to reconcile herself to the violence and destruction that she witnesses in Bombay. Dealing with Sita's remote past, the second part 'Winter '47' elaborately highlights her loveless childhood experiences in Manori that have caused her abnormal behaviour in later years. Skilfully presenting the present and the future of Sita, the concluding part deals with Sita's confusion about human existence and her return to Bombay. In this novel Desai has aptly used the pattern of monsoon to effectively portray the condition of Sita. As Desai says: "I wanted the book to follow the pattern of the monsoon together darkly and threateningly, to pour down wildly and passionately, then withdraw quietly and calmly" (Ram, "Interview with Anita Desai" 27-28).
Fire on the Mountain has three distinct parts: Part I 'Nanda Kaul at Carignano,' Part II 'Raka comes to Carignano,' Part III 'Ila Das leaves Carignano'. Each part consists of many small chapters with powerful short sentences. Describing the isolated condition of Nanda in Carignano, a small house situated in Kasauli, the first part depicts her fury on the impending arrival of Raka to convalesce at Carignano. While the second part portrays the deliberate efforts of Nanda to establish a rapport with Raka forgetting her self-imposed withdrawal, the third part deals with the tragic ends of Ila Das and Nanda and the setting of the forest on fire by Raka. The greatness of this novel is heightened not only by the moving story but also by the remarkable techniques employed by Desai. Commenting on the technical skill and the artistic construction of this novel, M. Prasad observes:

Technically, this novel is memorably different from all other novels of Desai, although even in this novel she beautifully employs at certain places the stream of consciousness technique which has been a favourite with her all along. This novel has obviously been written on the pattern of a film scenario, as all its chapters are strikingly short, focusing only on particular scenes or episodes with marvellous vividity and verbal economy expected only of a rare genius. Fire on the Mountain, carefully constructed, is a model of structural perfection
that speaks volumes of how skilfully Anita Desai can shape her fluid fictional material into an artistic whole, laying due emphasis on structuralism in the novel as an art form. From its deceptively calm opening, the novel moves slowly towards its violent climactic end. (102-103)

Clear Light of Day comprises four parts: Part I describes the present and the sad memories of the past that keep disturbing Bim; Part II deals with the distant past of Bim, Raja and Tara; Part III highlights the childhood days of Bim, Raja, Tara and Baba; and Part IV treats of the present and this part is a continuation of Part I.

Games at Twilight and Other Stories consisting of eleven short stories of about twelve pages each, marvellously depicts ordinary life situations that have psychological depth. In most of the stories Desai has employed the third person narrative technique. In "The Accompanist" the first person narrative is skilfully used. Commenting on the style of the stories of Desai, Victoria Glendinning says: "She writes an extraordinarily delicate, and lucid English which puts many English writers to shame" (qtd. in Varady 195).

The Village by the Sea which is structurally different from the other novels of Desai has thirteen chapters arranged
in a chronological order. Introducing rural characters and highlighting their socio-economic problems, the novel describes an Indian family story. In *Custody*, that is divided into nineteen chapters, narrates the aspiration of Deven, a college lecturer. The plot and action of the novel are deftly built on the interview Deven has with the poet, Nur. Baumgartner's *Bombay* that comprises seven chapters focuses on the past and present of the two Germans, Hugo Baumgartner and Lotte. The story of the novel is narrated against the backdrop of the Second World War.

Not only in the plot construction but also in the art of characterization Desai is unique among the Indian English novelists. She mostly chooses characters displaying psychological complexes and conflicts. As the majority of Desai's characters are women, there is a wide-spread view that Desai is interested in feminism. But Desai herself has denied this view and she firmly states that she writes only about the human condition. She largely writes about women because she knows them better. Writing about the complex characters of Desai who have psychic problems Srivastava observes:

Some of Desai's characters suffer from various complexes and psychic diseases. There are some traits in their temperaments which, when developed out of proportion with the rest, check the healthy growth of personality. Such characters are in
abundance in Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Anita Desai shows her depth in human nature by depicting the gradual conversion of a trait into a psychic block which assumes the form of a disease, making her characters neurotic.

(Introduction xxxix)

An important aspect of Desai's characterization is that she connects her characters with birds, animals and other external objects to effectively portray the condition and nature of the characters. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* is associated with peacocks, bears and monkeys; Monisha in *Voices in the City* with a bleeding dove; Otima with Kali and the city of Calcutta; Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* with a tender eagle and Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain* with the barrenness of Carignano.

While most of the female characters of Desai are sensitive, almost all the male characters are deplorably insensitive. The male characters are apathetic to the problems of women characters. In *Cry, the Peacock* Gautama is inconsiderate to Maya; in *Voices in the City* Jiban is painfully indifferent to Monisha; in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* Adit fails to understand the sufferings of Sarah; and in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Raman is insensitive to Sita. Mr.Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain* completely neglects Nanda; Raja in *Clear Light of*
Day is provocingly apathetic to the agonies of his sister Bim; and Hari's father in *The Village by the Sea* ignores his wife.

The role of the minor characters of Desai is very important in the sense that they help the evolution of the plot. In *Cry, the Peacock* the behaviour of Leila and Pom and the talk of the prim lady and the Sikh force Maya to believe in fate and to constantly remember the prediction of albino. In *Voices in the City* the apathetic attitude of Jiban and his family members towards Monisha drives her to loneliness and death. The inhuman attitude of Dharma towards his daughter causes Amla to abruptly snap her relationship with him; Otirna's affair with Major Chadha makes Nirode become rootless without any ambition in life; and Sonny, Jit Nair, Dharma and David help Nirode understand the world better.

Emma Moffit in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* tremendously increases Sarah's fascination for India; Christine Langford is responsible for the blossoming out of the friendship between Adit and Sarah; and the insulting action of Mrs. Roscommon-James ultimately causes the disenchantment of Adit with England. This novel has a few flat characters like Samar, Bella, Mala, Jasbir and the members of the Sikh family. Though they are flat they are not unimportant for the progress of the plot. Commenting on the significance of these characters Tripathi observes that they "are important for the plot and for providing the human
background to other important characters" (58).

In Where Shall We Go This Summer? the crucial part played by Moses and Miriam is very essential for the development of the plot and the betrayal of Menaka and Karan increases Sita's disenchantment with life. In Fire on the Mountain Ila Das, whose cruel tragedy is responsible for the shocking demise of Nanda Kaul, plays a very important role to reveal the real life of the latter. Ram Lal, who helps Nanda Kaul provides good company for Raka. In Clear Light of Day the role played by the rich family of Hyder Ali is necessary to expose the true colour of Raja; Aunt Mira is absolutely important to take care of Bim, Raja, Tara and Baba; and Dr. Biswa is essential to bring the selfless quality of Bim to light.

The coconut seller in The Village by the Sea earnestly advises Hari, the hero of the novel, to be independent and Hira Lal and Jagu help Hari to find a place to live in Bombay. While Panwallah instils into Hari a sense of self-confidence, the birdwatcher encourages him to adapt to new situations. The role of these minor characters is important for the positive growth of the character of Hari.

Mrs. Bhalla in In Custody causes a verbal fight between Deven and Sarla and the serious efforts of Siddique and Rai Sahib ultimately pave the way for Deven's interview with Nur.
While the behaviour of Trivedi and the inefficiency of Chiku increase the difficulties of Deven, the treachery of Murad provokes him to take a firm decision to fight in life. The role played by Farrokh, the slum dwellers, Chimanlal's son and Kurt in Baumgartner's Bombay help to reveal the noble personality of Hugo Baumgartner.

Like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, who are pioneers in the use of the technique of stream of consciousness, Desai adroitly uses the same technique in many of her novels: Cry, the Peacock, Voices in the City, Where Shall We Go This Summer?, Fire on the Mountain and Clear Light of Day. But only in Cry, the Peacock and Clear Light of Day has this technique been prominently used. By means of this device, Desai effectively portrays the internal flow of thought in her characters at manifold levels of consciousness.

The novelists, who make use of the technique of stream of consciousness are influenced by the principles of psycho-analysts, believing that some of the important activities of the human mind occur below the level of consciousness. They believe that the traditional mode of narrating a story in chronological order gives a superficial and incomplete picture of life. By employing the stream of consciousness technique they help the readers know and share the stream of thoughts incessantly flowing in the minds of their characters.
Expressing that this technique records the flow of impressions going through the mind of a character Fowler observes that for novelists this technique "was a fresh weapon in the struggle against intrusive narration. By recording the actual flow of thought with its paradoxes and irrelevancies they sought to avoid the over-insistent authorial rhetoric of Edwardian novels" (181).

In Cry, the Peacock which R.S. Sharma considers "the first step in the direction of psychological fiction in Indian writing in English" (24), Desai skilfully employs this method to describe the psychological problems of Maya. When Maya's disturbed feelings are rendered in the stream of consciousness device she is able to live in the present, immediate past, distant past and future. This method helps the readers understand the chaotic flow of Maya's consciousness. Presenting Bim's present, past, remote past and present again in Clear Light of Day, Desai reveals Bim's varied thoughts, memories and reflections. Commenting on the structure of this novel Gulati observes:

The novel is carefully constructed and beautifully written. Shifts from the present to the past tense and back help create an appropriate mood of nostalgia so necessary for the rendering of the principal characters' stream of consciousness as in
Like the novels of D.H.Lawrence and Virginia Woolf, the novels of Desai are immensely rich in symbolism and imagery. She has introduced a lot of symbols and images. The image of dead Toto, Maya's pet dog in *Cry, the Peacock* indicates the death motive in the novel and Maya's fear of death. The image of caged monkeys on the railway platform suggests the loss of freedom of Maya. Desai artistically employs the image of petunias and that of lemon flowers to forcefully bring out the irreconcilably different temperaments of Maya and Gautama. The title of the novel is highly symbolic. The cry of the peacocks symbolises the acute agony of Maya and the fight of peacocks suggests the marital disharmony of Maya. The dust-storm indicates the fierce storm blowing in Maya's subconscious mind.

Desai has dexterously used colour symbolism to "crystallize the various levels of Maya's consciousness. The frequent use of red and white colours indicates Maya's diseased psyche and emphasizes her certain preoccupations" (M. Prasad 14). At Mrs. Lala's party Maya tells Gautama about the orchids kept in a basket on the veranda: "But Mrs. Lal said they never flower. They are hill orchids, you see. They will soon be dead" (*Cry, the Peacock* 73). That the orchids do not flower is
symbolic of the barrenness of Maya and that they will soon die silently signifies her imminent death.

A notable image in Voices in the City is that of darkness for which Nirode longs and it suggestively indicates his desire for failure in life. Another remarkable image that is significantly employed in the novel is that of Kangaroo with its empty pouch which symbolically stands for Monisha's barrenness. The "gigantic black wardrobe" (Voices in the City 109) in Monisha's room is very suggestive and the black colour obliquely denotes Monisha's loneliness and her impending tragic death. The title of the novel is symbolic and it symbolizes the voices of different artists.

Dev in Bye-Bye Blackbird accidentally knocks down "a starving potted plant" (Bye-Bye Blackbird 6) in Adit's home and the image of the potted plant suggests that like this plant, Adit also struggles to live in London and he does not belong to this place. The image of Battersea power station has a deep symbolic significance and the bonfire in this powerstation "consumes Dev's initial Anglophobia out of whose ashes is born in him a strong Anglophilia (M.Prasad, "The Novels of Anita Desai: A Study in Imagery" 64). The inability of Sarah and Bella to participate in the discussion of their husbands and other Indians due to the problem of unfamiliar language is
profoundly symbolic. As Kajali Sharma rightly points out:

This suggests that the gap between the two cultures is so wide that there can only be a superficial adjustment between the two. Even after about three years of her marriage Sarah is not able to speak or understand Hindi, whereas Adit can speak English fluently. It symbolises their attitudes towards each other's country. While she does not bother much about India, he suffers terribly from inferiority complex and considers the English much superior. The situation is symbolic yet in another way. It shows that Adit and Sarah do not have any genuine understanding or relationship. (71)

In Where Shall We Go This Summer? the remarkable prey-and-predator image that symbolises violence and destruction in modern life is depicted with a forceful effect in a scene in which a group of crows mercilessly attacks a tender eagle. Whereas the crows represent ruthless people, the eagle stands for the weak. Sita's admiration for the divine love of the Muslim couple in the Hanging Garden suggestively implies that the deep and real love profusely exhibited by the couple does not exist between Raman and Sita. While Bombay stands for modern civilization and rational life, Manori island represents primitiveness and simplicity. The sea between the city and the island symbolises the mystery of Nature.
One of the important images dexterously employed in Fire on the Mountain is that of pine trees. The intense desire of Nanda Kaul to "merge with the pine trees and be mistaken for one" (Fire on the Mountain 4) symbolises her willingness to live a lonely life without being disturbed by anyone. Another significant image that is powerfully used is the image of Nanda Kaul's house in Kasuali. The tragic history of the house indicates her impending tragic end. That she is happy with Carignano's "barrenness and its emptiness" (Fire on the Mountain 31) symbolises the emotional dryness of her life. Desai employs prey-and-predator image in the inhuman rape of Ila Das by Preet Singh. One of the most significant symbols used in the novel is that of the forest fire. Commenting on the symbolic significance of Raka's setting fire to the forest Kajali Sharma aptly points out:

Raka's act of setting fire to the forest is symbolic of her revolt against the cruelty and violence rampant in our society. Apparently, the title of the novel Fire on the Mountain is suggestive of the revolt of the new generation of women against the harsh, cruel man-dominated world. Raka is the symbol of this new generation. (107)

In Clear Light of Day Bim's clearing away of old papers from her drawer is symbolic of her removing all impediments before her reconciliation. The title of the novel indicates
Bim's clear perception of the significance of existence. While Thul in The Village by the Sea symbolises rural life, Bombay represents urban life. Hari's enthusiastic intention of setting up of a watch mending shop in Thul signifies a consciousness of time.

In In Custody Deven's needless fear to face his students in the classroom suggestively conveys his utter inability to face the challenges of existence. The unpleasant scenes and bitter quarrels he unexpectedly witnesses in the house of Nur stand for the ugly sides of life. His escape from Nur's house pointedly suggests his incapability of accepting the horrible situations of life. His sorrowful recollection that Sarla is not his choice emphatically underlines the deep emotional hiatus between them. On the other hand his running with courage and zeal to meet the day with its calamities symbolically signifies his strong determination to face life.

Hugo's natural love for the two German girls in Baumgartner's Bombay symbolises his deep love for Germany. His ardent desire for the company of cats suggestively indicates that he is not able to get true love from human beings in India. That Hugo is not accepted by Chimanlal's son symbolically conveys that he is summarily rejected by India.
Desai effectively employs in her novels the technique of contrast. The diametrically opposite temperaments of the characters are sharply contrasted: Gautama and Maya in Cry, the Peacock; Jiban and Monisha in Voices in the City; Adit and Sarah and the Indians and Englishmen in Bye-Bye Blackbird; Raman and Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer?; Kaul and Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain; Bim and Raja in Clear Light of Day; and Deven and Sarla in In Custody. But in The Village by the Sea the contrast is abstract -- Thul with Bombay and agriculture with industrialization.

In some of her novels Desai has skilfully used the technique of objective correlative to enrich them with textural density. Desai uses a group of images and situations to portray the emotions of her characters. In Cry, the Peacock Maya considers Gautama's house as a cage where she loses her freedom and leads a lonely life. Becoming desperate she hates to live a tragic life and expresses her fury by complaining against her trapped existence. Maya's emotions of hate and fury are effectively conveyed through the images of cages and monkeys:

I, too went towards them, looked at them through tears, watching them move, feverishly, desperately, in cages too small to contain their upright bodies. Some clung to the rails, staring out with glazed
eyes of tragedy,... some whimpered... A few shrieked, as though they felt long pins boring through their flesh already, and revolted, and some bared their teeth in snarls of hate deeper and fiercer than any man knows. Cage upon cage of them. Long furred bodies swarming upon each other, till limbs and tails were twisted together, the elegant lines of their muscles contorted nightmarishly -- the work of some fiendish maniac. (Cry, the Peacock 154)

In Where Shall We Go This Summer? Desai wants to portray the modern civilization in Bombay that is marked by ugly and cruel activities. In this big city exploitation, murder, rape, arson and loot are common. To expose these inhuman activities Desai employs the practices of crows in the city:

Crows formed the shadow civilization in that city of flats and alleys... They ... sat on the ledges and balcony rails of the flats, waiting for lazy cooks to throw out a bucketful of kitchen garbage into the alley -- scraps were caught by them in mid-air, expert for all their clownishness, tattered wings holding them aloft as they twisted and flapped to get the largest bits. There was always much black drama in this crow theatre -- murder, infanticide, incest, theft, and robbery, all were much practised
by these rough, raucous, rasping tatterdemalions.
(Where Shall We Go This Summer? 38)

In Clear Light of Day Tara, who has come from abroad to attend the marriage of Raja's eldest daughter in Hyderabad, persistently requests Bim that she should come along with Baba for the marriage. Bim, who is indescribably hurt by the letter which Raja has thoughtlessly written to her, becomes furious and gets agitated. Inspite of her uncontrollable rage, Bim stoically keeps silent. Desai demonstrates Bim's agitation and fury through significant objective correlatives that include agitated mynahs and an angry dog:

Bim said nothing. In the small silence a flock of mynahs suddenly burst out of the green domes of the trees and, in a loud commotion of yellow beaks and brown wings, disappeared into the sun. While their shrieks and cackles still rang in the air, they heard another sound, one that made Bim stop and stare and the dog lift his head, prick up his ears and then charge madly across to the eucalyptus trees that grew in a cluster by the wall. Rearing up on his hind legs, he tore long strips of blue and mauve bark off the silken pink tree-trunks and, throwing back his head, bellowed.... (Clear Light of Day 6)
Desai employs a large number of similes in her novels which enrich their texture. The similes employed by Desai in her novels are not great and they are not elaborately worked out. They are very simple and their suggestive power is very limited. Desai is content to suggest in a simile the mere point of comparison. Her similes are useful in illustrating the points in question.

Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* leads a loveless life in Gautama's family and her misery is heightened by her fear of death. As Gautama does not understand Maya's problems she cannot expect any consolation from him. At the height of her agony she recalls those encouraging words used by her father to console her. Her father has advised her to accept the disappointments and difficulties of existence. Accepting them is the wisest course and everything is for the best. Desai brings out the effect of these words of her father on her: "I heard these phrases frequently, and each time I felt them soothe me like a stream of cold water that tumbled through the ferns of Darjeeling. Like the cold, pearl mists that crept over the blue hills and poured into the valley" (53). When Maya expresses her desire to see her father to seek help Gautama becomes furious and in his fury he throws away his "towel to the floor where it made a soft, damp plop like a limp dead bird thrown down" (53). That she cannot get help from her father and
that her death is imminent are implicitly suggested through this simile.

Emerging out of his room after three weeks of stay in it Nirode in *Voices in the City* feels frightened to see the people of Calcutta. Desai portrays Nirode's uncomfortable stay in his room and his dislike of the people: "..... he felt like a man who has spent three years in jail and emerges to find he is afraid of the plangent and populated world" (61). Nirode is greatly upset and unhappy that his mother has an illicit affair with Major Chadha. When he receives a letter from his mother he reads it with a terrible dislike. Desai presents Nirode's dislike and disgust through a simile: "He read the letter, and it was like sinking his teeth through a sweet mulberry to bite into a caterpillar's entrails" (37).

Emma Moffit in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* arranges a meeting in her little India club to promote the Indian culture and she invites Swami Binodanand to be the chief guest. As the Swami fails to reach the club at the appointed time she is very upset. On his arrival she feels immensely happy. Desai beautifully describes the arrival of the Swami: "Like the long awaited monsoon, like the yearned for call of the koel in spring, like the moon rising in the dark, expectant sky, the great Swami of Hampstead arrived" (93). While presenting the charm and beauty of the English countryside that has a long stretch of green and golden
fields that are moving and murmuring in the gentle breeze, Desai focuses on the clean lanes with poppies, foxgloves, roses and honeysuckles, the beautiful streams moving with green water weeds and the villages with the first thatched cottages. Desai compares these cottages, wildflowers and the sun with loaves of bread, butter and honey respectively: "They were... like loaves of lumpy brown bread, standing in fields of yellow-cupped wildflowers that surrounded them like butter, and the summer sun pouring down on them like honey" (126).

In Where Shall We Go This Summer? Sita with her two children is going to Manori by a boat propelled by Moses, and she becomes agitated and shouts at Karan, who suddenly screams mistaking the strands of seaweed for water snakes. Noticing the angry mood of their mother, the children become absolutely silent. Desai stresses the silence of the children using a simple and beautiful simile: "Unlike their mother, who continually broke apart into violent eruptions of emotion, the children seemed rigid, encased in their separate silences like larvae in stiff-spun cocoons" (19). After being alienated from her husband and children Sita is afraid of even small and unimportant incidents. On seeing her sons throwing their bodies at each other very often she becomes panicky and screams in anger. Desai portrays her sons' repeated action through a simile: "Like the waves incessantly, tiresomely crashing into
each other, her sons hurled their bodies at each other as if they were made for attack and combat" (44).

In Fire on the Mountain the letter informing the imminent arrival of Raka disturbs Nanda Kaul, who fears that the presence of Raka will not allow her to have privacy and stillness intact at Carignano. The letter slowly stirs Nanda's past memories of her life with her husband and children that have nothing to make her feel proud and happy. With the purpose of strongly portraying many years of Nanda's unhappy existence marked by uninteresting duties and thankless responsibilities Desai compares them with a stream full of unwanted things that make the water of the stream black:

Looking down, over all those years she had survived and borne, she saw them, not bare and shining as the plains below, but like the gorge, cluttered, choked and blackened with the heads of children and grandchildren, servants and guests, all restlessly surging, clamouring about her. (17)

Having left all those people, who have made her life miserable, Nanda leads a lonely life in Carignano. Feeling happy that her unhappy life is over in the plains she is not prepared to lead such a hard life once again under any circumstances. Introducing a suitable simile at this juncture Desai gives expression to Nanda's difficult life and her
unwillingness to involve herself in it again: "She had been so glad when it was over. She had been glad to leave it all behind, in the plains, like a great, heavy, difficult book that she had read through and was not required to read again" (30).

On one warm and early evening Bim's gardener in Clear Light of Day trains the garden hose on jasmines, palms and other plants. After having watered them he drenches the spider lilies on the steps of the veranda with water and at once a pleasant odour emanates from the fresh lilies. To picture the freshness and sweet smell of the lilies Desai likens them to ladies, who are freshly bathed, powdered and perfumed: "A scent of spider lilies rose from the flowerpots massed on the veranda steps as soon as they were watered, like ladies newly bathed, powdered and scented for the evening" (23).

As the insurance business has been giving a lot of troubles to Bim, she feels disgusted and wants to sell out the shares. At the instance of Tara, Bakul tells Bim to have a discussion on the business before taking a final decision. Disliking the idea of discussion and getting agitated Bim rejects Bakul's suggestion. To add insult to injury Bakul again tells Bim to consult and get the advice of Raja. On hearing the name Raja her fury keeps increasing by leaps and bounds and she is angry throughout the afternoon. Desai illustrates Bim's anger by likening it to the hot summer and the mercury in the
barometer: "All afternoon her anger swelled and spread, acquiring demonic proportions. It was like the summer itself, rising to its peak, or like the mercury in the barometer that hung on the veranda wall, swelling and bulging and glinting" (163).

Hari in The Village by the Sea reaches Rewas on his way to Bombay. By the time he gets into a boat bound for Bombay the sun is up in the sky brightening up the city of Bombay and a large number of boats on the sea. Desai presents this beautiful scene comparing Bombay with a white castle and the boats with dolphins:

By the time the sun was up, turning the dull sea into peacock blue and emerald green and lighting up the city of Bombay on the far shore like a white castle made of sand, or salt, blinding against the hot blue sky, all the boats had been loaded and were setting out like a shoal of dolphins over the waves. (72)

When Hari, who is abandoned by the members with whom he reaches Bombay, feels insecure and frightened he suddenly remembers that he has the Bombay address of the de Silvas. Feeling encouraged he becomes happy and optimistic and feels relieved. Desai describes the sense of relief felt by Hari by comparing it with a wave from the sea: "The relief of
remembering that he had an address in Bombay and knew people who might help him flooded him like a wave from the sea, cool and friendly and refreshing" (87).

When Deven in In Custody meets Nur for the first time in the house of the latter he is greatly disappointed to see the people of Nur scattering rice, gravy and spoons and smashing glasses in the presence of Nur. His disappointment is heightened when Nur suddenly gets up and goes away. Becoming desperate Deven runs to search for Nur. When he sees many dark rooms with furtive life he begins to walk on tiptoe with terrible fear and his heart starts beating very fast. Here Desai likens Deven's heart to a trapped fish: "Deven tiptoed past them, peering in through his spectacles, his heart thumping against his ribs like a fish in a trap" (58). In Deven's fourth meeting with Nur the recording of the interview is done. During the recording Nur persistently asks for biryani and he describes to Deven how in the past he used to get biryani every morning. Feeling exhilarated over the prospect of eating his favourite food Nur moves his bloodless toes. To bring out effectively the paleness of the toes of Nur, Desai compares them with worms: "... he waggled his toes with delight, like pale worms weaving out of the grave" (151).

Hugo Baumgartner in Baumgartner's Bombay leads a withdrawn and isolated existence in the internment camp where the Jews
are separated from the Nazis. Rejecting the menial work given to them the Jews are idle and lie on their bunks. Hugo who is without any work and without any friends in the camp thinks about his mother in Germany. As he has not received any letters for a long time from her he is worried about her safety. Desai presents Hugo's thoughts likening them to an uncontrollable nightmare: "Had she been swept up into the horrors of which the others in the barracks whispered and muttered in the dark? The terrible thoughts flooded, an invading army that his closed eyes would not keep out, could not stop; they advanced like a nightmare to the inevitable" (118).

Kurt heartlessly stabs Hugo for monetary gain disregarding the magnanimity of the latter. Having stolen the silver trophies of Hugo, Kurt is ready to flee. Noticing a black fluid running down his knees, he tries to clean it and stares at the body of Hugo helplessly lying in a pool of black and watery blood. Desai employs a comparison to focus on the colour of the blood: "... that pale mound of yellow tallow was oozing with something dark, liquid. It was not like blood, it was like a diarrhoea of blood" (220). After murdering Hugo, Kurt frantically runs away producing a deafening noise. To illustrate the noise Desai compares the feet of Kurt with stones and the noise with a great mass of snow and ice crashing down: "His feet no longer floated; now they were like stones
and fell from one stair to another, thundering on them like an avalanche descending" (220).

Another notable technique that Desai has deftly introduced in her novels is that of flashback -- characters remembering the past days of their lives for different purposes. Commenting on this technique used by Desai, Tripathi points out: "Anita Desai, like some great masters of fiction, manages to raise the action and the plot above timeliness... She achieves this by memory flashbacks... " (20). When Maya in Cry, the Peacock eagerly expresses her desire for going south to see the Kathakali dances, Gautama sharply tells her that it will be expensive and asks her to wait till a Kathakali troupe comes to Delhi. Their conversation suddenly stops and Gautama's apathetic attitude makes Maya recall her past:

When with my father, even breakfast in the garden -- for, on bright winter mornings, we have the servants bring it out into the flower-beds -- becomes a party, as good as a revel of elves and fairies who feast on melons and syrups by moonlight. As a child I enjoyed, princess-like, a sumptuous fare of the fantasies of the Arabian Nights, the glories and bravado of Indian mythology, long and astounding tales of princes and regal queens... that were read out to me by him... My father peels a loquat for me, with a fastidiousness that is a pleasure to watch...
the finely groomed hand that places slivers of fruit upon my plate seems made of alabaster and ivory, fashioned by those magic carvers of ivory that sit beside the Taj Mahal.... (Cry, the Peacock 43-44)

Maya's recalling of her past happy life with her father is a strategy to escape from her tragic life with Gautama and his family members. Unlike Maya's father, Gautama does not care for those things that are interesting to Maya and he does not make efforts to fulfil her needs and desires. In her father's house she was like a princess, had many servants to serve her and enjoyed umpteen beautiful things. But in Gautama's house she is lonely and neglected by Gautama and his family members and nobody is interested to talk to her and help her.

When Nirode in Voices in the City returns after having seen Arun off to London, he becomes unhappy because of the better fortune of his brother, Arun. Overwhelmed with jealousy he recollects his school days marked by many failures and regrets for his recalcitrancy:

It might have been he, he knew that, had he not, as a child, an emotional and disorderly schoolboy, fallen from his horse and declared to his father, through tears, that he hated horses, sports, and would never ride again. If he had not written odd, twisted scraps of verse in exercise books that were confiscated and scrawled over with the obscenities
of his happier colleagues in school. If Arun had not ridden like a prince, captained the cricket team and won top honours in all examinations. If his father, while dictating his will to an obese solicitor, had not weighted these distinctions before laying aside a sum of money for the education abroad of one of his two sons. If Arun had not been the favourite and Nirode a congenital failure... Nirode cried: Unfair, life is unfair... (Voices in the City 7-8)

Nirode's distressing statement that life is partial to him does not hold water. He does not realize that he himself is responsible for having been recalcitrant and emotional in his school days. Having been irresponsible in the past Nirode unjustly expects good fortune now and therefore his expectation is unfair. Life is not unfair to him, though he believes so. The contrast between reality and the illusion of Nirode is effectively brought out by the flash back technique.

In Bye-Bye Blackbird Adit feels disenchanted with England. Growing nostalgic for the Indian scenes and sights he remembers the terrible noise of an Indian railway station, its coolies, the happiness of a school boy going to summer resorts, and their landscapes:

... he was led to recall the thunder of an Indian railway station, the red-shirted coolies hobbling under monstrous bedding... the unbearable excitement
of a small boy, released from school, going to Puri or to Darjeeling for a summer. Puri, where the ocean and the sky met in a landscape so elemental and primitive, unpeopled except for fishermen plunging into the waves in nut-shell-frail boats that Brighton and Blackpool seemed a mockery to Adit who had stood in the surf of Puri, listening to the wild roar of silence. (Bye-Bye Blackbird 183)

If one considers the reason that makes Adit recall the Indian scenes he has witnessed in the past, one can come to the conclusion that his recollection of these scenes is not spontaneous. That he is insulted by his mother-in-law forces him to find solace in his remembrance of the past. Adit's dislike of England is so great that the beauty of Brighton and Blackpool appears to him ridiculous when compared with that of Puri and Darjeeling. Adit's sudden resort to Indian scenes is a strategy to escape from his acute feeling of alienation caused by the mother of Sarah.

Unable to adapt herself to her family and society, disgusted with her boring existence and unwilling to give birth to her fifth child Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? escapes to Manori where she recollects a violent past incident in Bombay:

There was a sudden sound like the screeching of brakes, a commotion -- only it was not a common road
accident but a clash and clamour of aroused women. The ayahs, the ayahs were in arms. Hearing the screams, Sita leapt up to lean over the rails and peer down the street, and although she could not see the women fighting in the cul-de-sac, she could see the passers-by who had stopped to stare, and the whole street seemed to quiver and whip with their passion and rage. There was a clamour of shouts and accusations, screams and shrill, tooting sounds as the argument gave way to action. She thought she saw the madly flapping edge of the battle-scene -- arms flailing, saris ripping. (Where Shall We Go This Summer? 42)

Though women's fight in the streets is not uncommon Sita is terribly frightened of it. If one understands the mental state of Sita one will not be surprised over her unreasonable behaviour. Leading a loveless life Sita feels alienated from her husband and children and her alienation has sown the seed of insecurity in her mind. Her feeling of insecurity does not allow her to consider an ordinary street fight as common because it greatly intensifies her sense of insecurity further leading her to feel alienated from society also.

Deeply disturbed by the fact that her great-granddaughter, Raka is going to stay with her at Carignano,
Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain* becomes angry. She fears that Raka's stay will cause new responsibilities and duties. Her fear on this count brings to her mind the thoughts of her children when they were small:

... she thought of her sons and daughters, ... she seemed to hear poignant shrieks from the canna beds in the garden - a child had tumbled off the swing, another had been stung by a wasp, a third slapped by the fourth and gone out on the veranda to see them come wailing up the steps with cut lips, bruised knees, broken teeth and tears, and bent over them with that still, ironic bow to duty... Now, to bow again, to let that noose slip once more round her neck that she had thought was freed fully, finally. (Fire on the Mountain 18-19)

As a mother, Nanda Kaul has fulfilled her duties and responsibilities. But her children have betrayed and neglected her. Since she feels hurt and disappointed, she dislikes new responsibilities which Raka's stay will surely impose on her.

Another notable technique that Desai has employed in some of her novels is that of irony. It "provides a means for unifying the apparent contradictions of experience" (Fowler 102). Though there are several kinds of irony "at the root of all irony is a contrast between what is being said, implied or
suggested and what is actually the case" (Murray 69). Gautama's mother in Cry, the Peacock tells Maya: "It was wise of Gautama to have married you..." (Cry, the Peacock 47). But the reality is totally different. Maya's life with Gautama is fully marked by lovelessness, unhappiness, alienation, agony and anguish. Immersed in his own work, Gautama is not interested to make Maya happy. Being a victim of adverse circumstances, Maya acutely suffers a lot without the pleasures of married life.

A similar situation is witnessed in Fire on the Mountain when the people who have come to Nanda Kaul's house say that Nanda is magnificent, that she is like a queen and that her Vice-chancellor husband "is lucky to have a wife who can run every thing as she does" (Fire on the Mountain 18). But the real condition of Nanda at her house is pathetic. She is neither like a queen nor is she treated like one. Neglected by her husband and her children she is leading a miserable life. With noble intentions Ila Das in the same novel dissuades Preet Singh from marrying off his seven year old daughter to a widower having six children. But it is ironical that Preet Singh heartlessly assaults her and ultimately rapes and murders her. As B.Gupta says: "It is ironical that Preet Singh, whose daughter's disastrous marriage Ila Das has just tried to stop from taking place, should assault and rape her under cover of darkness" (187). The title of the novel Fire on the Mountain has ironical overtones. Mountain normally brings to mind
beautiful natural scenery, tranquillity and happiness. But in this novel mountain is connected with human sorrows, fire and destruction. As Tripathi aptly points out:

The title ... implies deep-set sense of irony. Mountains were usually havens, calm places, associated with holiness and divinity -- particularly the Himalayan mountain ranges of Kasauli. There should have been an atmosphere of stillness, contentment and detachment in these areas -- areas covered with snow. Rains should be frequent here. But the infection of human sorrow -- burning of hearts -- has come to these regions also from the plains; fires burn even on the mountain.

Nirode in *Voices in the City* is terribly angry with his mother for her infidelity to his father. His mother's disloyalty makes him lose interest in life and he leads a life of negation. But the tragic death of Monisha dramatically changes his negative attitude towards life. Unaware of the fact that the suicide of Monisha has greatly changed his mother's attitude towards him, he eagerly goes to the airport to meet his mother, who is coming to attend her daughter's funeral. Since he has not seen his mother for a long period of time he longingly embraces his mother on her arrival. While embracing he feels "her draw away, push him away with a cool,
dispassionate movement so that she might stand alone and free. He fell away and felt himself drained of blood and passion: he realised she did not want him any more" (Voices in the City 251). It is an irony that Nirode is rejected by his mother when he wants to involve himself in life.

Dev in Bye-Bye Blackbird becomes understandably furious when he witnesses Indian immigrants being openly insulted in England by the English. He shouts that he will not live in a country where he is insulted and unwanted. But Adit considers England as a land of innumerable opportunities and he loves to live there. It is really an irony of circumstances that Dev decides to stay in England and Adit decides to leave it.

In In Custody Deven, who undergoes nightmarish experiences at Nur's house, takes a decision not to visit Nur anymore. But a postcard purportedly written by Nur changes his mind and causes him many difficult problems. As Bande avers: "It is an irony that as soon as Deven decides to free himself from Nur and Murad, he is much dragged in. Either Murad's contrived letters sent through Nur, or his coaxing works on Deven's mind" (160). Like Ila Das in Fire on the Mountain Hugo in Baumgartner's Bombay is inhumanly murdered. It is ironical that he is stabbed by Kurt whom Hugo sympathetically takes home to
help. The merciless murder of Hugo grimly portrays the irony of fate.

An important aspect of Desai's fiction is a strong presence of Nature that gives "an exotic touch and colourful texture" (Saxena, "View of Nature in Anita Desai's Novels" 192). Desai employs Nature for different purposes. Maya in Cry, the Peacock remembers her father's garden in Lucknow and it soothes very much her anguished soul:

I have been strolling amidst the vegetables with father -- he takes an interest in tomatoes of a foreign variety, and I nibble at a radish, then a sprig of dill -- but he has been called in by a visitor, and now I am waiting for him, in the shade of the bougainvilaea arbour, where the light turns from lilac to mauve to purple, from peach to orange to crimson, as the small whispers of breeze turn and turn again the heavy load of blossoms upon the air. (Cry, the Peacock 36).

At another place in the same novel Desai powerfully presents Maya's fear, her struggle to escape from her tormented existence with Gautama and her inability to achieve it through an effective description of Nature:

The atmosphere was charged with restlessness...

Gusts of wind dragged the thorny, paper-flowered
bougainvillaea creepers against the wall with a dry, scratching rattle that unnerved me. The cries of birds, caught in the rut of love, were like frantic warnings to my ears. The rolling cotton-balls, the flying yellow leaves, the surging clouds of dust, all seemed to flee, flee, flee, and yet could not, for they were bound to the season, and returned to continue their struggle for escape. Something similar heaved inside me - a longing, a dread, a search for solution.... (Cry, the Peacock 35)

Nirode has not seen his mother, Otima for a long time. In Voices in the City Otima describes the wealth of her garden to make him come and spend a holiday with her in Kalimpong:

There is such a profusion of spring in our garden, though I have sent baskets of it to everyone I know... There are still masses of rhododendrons, azaleas and magnolias, and I am leaving them to the bees. What honey I shall have, in autumn. Under the mulberry tree Rinchin and Pem Pem... in their striped aprons are trying to decide whether the mulberries are ripe enough to eat. (Voices in the City 36)

Having lost connection with her children Otima is unhappy at Kalimpong. Even the beautiful nature scenery is not able to
soothe her anguished heart. Feeling tormented she says:

And the day was so lovely. I could see villages in the valley below, scattered flakes of red and white in the neat tea gardens. And the sky was rinsed and sparkling like glass, the Kanchenjunga hidden by the whitest fleece of clouds. All the woods blue and misty. And my garden lifting out of the rainwater, so brilliant. But it seems my instincts have all been wrong, my paradise is a fool's abode, and I have lost touch with my closest ones.... (Voices in the City 202)

When Adit in Bye-Bye Blackbird feels disenchanted with England Desai makes use of Indian scenery to intensify his disenchantment. Though Adit sees the land of Hampshire he actually sees "the landscape of India, that vast moonscape of dust, rock and barren earth broken only by a huddle of mud huts here, a dead tree there, a tree that raised its arms helplessly, dead before it had ever borne bud or flower, leaf or fruit" (Bye-Bye Blackbird 177). When he sees sleek cows, pigs and turkeys in the country lanes and farmhouses, he really sees "hordes of soundless Indian cattle, all rib-cage and meditative eyes and spatterings of dung" (177). The hens and the pheasants of England make him see "the vultures of India, those great heavyboned birds with their reptilian necks rising out of rhinoceros shoulders and blood-caked feathers, perched
on thorn-bushes around the corpse of a buffalo..." (177). The river Test in England reminds Adit of "the rivers of India -- the shameful little Jumna... the mud and slush of the Ganges... the murderous Mahanadi... the uncivilized, mosquito ridden Brahmaputra... the five silver fingers of Punjab's rivers..." (177-178).

When Dev becomes enchanted with England Desai employs Nature to heighten his enchantment. What he sees in the English countryside makes him immensely happy. As Desai says:

He took the lane down to the river. It took him past the churchyard where, amongst hillocks of grass and a riot of butter-centred daisies... the old cracked gravestones were bright with lichen. He passed cottages on fire with the most scandalous roses... and patches of tomatoes and plum trees where men in shirtsleeves chopped wood and hoed, then down through fields of ripe, bending wheat and hay that showed aspects now of gold and now of lead to the ruffling breeze. (Bye-Bye Blackbird 168)

Dev walks continuously and enjoys "the rolling fields, ...bits of the New Forest cradling in dips of the green downs, aquatically deep and still, hill-tops with blank white cliffs... and expanse of lustrous sky in which clouds grazed lazily..." (168). The view of this idyllic land fills him with thrill and pleasure.
Sarah's stay with her parents for a few days brings about a remarkable change in her. Desai describes the transformation of Sarah by connecting her inner landscape with Nature around her:

... Sarah lay awake, face turned to the window where she could see the branches of the cedar tree lifting and falling and turning in the breeze against a moon-milky sky. She listened to the stream rush and an owl cry and felt herself cut loose from her moorings and begin to drift round and round, heavily and giddily, as though caught in a slow whirlpool of dark, deep water. (Bye-Bye Blackbird 151)

Not being able to continue to live in Bombay Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? escapes to the island of Manori for protection. When she realizes that the magic of the island is gone she feels frightened and lonely. Nature seems to give her warning of any approaching danger:

... the house, in its grove of palms, seemed surrounded by a host of watchful cranes, always half-awake, ready to spring to life at the slightest touch or alteration in light and wind, raise their wings and give voice to warning. The grove was like a radar system planted around her house. (Where Shall We Go This Summer? 127)
In *Fire on the Mountain* Nature becomes an integral part of the narrative. Like Nandakaul's life that is characterized by emptiness, her garden at Carignano is marked by barrenness and emptiness. Desai portrays Nanda's inner wish to become a part of Nature: "... she would be a charred tree trunk in the forest, a broken pillar of marble in the desert, a lizard on a stone wall" (*Fire on the Mountain* 23). Nanda wants to be alone without any contact with human beings. Lying on her bed she thinks that nobody will dare disturb her. But the parrots dare rouse her: "The Parrots dared. A sudden quarrel broke out in the tree-tops, for a moment they all screamed and scolded together, then shot off like rockets, scattering pine nuts..." (*Fire on the Mountain* 23). Enjoying the gentle breeze of late afternoon Nanda goes to the window and sees a beautiful sunset scene that Desai describes effectively: "She went to the window and looked out on the flushed ravine, the molten plains, the sky filled with a soft, tawny light in which the sun floated like a lighted balloon, making the pine-needles glisten like silk, like floss" (*Fire on the Mountain* 26). Though Nanda feels disturbed by the cries of the parrots she feels pleased on seeing this colourful scene of sunset.

Raka who dislikes the company of Nanda Kaul is attracted by Nature. Sitting on the rocks under the pine trees Raka sees the hills and in the scene she finds the hills, the wind, the
sea and the waves getting fused together:

For a while she sat there, chin on her knees, looking out on the hills that flowed, wave on wave, to the horizon, and listened to the wind that blew up and crashed into the pines, then receded and went murmuring away like the sea. She narrowed her eyes and the greys and blues of the scene melted together, till waves and hills, sea and wind were all one. She was in a boat, rocking, alone. (Fire on the Mountain 130-131)

Glad of Nature's company Raka immerses herself in it. She is interested in listening "to the wind in the pines and the cicadas all shrilling incessantly in the sun... and thought she had never before heard the voice of silence" (40). Though Raka likes Nature she is mostly drawn towards the places of devastation that appeal to her and inspire her. As Desai says: "it was the ravaged, destroyed and barren spaces in Kasauli that drew her: the ravine where yellow snakes slept under grey rocks and agaves growing out of the dust and rubble, the skeletal pines that rattled in the wind, the wind-levelled hill-tops..." (Fire on the Mountain 91). Since Raka is brought up without love and affection she rejects the world of human beings. No wonder she has a fascination for the scenes of destruction in Nature.
In Clear Light of Day Bim, who is abandoned by all, struggles to live with her younger brother Baba. Desai portrays Bim's agonizing situation in terms of Nature in Bim's garden:

The rose walk was a strip of grass, still streaked green and grey, between two long beds of roses at the far end of the lawn where a line of trees fringed the garden -- fig and silver oak, mulberry and eucalyptus. Here there was still shade and... the only bit of cultivation left; everything else, even the papaya and lemon trees, the bushes of hibiscus and oleander, the beds of canna lilies, seemed abandoned to dust and neglect, to struggle as they could against the heat and sun of summer. (Clear Light of Day 1)

Bim, Raja, Tara and Baba are neglected by their parents. Fortunately Mira-Masi comes to stay with them and gives the children love and protection. The strong protection given by Mira to them is described in terms of Nature: "... to the children she was as constant as a staff, a tree that can be counted on not to pull up its roots and shift in the night. She was the tree that grew in the centre of their lives and in whose shade they lived" (Clear Light of Day 110). Elaborating on Mira-Masi's love for the children and her happiness over
their healthy growth Desai further says:

Soon they grew tall, soon they grew strong. They wrapped themselves around her, smothering her in leaves and flowers. She laughed at the profusion, the beauty of this little grove that was the whole forest to her, the whole world. If they choked her, if they sucked her dry of substance, she would give in without any sacrifice of will -- it seemed in keeping with nature to do so. In the end they would swarm over her, reach up above her, tower in the sky, and she would be just the old log, the dried mass of roots on which they grew. She was the tree, she was the soil, she was the earth. (Clear Light of Day 111)

When Tara tells about the details of the elaborate and costly arrangements for Moyna's wedding Bim does not make any response because she is not interested in it. As Bim is very sad she seeks consolation in listening to "the usual summer morning sounds of mynahs quarrelling and shrieking on the lawn, the pigeons beginning to mutter comfortably to each other in the veranda, dry leaves and scraps of paper swirling down the drive and blowing into hedges and corners" (Clear Light of Day 146).
When Deven in *In Custody* goes for a walk shortly before dawn in an agitated condition the call of the lapwing gives him a ray of hope: "Out in the invisible fields a lapwing gave a wild... cry and he could see the pale flash to its wings in the darkness that was growing dilute now in the east" (In Custody 202). When he is frightened of the likely consequences of the failure of the recording of the interview with Nur the gentle sound of a soft breeze helps him remember the poetry of Nur that gives him a unique feeling of being the custodian of the spirit of Nur:

The sky was filling with a grey light that was dissolving the dense blackness of night. It glistened upon a field of white pampas grass which waved in a sudden breeze that had sprung up, laughing, waving and rustling through the grasses with a live, rippling sound. He thought of Nur's poetry being read, the sound of it softly murmuring in his ears. He had accepted the gift of Nur's poetry and that means he was custodian of Nur's very soul and spirit. It was a great distinction. He could not deny or abandon that under any pressure. (In Custody 204)

Desai's description of the plants, birds and insects around Thul in *The Village by the Sea* is fascinating and it
brings out the beauty of the rural atmosphere of that village:
The morning light was still soft as it filtered through the web of palm leaves, and swirls of blue wood-smoke rose from fires in hidden huts and mingled with it. Dew still lay on the rough grass and made the spider webs glitter.... Butterflies flew up out of the tussocks and bushes of wild flowers -- large zebra-striped ones with a faint tinge of blue to their wings, showy black ones with scarlet-tipped wings, and little sulphur-yellow ones that fluttered about in twos and threes. Then there were all the birds flying out of the shadowy, soft-needled casuarina trees and the thick jungle of pandanus, singing and calling and whistling louder than at any other time of the day. Flute-voiced drongoes swooped... and pert little magpie robins frisked... Pairs of crested bul-buls sang from the branches. (The Village by the Sea 8-9)

The technique of fantasy has been suitably used in some of the novels of Desai. Her characters build their own world of fantasy for different reasons. On the technique of fantasy Jain aptly observes: "Fantasy in itself may be conscious or unconscious. On the one hand it may be closely allied to a desire for... escape... and day dreaming, on the other it may become a substitute for reality in a comprehensive way" (38).
Writing about the fantastic she further says:

It may be quite true to say that the fantastic is unreal i.e. it does not exist in fact but it must be recognized that fantasy has its basis in reality which constitutes the take-off point for all fantastic elaboration. It is an actual desire, fear or obsession which finds expression in various ways. ("The Use of Fantasy in the Novels of Anita Desai" 69)

In Cry, the Peacock the death of Toto rakes up Maya's "another sorrow" (Cry, the Peacock 8) that begins to torment her. To escape from this torture she descends into her memories of childhood. They give her comfort but the reality of her situation triggers off her inner fears:

It was that something else, that indefinable unease at the back of my mind, the grain of sand that irked, itched and remained meaningless. Meaningless, and yet its presence was very real, and a truly physical shadow, like the giant shadows cast by trees, spilt across the leaves and grasses towards me, with horrifying swiftness, till, like the crowding blades of grass, it reached my toes, lapped my feet, tickling and worrying, and I leapt from my chair in terror, overcome by a sensation of snakes coiling and uncoiling their moist lengths about me,
of evil descending from an overhanging branch, of an insane death, unprepared for, heralded by deafening drum-beats. (Cry, the Peacock 12-13)

Maya's ardent desire for love and sex is not satisfied by Gautama. Making use of her imagination Maya tries to satisfy her sex urge. Her contemplation on the male and female papaya trees indicates that she intensely wants a sexual union with Gautama who is indifferent to her feelings:

I contemplated that, smiling with pleasure at the thought of those long streamers of bridal flowers that flow out of the core of the female papaya tree and twine about her slim trunk, and the firm, wax-petalled blossoms that leap directly out of the solid trunk of the male... Besides, if I could pleasure in contemplation of the male papaya, how much more food for delight in this male companion, surely. And I melted with tenderness, my arms curled into an instinctive cradle, a possessive embrace, as I went over thoughts of him.... (Cry, the Peacock 92-93)

Alienated from his mother, Nirode in Voices in the City wants to fail in everything. Giving up his job with the newspaper Patrika he starts a new magazine called The Voice. Though he works hard to promote it he feels unhappy when it
becomes a success. Whereas Dharma and David encourage him to develop the magazine Nirode wants to escape from it. Unwilling to involve himself in the development of the magazine he indulges in fantasy and longs to fly away like a king kite:

... the magazine tasted now to him -- artificial and a waste. The fact that his friends, so believed in it, so encouraged it, made him despise them all the more. Yet he was responsible for it. He hated this being responsible for anything at all. How did one get rid of it? ....one must be a king kite wheeling so far away in the blazing empty sky as to be merely a dot, almost invisible to the urchins who stood below, stones in their fists, ready to be aimed and flung. (Voices in the City 72)

Wounded by the merciless attitude of Jiban's family members towards her and tormented by her loveless and comfortless life with Jiban, Monisha clings to fantasy. Not being able to cope with the world of dissatisfying reality she wants to have darkness that, she imagines, will comfort her: "Now leave me, leave me to the sky.... Only the dark spaces between the stars... that can comfort me, rub a balm into my wounds, into my throbbing head, and bring me this coolness, this stillness, this interval of peace" (Voices in the City 138).
Terrified of violence and disgusted with meaninglessness of everyday life in Bombay, Sita, in Where Shall We Go This Summer?, is afraid of giving birth to her fifth child. Imagining that the Manori island will help her keep the child unborn, that the tides of the sea will make her children happy and that the trees in the island will give them protection, she escapes to Manori. Indulging in fantasy she contemplates:

If reality were not to be borne, then illusion was the only alternative. She saw that island as a refuge, a protection. It would hold her baby safely unborn, by magic. Then there would be the sea -- it would wash the frenzy out of her, drown it. Perhaps the tides would lull the children, too, into smoother, softer beings. The grove of trees would shade them and protect them. (Where Shall We Go This Summer? 101)

While fantasy is mainly used as escape in the other novels of Desai in Fire on the Mountain it is used in a different way. Being attracted to Raka, Nanda Kaul earnestly wishes to capture Raka's attention and win her confidence and love. But it is not possible because Raka always depends on Ram Lal. When Raka touches a little bronze Buddha, Nandakaul, who has been waiting for an opportunity, consciously creates a fantasy to make Raka feel happy. Narrating why traders went to Tibet, Nanda Kaul describes how her father went there as an explorer. To interest
Raka, she beautifully describes the orchards that "were all in their autumn colours -- scarlet, crimson and rust" (Fire on the Mountain 83) and "the forest of walnuts and maples, sycamores and chestnuts" (83). Though Raka is interested in listening to the words of Nanda Kaul in the beginning, she gradually loses her interest and is not able to "bear to be confined to the old lady's fantasy world when the reality outside appealed so strongly" (Fire on the Mountain 100).

Desai uses fantasy in Clear Light of Day to project the aspiration of Raja, Bim and Tara, who are the victims of irresponsible parents. Tortured by dullness and boredom caused by the detrimental home atmosphere the children bask themselves in their fantasies. Raja declares: "I will be a hero" (Clear Light of Day 78) and Bim proclaims: "And I will be a heroine" (78). Filled with dreams of escape Tara says: "I am going to be a mother and knit for my babies" (Clear Light of Day 112). Of the three, Tara alone achieves her dream of becoming a mother. The dreams of Raja and Bim are upset by unfavourable circumstances. In In Custody fantasy is employed as a means of escape from mundane realities. Deven's prospects of recording the interview with the great poet Nur transport him to a world of fantasy from his uninteresting existence marked by defeats and disappointments. The very name of Nur strangely triggers off his imagination:

    Nur, of course, the magic name... opened doors,
changed expressions, caused dust and cobwebs to disappear, visions to appear, bathed in radiance. It had led him on to avenues that would take him to another land, another element. Yes, these college grounds, these fields of dust, these fences of rusted barbed wire, these groups of hostile and mocking young students at the gate and the bus stop, all would be left behind, and he would move on into the world of poetry and art. (In Custody 105-106)

The prose style of Desai is marked by lyricism, picturesqueness, elasticity, dynamism, lucidity and simplicity. On hearing the poetical recitations pregnant with "the basic passions and tragedies" (Cry, the Peacock 99) in a party in Gautama's garden, Maya expresses her emotions and the words used by Maya are pleasant and appealing. Human sentiments are conveyed through the objects of Nature:

The soft blue twilight in the garden vibrated with rich words like 'zulph' and 'mehtab' -- words filled with the short, deep sighs of welts-chmerz, and rounded with a passion for balance, design, precision. They seemed to issue out of the mouth of the large, white flowers that had begun to breathe now in the evening dimness, out of the beds of earth, freshly dug and moistly odorous ... I heard ... strings of liquid words, gem-like and fluent as
notes of a flute falling one upon the other....
(Cry, the Peacock 98-99)

Desai presents in Cry, the Peacock a lucidly pictorial description of silk-cotton trees in a spring season. The picturesqueness of the description is so beautiful that the readers are made to see and enjoy what Desai describes:

Down the street the silk-cotton trees were the first to flower: their huge, scarlet blooms, thick-petalled, solid-podded, that made blood-blobs in the blue, then dropped to the asphalt and were squashed into soft, yellowish miasma, seemed animal rather than flowerage, so large were they, so heavy, so moist and living to the touch. Their pods were crowded with silk cotton and, as they burst, these airy-faery puffs of silver-streaked whitness were released and sailed through the air like angelic, soft-feathered birds, and rolled along the streets in radiant billows till the dust soiled them. (Cry, the Peacock 34)

In Where Shall We Go This Summer? Desai presents an attractive scene of the overcast sky. The rendering of the slow and gradual movement of the monsoon clouds in the wind is excellently pictorial: "... the solidity of the cloud ceiling showed cracks -- rifts of soft white, rifts of weakness -- that
widened into pale channels so that the clouds separated at last, drifted free, became light enough for the wind to send them floating this way and that" (Where Shall We Go This Summer 119). Another pictorial description of the English countryside is presented in Bye-Bye Blackbird. While going to visit Sarah's parents, Dev, Adit, Sarah and their friends enjoy the beautiful scenery of the countryside. The cottages, farm houses, fruit trees, forest, sheep and cows produce a pastoral atmosphere:

They passed villages of new red brick and villages of old, half-timbered cottages with thatched roofs like tea-cosies.... Fruit trees dipped unripe fruit like promises over stone walls... They drove past farmhouses and motels, tea shops and inns... They drove into glades of forest where sunlight slipped like rain through green mantles of foliage and small ponies scampered up tamely for apples.... Grazing in the meadows were hens as large as turkeys, sheep as big as cows, cows as big as barns. There were lanes spattered with cowdung, horse-chestnuts and dog roses, and cottage gardens in which cabbages gleamed like giant globules of dew. (Bye-Bye Blackbird 130-131)

To make her prose style effective and dynamic Desai makes use of long and short sentences in her novels. In Voices in the City Amla, who comes to Calcutta with a great expectation of
enjoying her stay feels depressed and frightened on seeing the tragic and mysterious state of Monisha. The feelings of Amla about Monisha are suggestively conveyed in a long sentence:

Now she stirred with foreboding -- this sister had wandered away, into some unholy garden of her own, stood there now like one of those lifeless statues, on the brink of a stone fountain, and seemed not to realize that the fountain was dry and what confronted her was no ripple and trickle of cool water but only dry, hard flagstones. (Voices in the City 149)

Coming to know about Raja's deep interest in Urdu language Hyder Ali in Clear Light of Day invites Raja to visit his library. On being invited Raja is overwhelmed with different emotions. Desai portrays Raja's dismay, astonishment and happiness in a long sentence:

Raja, appalled at having been caught at the childish pastime of hanging on the creaking, swaying garden gate, dazzled by the impressive figure of the old gentleman with silver hair, dressed in white riding clothes and seated upon the white horse that Raja had for years envied him, often climbing up the garden wall to watch it being fed and groomed in the stable at the back, quite overcome at being given an invitation that he had only dreamt of in secret,
nodded his acceptance in dumbfounded silence at which the old landlord smiled. (Clear Light of Day 47-48)

In In Custody Desai describes the areas of Muslims and Hindus in Mirpore and the rivalry between them in two long sentences:

This was not strictly so and there were certainly no boundaries or demarcations, yet there were differences between them that were not apparent to the eye but known and observed by everyone, so that pigs were generally kept out of the vicinity of the mosque and cows never slaughtered near a temple. Once a year, during the Mohurram procession of tazias through the city, police sprang up everywhere with batons, sweating with a sense of responsibility and heightened tension, intent on keeping the processions away from the temples and from hordes of homeless cows or from groups of gaily coloured citizens who unfortunately often celebrated Holi with packets of powdered colours and buckets of coloured water on the same day as that of the ritual mourning. (In Custody 21)

Maya in Cry, the Peacock is very sad that Gautama does not care for her. The attitude of Gautama's family members towards
Maya is no better. Ignoring Maya they incessantly discuss and talk about many things that do not interest her. Desai describes the topics of their discussions in one long sentence:

One spoke -- they spoke -- of discussions in parliament, of cases of bribery and corruption revealed in government, of newspaper editors accused of libel, and the trials that followed, of trade pacts made with countries across the seas, of political treaties with those across the mountains, of distant revolutions, of rice scarcity and grain harvests. (Cry, the Peacock 46-47)

Many short sentences are mostly employed in The Village by the Sea and Fire on the Mountain. After having profitably spent nine months in Bombay Hari in The Village by the Sea reaches his village, Thul. Feeling thrilled he stares at the beautiful landscape of his village. Desai presents the natural scenery around Thul in short and effective sentences:

Hari came down the path through the coconut grove to the cluster of old gnarled casuarina trees on the beach. Here the breeze blew up salt and fresh, and there was the sea. The real sea, the open sea, not the sea that lapped the island of Bombay. Hari sank down on the roots of a casuarina, cupped his chin in his hand and stared and stared and stared at it. He wanted to make sure it was exactly as he remembered
it, and it was. The tide was coming in, it boomed and thundered on the silver sand. The three black rocks were being submerged, only the tops showed about the creamy froth on the waves. (The Village by the Sea 135)

When the police officer in Fire on the Mountain informs Nanda Kaul of the death of Ila Das, Nanda Kaul feels shocked and can not bring herself to believe the news. Desai expresses Nanda's disbelief in short sentences:

But Nanda Kaul had ceased to listen. She had dropped the telephone. With her head still thrown back, far back she gasped: No, no, it is a lie! No, it cannot be. It was a lie -- Ila was not raped, not dead. It was all a lie, all. She had lied to Raka, lied about everything. (Fire on the Mountain 145)

Though Desai uses memorably beautiful English in Bye-Bye Blackbird she employs very ordinary English like school boys at one or two places in this novel. The language used is so ordinary that one tends to feel that Desai does not give much importance to sentence construction. She presents Adit's reasons for being happy in London repeatedly using the same subject and verb:

I like going into the local for a pint on my way home to Sarah. I like wearing good tweed on a foggy
November day. I like the Covent Garden opera house... I like the girls there -- I like their nylon stockings -- I like steamed pudding with treacle. I like -- I like thatched cottages... I like the pubs. I like the freedom a man has here... I like reading the posters in the tube.... And I like the Thames ... I like the ravens there....

(Bye-Bye Blackbird 18)

The other notable aspects of Desai's prose style are parenthesis, repetition, interrogation and sentences loaded with adjectives. Desai makes use of the device of parenthesis in her novels mainly for explanation and additional information. Maya's father in Cry, the Peacock becomes angry when he sees a dead branch on a silver oak in his beautiful garden. As Desai says: "He notices a dead branch on one of the silver oaks and, with a small muscle at the corner of his mouth twitching -- for he is particular about the garden -- he complains of the laziness of the gardener" (Cry, the Peacock 39). Nirode in Voices in the City is unhappy with his mother. When he suffers from a high fever he begins to talk about his mother happily. Since one may be surprised at Nirode's attitude towards his mother Desai explains:

He begins to chat, softly and pleasantly, about mother -- not of mother in the years when he so inexplicably turned against her, just after father's
death, when we thought he would grow closer and
dearer to her than ever before -- but of mother when
we were all very small and she would play Chinese
checkers with us on the bright mats, and put us to
sleep with stories from the Mahabharata. (Voices in
the City 127)

When Mrs Roscommon-James in Bye-Bye Blackbird tries to
make Dev visit many places of interest the latter refuses. Here
Desai employs parenthetical devices:

Mrs Roscommon-James thought he should visit the
abbey -- it was a famous one -- but he would not.
She asked him -- rather self-sacrificingly, she
thought -- to accompany her to tea at Lady
Bendsworth's -- or Boxworth's or Bandbox's -- but he
refused. She tried to make him call on the Vicar, to
go to Winchester to see King Arthur's Round Table
hung upon the Town Hall wall like a dart-board --
but he wouldn't. (Bye-Bye Blackbird 165-166)

Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? revolts against the
dull and sluggish existence of the family members of Raman. To
show her protest and anger she starts smoking. Desai writes:

The more stolid and still and calm they were, the
more she thrummed, as though frantic with fear that
their subhumanity might swamp her. She behaved
provocatively -- it was there that she started smoking, a thing that had never been done in their household by any woman and even by men only in secret -- and began to speak in sudden rushes of emotion, as though flinging darts at their smooth, unscarred faces. (Where Shall We Go This Summer? 48)

Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain thinks of her past tragic life. To stress the fact that Nanda Kaul has lived an unhappy life without a sense of belonging to her husband Desai says: "Mentally she stalked through the rooms of that house -- his house, never hers -- very carefully closing the wire-screen doors behind her to keep out the flies...." (Fire on the Mountain 18). Bim and Tara in Clear Light of Day are talking about the rose walk in their garden. Suddenly Bim shakes a long branch of a rose plant from which a fully bloomed rose dangles. The flower comes apart and the petals of it immediately fall in a bunch and spread in the earth. Tara does not like the flower being destroyed by Bim. Desai reveals the feelings of Tara: "Tara's mouth opened in dismay at the destruction of a rose in full bloom -- she would never have done what Bim did -- and then she saw the petals that had clung together in a bunch in their fall part and scatter themselves" (Clear Light of Day 2).

Hari in The Village by the Sea reaches Rewas Pier on his way to Bombay. Before getting into a boat going to Bombay he
feels that he is doing something that needs courage. But when he sees a lot of people waiting for boats there he feels astonished: "He had not thought so many would be going to Bombay. He had thought he was doing something terribly adventurous -- in fact, he found himself trembling with excitement and fear -- but here were men and boys of all ages and sizes... calling and laughing..." (The Village by the Sea 72). Desai in In Custody describes the role of the Hindi and Urdu newspapers when the festivals of Hindus and Muslims clash:

If these clashed, as happened from time to time, knives flashed, batons flailed and blood ran. For a while tension was high, the newspapers -- both in Hindi and Urdu -- were filled with guarded reports and fulsome editorials on India's secularity while overnight newsheets appeared with less guarded reports laced with threats and accusations. (In Custody 21)

Desai in Baumgartner's Bombay portrays the terrible fear of small Hugo while the latter coming in the darkness to his house in Germany after he has purchased butter for his mother:

He knew about those men who lurked in the shadows, waiting for the right moment to fling the noose, whip out the knife, bring down the cosh... he had even seen the man waiting -- much further down the road, with his newspaper, but he could have followed
Hugo -- Hugo never turned to look back over his shoulder -- or even overtaken him in the dark. (Baumgartner's Bombay 31-32)

Desai utilizes the device of repetition for the purpose of emphasis in some of her novels. While the albino astrologer in Cry, the Peacock warns Maya about her possible death at young age he tells her: "Of course you are still so young, so very young" (Cry, the Peacock 31). When the sound of the beating of the drums evokes Maya's fear of death the same device is used:

And softly, softly the drums crept across the desert, stole through the dust. Softly, softly they began to beat. Closer and closer came the sound, louder and louder. 'Ah', I cried, looking up to see if I could find... Nothing but the sound, irrepressible, relentless sound of drums, drums beating. (Cry, the Peacock 150-151)

In Voices in the City Nirode becomes uncontrollably agitated over his mother's illegal connection with Major Chadha. He furiously tells Amla that he has seen their mother leaning across to give Major Chadha a good look into her blouse. On hearing his rude remark Amla snaps at Nirode: "It is you, it is you who are depraved, who makes love into something ugly and degenerate" (Voices in the City 191). And she further
says: "You -- you can be a rat, Nirode, a rat" (191). In The Village by the Sea the fourteen villages along the coast from Rewas to Alibagh are to be affected due to the construction of fertilizer factories. The people of these villages fear that their land will be taken up by the Government and all the effluents from the factories will be dumped in the sea causing the death of the fish for miles around. It is impossible for the villagers to survive without their land and the sea. They are not ready to lose at least two thousand five hundred acres of their best land. When the man from Alibagh roars that the villagers should not let that happen, the villagers roar back: "No, no, no... we will not! We will not!" (The Village by the Sea 63). When the man says: "... the land is ours, the sea is ours!" the people also say: "Ours! Ours! Ours!" (63).

Desai employs the device of interrogation for various purposes in her novels. In Cry, the Peacock it is used to arouse self-doubt. Maya feels that she is becoming insane but she is doubtful about it. Desai writes: "This is insanity. But who, what is insane? I myself? Or the world around me?" (Cry, the Peacock 145). Nirode in Voices in the City has the problem of choosing his audience to communicate his ideas. Not being able to choose his audience and not knowing how to communicate his ideas he expresses his inability to Professor Bose:

'The lack of an audience is not the problem, in this bloody country it is the choice of one. There are
too many levels of education, they run into each other, or they keep so distant from each other, what does one do about it? And unless one has decided upon one's chosen audience, one's reader, what sort of material can one feed them? What does one collect for them? How put it across? How communicate?' (Voices in the City 23)

Dev in Bye-Bye Blackbird is acutely suffering from cold and coughing. Though he wants to go out he is not allowed by Adit and Sarah. Feeling sad and becoming uneasy Dev questions himself:

Why was he here, coughing and keeping awake the strangers in whose house he had lived all summer? Why was he here, wasting the last of his father's money, and not studying politics, philosophy and economics in some secure stepping-stone of a college? What were, he asked himself with growing sternness, his intentions? (Bye-Bye Backbird 123)

Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? is informed by Jivan that their mother has run away to Benares. Feeling shocked, not knowing the reason why their mother has left and wondering what she will do in Benares, Sita expresses her sorrow and anxiety to her brother, Jivan:

What prayer did her mother pray -- the ritual
prayers to Dawn, to the Sun, to the Ganges, or personal prayers of accusation, bitterness and reproach?... where did she go with her lota filled with Ganges water?... whose house? What room? Any why?... Why had she left? ... Jivan, ... and Sita? Why had she left her husband whom they called the Second Gandhi? Why was she not at the island with them, participating in this experiment that all called unique, great, and Gandhian? Did she not agree with them? (Where Shall We Go This Summer? 86-87)

In Fire on the Mountain Nanda Kaul is unhappy about the impending arrival of Raka because Nanda feels that the stay of Raka with her will disturb her privacy and cause new responsibilities that she hates. Being depressed Nanda reveals her irritation and agony: "... Is it wrong? Have I not done enough and had enough? I want no more. I want nothing. Can I not be left with nothing? (Fire on the Mountain 17). Tara in Clear Light of Day invites Bim for the marriage of the daughter of Raja. Refusing to go to the marriage and remembering Raja's cruel letter Bim gives Vent to her anger: "And what about the letter he wrote me?... but what about the letter he wrote me? My letter? Has Tara forgotten it -- in my desk?" (Clear Light of Day 147).
Witnessing the terrible fight between the two wives of Nur, Deven in *In Custody* begins to lose his interest in the interview. Seeing the helpless condition of Nur during his next visit Deven wonders in fear: "Had there been another fight, he wondered in panic, as between jealous tigresses? Was this a common scene in this home of ferocious felines? Would they not, between them, devour the helpless quaking flesh of the poet and his as well? (In Custody 117). With a great difficulty Hari in *The Village by the Sea* reaches the house of the de Silvas in Bombay to get a job. When Hari bangs on the door the watchman suddenly appears and heartlessly frightens him with many questions: "Why are you banging, idiot -- don't you see the bell?" ...."Who are you and what do you want?" ...."The Sahib? Who sent you to meet him? Have you a letter?" ...."Who gave it to you?" .... "So you come from Thul, do you?... What are you doing here?" (The Village by the Sea 88-89).

In Baumgartner's Bombay in which Desai has used a number of German words, Hugo goes to Lotte's house and becomes worried about the bad health of Lotte, who consumes gin often without eating anything. As Hugo is very hungry he asks for some bread and cheese. Considering what Hugo asks for is very expensive Lotte becomes indignant and ridicules him: "'Bread and cheese?' ...'He thinks he is in Deutschland, hah? Or in der Schweiz? Choice between Roquefort, Camembert, and Brie perhaps? And
bread -- *Weissbrot*, *Schwarzbrot*, *Pumpernickel* may be?" (Baumgartner's Bombay 74).

Generally Desai's prose style is heavily adjectival. In order to write impressively she loads her sentences with adjectives. When Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* witnesses an old and exhausted bear balancing on his feet with great difficulty and discomfort, she is so much moved that she immediately runs to her house to bring bananas for him. To describe this pathetic scene Desai remarkably employs a number of adjectives:

I gaze at this magnificent beast from whose thick coat the gloss has sunk into dust, from whose tenebrous eyes all pride and power have gone, leaving only an intent determination to remain tearless. I put my hands to my mouth, then turn and run back into the house where I know there to be a bowl of ripe fruit gleaming on the polished teakwood of the buffet. Bearing two golden bananas in each hand -- more I cannot hold -- I come rushing out again, race up to the bear, then stop short, for he is so wonderously large, so powerfully dark, standing there on his hind legs in an attitude of mourning. Then, timorously, I extend my offering. (Cry, the Peacock 87)
Otima's loveless life in *Voices in the City* with her husband cannot change her very much but the tragic death of Monisha changes her completely. Ceasing to be sentimental she becomes unbelievably calm and rejects her children, Nirode and Amla. Desai narrates the impact of her daughter's suicide on Otima using many adjectives:

Her life so far had been a dazzling sketch, executed with skilful flourishes, a matter of fine, dashing lines, of hints of vibrant colour -- mahogany and gold and fascination. But incomplete, without a background, for oh, the background provided by a slack, sprawling drunkard, absurd in his too tight silk coat and a flimsy glass of liquor trembling in his hand, it had never fitted, she had preferred to do without it. Now Monisha's death had brought the shades and depth of the most appropriate possible background flooding in -- a mass of darkness, abundant with shadows and hints of distant light, which gave this brief sketch of herself a breadth, a philosophic dimension and a lovely, whispering mysteriousness filled with the murmurs of subsiding tragedy: its great weeping, its long preparation, its awesome climax. She was no longer a woman thwarted, but a magnificent portrait, a figure, calm and pale, in a great tragedy. (*Voices in the City* 252)
Out of her fascination for India Emma Moffit in Bye-Bye Backbird sets up the Indian club of Clapham to promote Indian culture. She invites the great Swami of Hampstead for the club to preside over a meeting. The people are eagerly waiting for him but he reaches the club very late. Desai describes the appearance and manner of the Swami introducing umpteen adjectives:

Robed in saffron, with a shawl of the finest cream pashmina about his massive shoulders, his vast head like a gleaming globe unmarred by a single hair, the Swami was a sight majestic and exotic enough to please the most homesick Indian in London. Yet his manner -- not withstanding his observance of Indian Standard Time which had led to such anguish on Emma's part -- had the brisk efficiency, the commonsensical air of an affable City man or, at least, a totally successful expatriate. (Bye-Bye Blackbird 93)

Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? goes to Manori island after many years. While living in the island she remembers her strange childhood spent there. Desai writes about Sita's childhood life in Manori in her characteristic adjectival style:

... she had lived a strange life, an unusual life, that had the effect of making her withdraw into the
protective chrysalis of childhood for longer than is usual for most. She saw the island as a piece of magic, a magic mirror -- it was so bright, so brilliant to her eyes after the tensions and shadows of her childhood. (Where Shall We Go This Summer? 63)

In Fire on the Mountain Nanda Kaul is watching Raka, who is coming with Ram Lal to the former's house. Here Desai describes the appearance of Raka, who looks thin and frightened making use of a lot of adjectives:

Raka meant the moon, but this child was not round-faced, calm or radiant. As she shuffled up the garden path, silently following Ram Lal, with a sling bag weighing down one thin, sloping shoulder and her feet in old sandals heavy with dust, Nanda Kaul thought she looked like one of those dark crickets ... or a mosquito, minute and fine, on thin, precarious legs.... She sucked at the loose, curly elastic of an old, broken straw hat that drooped over her closely cropped head like a straw bag. She turned a pair of extravagantly large and somewhat bulging eyes about in a way that made the old lady feel more than ever her resemblance to an insect. (Fire on the Mountain 39)
Desai uses a number of Indian words to evoke Indian atmosphere in many of her novels: *Kumkum, Sanyasi, yogi, guru, tandoori chicken, carrot halwa, calcutta-wallah, box-wallah, puja, shehnai, sitar, toba, samadhi, kalapani, papadums, halwa, rotis, dal, pakoras, salwar-kameez, kurta, pallav, burka, sari, dhoti, pan, raga, tanpura, bhajan, chelas, swaraj, lota, mantra, burfee, pulaos, mohalla, patrika, sahib, tabla, raginis, jalebis, sarod, vina, drongo, samosa, kebab, kismet, jhol, bhang, puree, bul-bul, pipal, tazias, ayahs, biryani.

Though the novels of Desai are richly invested with brilliant novelistic devices and techniques, they suffer from some limitations. Some of her novels are deficient in action and the plots in them are thin since she does not attach a great importance to external details. As Tripathi points out: "The adorers of a Fielding, a Tolstoy, a Stendhal, delighting in external spectacle and solid characters changing and growing in course of time will not enjoy her writings" (156). Except for a few characters, other characters of Desai do not change and grow. Many of them are extremely brooding in nature and they cannot interest all types of readers.

To a great extent Desai confines herself to the life of the cities and she portrays rural life only in *The Village by the Sea*. A number of themes persistently recurs in her novels. Mainly interested in serious writing, she neglects humour, an
indispensable part of life, in many of her novels. It is true that serious readers are definitely interested in reading her novels but the common readers who expect humourous situations, funny incidents and comic characters will be greatly disappointed and they may find her novels boring. In a number of places in her novels, she indulges in oververbalisation and sometimes she uses words for their sounds rather than for their sense. When Mukherjee writes about the characteristics of Desai's language she says that it is marked by "a love for the sound of words" (189).

The artistic integrity of Desai has its role to play in her fiction. In her interview with Desai, Peterson tells her opinion that many Indian critics may feel hostile towards In Custody because it harshly criticises Indian society. Expressing her point of view she asks for Desai's reaction. Desai's response strongly displays her artistic integrity. She firmly says: "It would make me sad if that is what happened, but it would not make me change a word" (Peterson 85). Desai's firmness in this regard immediately recalls to mind Theodore Dreiser, an American novelist, whose Sister Carrie was not favourably received by the reading public because the critics denigrated it for lack of moral perspective. But Dreiser was not influenced by the hostile criticism. He stubbornly refused to sacrifice his artistic integrity for the sake of pleasing the readers and critics.
In the novels of Desai, plot, technique and language are fused in such a way that they cannot be separated from one another. Desai is rightly considered as a serious and skilled novelist. Raising Indian English fiction to a new height of greatness, she deservingly occupies a significant place in it. Her memorable achievement in her art of fiction is a landmark in the world of Indian English fiction.