A close reading of Baumgartner's Bombay\(^1\) reveals as its main theme a poignantly portrayed state of isolation and loneliness. This isolation arises on account of Baumgartner's feelings of displacement which is again due to the lack of a national identity.

In this connection, it is worth quoting N.R. Gopal who comments that this novel "deals with the modern phenomenon of displaced persons"\(^2\). Similarly, S. Indira's observation is also relevant. She believes that this novel is a "powerful and poignant study in human loneliness" portraying "an authentic picture of intense mental torture"\(^3\).

Baumgartner's isolation is similar – but not so deep – to the one suffered by Sarah in Bye-Bye Blackbird. Like Baumgartner, Sarah suffers a crisis in her identity as she cannot determine her true self between her external English identity and her inner longing for an Indian identity. Baumgartner too vacillates between his German identity and his adopted Indian nationality. Unfortunately for him – unlike Sarah – there is no resolution.

Adit and Dev – the other two protagonists of Bye-Bye Blackbird – suffer social isolation because of their colour – the 'brown'.
amongst the majority white. In Baumgartner’s case, it is the reverse—a fair sahib amongst the dark Indians.

Like Bye-Bye Blackbird therefore, Baumgartner’s Bombay is also another variant of the East-West theme. Although psychological states like schizophrenia which had been present in Bye-Bye Blackbird, are not dealt with, it does yet project the psychological effects produced by a displaced nationality.

Hugo Baumgartner suffers isolation and a sense of alienation all through his life. His colour—because of being a German Jew—makes him too dark for Hitler’s Germany and too fair for India. Consequently, he remains a “firanghi, foreigner” (19) wherever he goes. Moreover, not being Indian, he is regarded as a “mleccha” (13)—a man of an inferior race—by his Indian acquaintances.

As a child, Baumgartner had lived a comfortable life with a well-to-do businessman father dealing in furniture and a doting mother. This was during the pre-Nazi days.

However, with the spectre of Nazism slowly spreading its tentacles, there now occur palpable changes which appear ominously unexplainable to Hugo. The street no longer remains “sunlit” (29), people make efforts to appear faceless while others throw furtive glances at Hugo. A seemingly mad woman even shrieks out a possible curse after him. Their maid-servant does not return while his father’s business suffers a
setback and his own house starts to lose its air of "comfortable opulence"(39).

Their only visitor now is his father's old business associate, the timber merchant, who advises them to save and prepare but in anticipation of what an incomprehending Baumgartner can not guess. Being yet a small boy, he is unaware of the events taking place and the slow isolation of being a Jew in Nazi Germany.

In school – prior to the Nazi days – Baumgartner senses his difference from the other children when he tells his mother "you don't look like everyone else's mothers"(33). The other instance of his isolation occurs at the Christmas party held in his school. The other children being Christians had already had their presents – sent earlier by their parents – on the Christmas tree. Not being aware of this custom, Baumgartner remains the only one without any present in his name. He longingly looks at a great ball of red glass – the topmost ornament of the tree – and the teacher, finding him to be the only one without a present, smilingly hands it to him. Yet, Baumgartner refuses to make any move and the gift is missed. An incomprehending small child, he finds himself collapsing into the "dark ditch of his shame"(36) although the cause of his shame seems vague:

What was the shame? The sense that he did not belong... But no one had said that. Was it just that he sensed he did not belong to the radiant, the
triumphant of the world? ... He could not understand... or explain it. It baffled ... frightened him even ... (36-37).

This shows that even as a small boy, Baumgartner was sub-consciously affected by the sense of not belonging to any definite culture.

The slow emergence of Nazism comes to his street also one night. That night finds them tormented with "hideous"(42) noises with morning finding the word "JUDE"(42) painted on his father's showroom window. Nazism with its accompanying element of isolation stalks Hugo further with the windows being turned into splinters and men ransacking his father's show-room the next night. The very next day, his father is taken away by the police without a word. When he returns a fortnight later, he is drastically and tragically changed. Unable to bear his humiliation, Baumgartner's father commits suicide. Understanding his mother's need of him, Baumgartner stops attending the Jewish school to which he had been going and thus comes to an end the few friends that he had ever made.

At first, Herr Pfuehl – the timber merchant – employs Baumgartner in his office after he takes over their shop. Next, he installs his family in their home while Baumgartner and his mother are relegated to a corner of the small office where they live in fearful isolation – cut off from the outside world and bereft of any other help and security. Finally, fearful of being accused of harbouring Jews, Herr Pfuehl, arranges to send
Hugo to India to carry on his timber business from that end while his mother is arranged accommodation as a paying-guest. Thus, Hugo Baumgartner arrives in India.

India appears a “bedlam”(83) to Baumgartner on his arrival and he longs for someone to lead him out of it. Unfortunately, as always, he is left to himself. In Germany, he had faced loneliness because of being a dark Jew amongst the fair Aryans. In India, his smattering of English, his unfamiliarity with the Indian language and food, once again, mark him out to be isolated from the Indians. Ironically, the fact that on his very first day, Baumgartner has curry without either suffering dysentery or food-poisoning, sets him apart from his fellow Germans in India also. From Bombay, Baumgartner is sent to Calcutta where he starts work and simultaneously tries to make a home for himself in India. But he still feels isolated for among the “darkness” of the Indians, Baumgartner finds and feels himself to be “a great hunk of red meat”(93). This is because the Indian sun, instead of making him darker, makes him grow redder daily. Thus, once again, Baumgartner’s colour – symbolising his unacceptance – makes him despair about fulfilling his dream of bringing his mother to India. For in order to turn his dream into reality, it becomes “desperately important to belong”(93).

As war breaks out, Baumgartner is arrested on account of his nationality – a German in British India. His attempts to establish himself as a Jewish refugee from Germany prove futile due to his lack of
having any important connections. In camp too, he faces isolation because of his Jewishness for there are two groups of Germans - Nazis and Jews. Due to the laxity of the camp commandant Baumgartner begins to see how the camp becomes an "extension" (116) of Nazi Germany when a "certain group ... of German" (115) takes over and runs it with efficiency and ruthlessness.

On the parade ground, all the prisoners are forced to sing, the German flag made to fly while they are forced to raise their right arms and say "Heil Hitler!" (116). One day when a group of Jews refuse to join in these ceremonies, Baumgartner joins them by remaining silent for he realises at that instant that "silence was his natural condition" (117). In other words, as Baumgartner had always felt intimidated because of his race, he gratefully joins in the chance to register passive resistance. The Jews are now put in separate barracks and excluded from most camp duties as well.

Earlier, Baumgartner had been assigned to labour in the fields where the sight of the simplicity and easy camaraderie of some Indian village women makes him aware of his own isolated state. Even then, this assignment had been welcome for it had helped him escape the questioning of his compatriots regarding each other. Whereas for the others, this questioning often led to friendship, for Baumgartner it never did. The "habits" of an only child, an isolated youth in an "unsafe and
threatening" land and thereafter a "solitary foreigner" in India – all these had made him wary and restrained him from revealing his thoughts.

Again, while fears about Germany as well as their families were shared and attempted to be forgotten by the others in seeking out the company of each other, Baumgartner carried everything within him like a "mournful turtle"(109).

Later, the exclusion from camp duties combined with the isolation from his fellow Jews, with time hanging heavy and nothing but emptiness to fill the vacuum that he feels on learning about the plight of Jews in Germany, makes Baumgartner yearn to create an illusion of pre-war Germany pining desperately for news about his mother.

Finally, unable to bear his loneliness any more, he decides to seek out company for he feels that "any relationship" would be preferable to the "oppression of solitude, the tyranny of solitary thought"(124).

When news about a possible German defeat begins to circulate, insecurity floods Hugo and he wonders if the "long internment had not incapacitated him"(132). There appears to be no possibility of return to Germany as he feels himself to be unfit to live in destroyed Germany. Thus, India would have to be made his permanent place of residence. This would mean that he would once again, be alone and helpless. This in turn, makes him wonder about his very survival. Although not regarded as a friend by anyone, the six years of imprisonment had provided Baumgartner with some sort of company at
least when he had been able to pretend that he was not alone or solitary. But once outside the prison, he would again be an isolated man with neither family nor country to call his own. Thus, the end of the war has loneliness looming large all around Baumgartner once again during which he apprehends a dislocation of his identity for who would he remain – a German without his country or a *ftranghi* native of an alien country?

It is because of this sense of dislocation that a brief halt in Venice – prior to his arrival in India – becomes a cherished memory for Baumgartner. Venice appears to him to be “both East and West, both Europe and Asia”(81). His unacceptance in both these lands makes Venice:

... the magic boundary where the two met and blended ... that bewitched point where they became one land of which he felt himself the natural citizen(63).

The war’s end brings Baumgartner to Calcutta but the partition riots in Calcutta finally brings Baumgartner to Bombay. The city’s “affluence and westernization”(180) arouses in him a sense of further isolation from his native home, Germany. In fact, his later acquisition of Indian citizenship makes him wonder if Germany and his German identity have been lost forever.

In Bombay, Chimanlal instantly provides him with a rented flat and work in his office. Although Chimanlal genuinely likes him –
inviting him to his house and taking him along to the race-course where they win silver trophies together, loneliness still haunts him due to his lack of fellow-companionship. To fulfil this need for companionship Baumgartner starts to gather cats and kittens who fulfil his emotional desires of love and companionship – giving him now a reason to hurry home. This substitution of human love and care by his love for cats is incomprehensible to the Indians with their close sense of kinship. Hence, with the passage of time, an old shabby Hugo acquires the appellation Pagal-sahib, bille-walah sahib(204).

After his arrival in Bombay, Hugo once again meets Lotte – an old friend and fellow German of Calcutta who had escaped imprisonment by marrying an Indian. Their relationship resembles more like that of a brother and sister, for they had “shared enough to be comfortable with each other ... comfortable as brother and sister are together”(150).

Seeing the chaotic city life, Hugo for once, feels his isolation from the “main stream”(211) to be one of relief. Although he had lived in India for fifty years, yet he possesses the “abashed smile of one who did not belong”(19).

Again, India now no longer appears exotic to him but has become familiar yet he still remains the strange and unfamiliar foreigner. This is brought out by two instances. Firstly, inspite of fifty years in India, he learns neither Hindi nor English properly. He therefore uses both
“Good morning, salaam”(16). He even forgets German to some extent. Thus, when he meets Julius and his wife, Gisela – an old acquaintance of Hugo – he is declared an outsider by Gisela and is refused to be acknowledged as even an acquaintance. Again, when he goes to Chimanlal’s funeral, he is not accepted by anyone there. In fact, Chimanlal’s son does not accept him as either a friend or business associate of his father. This shows his isolation from the Indian people. These two instance highlight the tragic dimension of his isolation – a man with neither a home, country or language to call his own.

Seeing a fellow German one day – although a highly dirty Aryan – Baumgartner’s sense of being forever isolated resurfaces:

Accepting - but not accepted; that was the story of his life ... In Germany he had been dark ... In India, he was fair ... In both lands, the unacceptable. Perhaps even where his cats were concerned, he was that – man, not feline, not theirs(20).

At the café-owner, Farrokh’s, insistent urgings Baumgartner enquires after the fair-haired German boy. His concern aroused inspite of himself, Baumgartner volunteers to take the boy to his home.

Baumgartner suffers an inner turmoil when he tries to decipher the reason behind his offer of hospitality. Because of his continuous sense of isolation, he had decided in the internment camp itself never to live in a “pack”(150). Although Lotte remains his only link with
the German tongue, she was the only one who had belonged to the “India of his own experience”(150). But he had discreetly kept himself away from the other Europeans in Bombay. Their probing questions and determination to discover his circumstances — his past, present and future — was disliked by Baumgartner. As he had always encountered isolation on account of his race, he remains withdrawn from them. However, the sight of the German boy Kurt, stirs his dormant feelings of nationalism awake. Although he tries to justify his act of hospitality as helping someone in need, he knows instinctively that the real season was because Kurt was a fellow German — an Aryan perhaps but nevertheless a German. So her argues to himself “... ask your blood why it is so, only the blood knows”(150).

Inspite of being shocked by Kurt’s depravity — he had lived with the doms in the burning ghat of Benaras, taken human flesh, danced with the devil, loved a temple priest’s boy, lived with lepers and had a plentiful supply of opium, marijuana, cannabis and heroin in Goa — Baumgartner gives him his divan to sleep and cooks pish-pash for him. This time, Baumgartner even chooses to ignore the boy’s obvious hatred of his host’s Jewishness. Once the boy takes in his quota of drugs secretly, his jeers make Baumgartner feel violently threatened by this behaviour of the hitherto “lifeless” boys. This feeling is transformed into fatal reality when Kurt — to steal the silver trophies that Baumgartner had won in the
races with Chimanlal — plunges the kitchen knife into the sleeping and utterly defenceless Baumgartner and murders him.

Ironically, Baumgartner's very act of attempting to alleviate his loneliness by offering hospitality and showing concern to a fellow German brings in his death — just for a handful of silver trophies. Isolated in life, he lies isolated in death too. Lacking a family he lacks sympathy and concern too. Instead, the scene of his murder becomes the site for a 'drama' for the gathered crowd of on-lookers:

... it was all they could have desired, the drama, the theatre, the raw emotions ... they watched the memsahib arrive ... holding together a torn red dress from which the white flesh split. It was wonderful, perfect ... (227-228).

Thus, the whole gruesome murder assumes the theatricality of a drama. Instead of a crowd of mourners, there is an audience enjoying a 'show'. This very poignantly brings out the extent of Hugo Baumgartner's isolation. After fifty years in India, Baumgartner is killed by an "Aryan" German.

As has already been mentioned, it is due to his race — a Jew — that Baumgartner chiefly suffers isolation. Only Lotte accepts him for what he is. This is because although a German, she claims to have been a "gypsy" who had "followed her artistic parents all over the globe" (66) and never lived in the Germany of Baumgartner's time. Moreover, Lotte is
equally isolated from society and the people around her. A dancer in Calcutta in the pre-war days Lotte marries an Indian businessman to escape internment and comes to Bombay. Driven to a small flat in the slum area by her late husband’s sons, her only link to companionship is Baumgartner. Both are “fragments of dispossessed humanity and in need of each other for emotional sustenance.” This emotional affinity between them is evident in the way they sleep on the same bed making a comfortable pair looking like “two halves of a large misshapen bag of flesh”(82).

This relationship does not progress any further than that of a brother and sister because of Baumgartner’s mother-fixation. The only child of his parents, Baumgartner adored his doting mother. When it is arranged for him to go to India, he reassures his mother saying that when in India, he would make a home for them. He desperately hunts for clues in the writing of her letters to receive the “reassurance that the words so lacked”(94). When his letter returns unanswered he is filled with agony. During his internment, he is haunted and plagued with worry about his mother. His need for his mother is expressed when Baumgartner spots a young German lady in the woman’s section and is immediately drawn to her. This attraction is not physical but constitutes a search for his childhood and his mother. The lady appears to him, to “embody his German childhood”(127). Receiving his mother’s post-cards after the war, Baumgartner finds the messages “strangely empty, repetitive and
cryptic"(164). That there was no letter dated later than February 1941, was indicative of his mother’s death. These cards remain his most precious possession till his death. He often read them at odd hours of the night when sleep evaded him. This shows that Baumgartner still pined for his mother’s comforting love. As no one could replace his mother, Lotte remains nothing more than just a sister while he showers his love and care on his cats.

The other factor that also serves to add to his isolation is his very nature. Being an only child without either siblings or friends, Baumgartner becomes hesitant and unassuming. The insecurity that he feels as a young boy on losing his father adds to his hesitant nature making Baumgartner carry his fears within himself.

It is when he sees Julius Roth sketching pieces of jewellery and period furniture that he is propelled to make a move at companionship. This is because the sight of the sketches reminds him of his father’s showroom. It further amuses him to be able to recreate with Julius’ help his father’s elegant showroom in the internment camp. When at times Julius reprimands him in irritation, Baumgartner becomes “suitably remorseful”(125) just as if the reprimand had indeed come from his father. This brings out his unconscious longing for emotional security that comes from parental love and protection. So much so that even a stroll with Julius reminds him of his Sunday walks with his father. That their
companionship is based not on true friendship is brought out when after
the war, they hardly keep in touch even though they both stay in Bombay.

In conclusion, isolation and an accompanying sense of
loneliness haunt Baumgartner all through his life. The poignancy lies in
the fact that this was the result chiefly due to his race – a fact over which
he had no command.

To express such a sense of isolation and loneliness, once
again Anita Desai adopts the omniscient narrator to reflect the inward
reality. Since it deals with some amount of external action, it is more on
the lines of Clear Light of Day, Bye-Bye Blackbird and In Custody. As
before, the narrator’s voice projects the perspectives of the characters. For
instance:

Hugo walked along, thinking he might find the
Jewish quarter ... Strange, in Germany he had never
wanted to search them out, had been aware of others
thinking of him as a Jew but not done so himself. In
ejecting him, Germany had taught him to regard
himself as one. Perhaps it was important to find out ... perhaps over here he would find ... a new identity ...

(62).

Here, the first sentence is in the narrator’s voice. The second
is Baumgartner’s perspective in the narrator’s voice. The third sentence is
again, in the narrator’s own voice and perspective while the last two reflect Baumgartner’s perspective once again.

The narrator adopts a tone of irony when depicting the scene of Baumgartner’s murder and its viewing by the people who especially enjoy Lotte’s weeping. This tone heightens the effect of theatricality that the narration aims to project while at the same time it adds to the poignancy of Baumgartner’s isolation:

The crowd waiting in the room could not have asked for more ... all the crying anyone’s heart could desire, loud and shrill and scandalous. The audience shivered with delight (227-228).

Again, when the corpse is carried out, the narrator ironically depicts the reaction of the crowd. It was enjoyable as long as they were not affected personally:

The corpse - yes, dead ... a certain respect due there... people falling back. No one wanting to touch, to be touched by death, by the dead. Hands and handkerchiefs rising instinctively to mouths, noses. Not to breathe, not to breathe in death ... (228-229).

The characters are revealed mainly through the narrator’s voice as well as through the thought-processes of the characters. For instance, Baumgartner’s thoughts concerning his action of bringing the
German boy home reveals the re-opening of his dormant feelings for Germany.

The structure of this novel is of special significance as it brings in a reminder of the structures of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. In these two novels, the action takes place within twenty-four hours. Similarly, the entire action of this novel is covered in twenty-four hours. And yet it covers a sizeable part of history—the World War II along with a hint of the Holocaust, the War’s effect on colonial India, India’s own pre-partition riots, Independence and finally Independent India. Somewhat like *Clear Light of Day*, which projects the summer of 1947, this novel also projects vignettes of life in India during the pre-partition days especially the pre-partition violence in Calcutta. In fact, also present is a picture of Baumgartner celebrating Independence Day by buying gifts for Chimanlal’s son. A majority of this is depicted as passing through Baumgartner’s memory.

The entire action fluctuates between the past and the present. Hence, once again, the handling of time is very fluid. The novel begins and ends in the present— in fact with the same scene. The first scene of chapter-I shows the entry of a shaken weepy Lotte into her flat after visiting a dead Baumgartner’s flat. She had brought with her his mother’s old letters which she now keeps in front of her, weeping in nostalgia.

Then begins the beginning of the past day — the final day of Baumgartner’s life. Thus, the shift is to the past.
Baumgartner begins his daily routine of bidding a loving farewell to his cats on his trip to Farrokh's café for tea and leftovers for the cats. The use of the word 'escape' first denotes Baumgartner's escape from Farrokh's barrage of complaints against the presence of an unwanted German boy in his café. This word leads to his revival of memories that accentuate his isolation in India. The sight of the "Aryan" German boy takes Baumgartner's memory back to the forgotten past of Hitler's Germany:

The *Lieder* and the campfire. The campfire and the beer. The beer and the yodelling. The yodelling and the marching. The marching and the shooting. The shooting and the killing. The killing and the killing (21).

The second passage is a merging of the past with the present as a confused Baumgartner thinking of the past is actually in the present while his thoughts once again travel to the past:

Baumgartner was running. Beginning with a march, as ordered ... he broke and ran – or would have had he not been bumped into and shoved aside ... The crowd opposed ... but protected him ... he blundered through ... Colaba Causeway ... all drew back ... other images emerged(22).
These images are of his life in Germany prior to and after Nazism and his journey to India.

The first sentence of Chapter III is ambiguous – "But the light was different here" (65). In reference to the last sentence of Chapter II – "packing his valise, he ran out into the moist dark" (64), where the darkness is that of the night of Venice – it indicates subtly the light Baumgartner faces on his arrival in India.

At the same time, the next sentence which is the beginning of a new paragraph refers to the present "His eyes streaming from the glare, Baumgartner stopped to wipe them..." (65). This is suggestive of the fact that the harsh light jolts Baumgartner back to the present from his thoughts of the past.

Although the action is in the present it consists of the conversation between Lotte and Baumgartner wherein once again, Lotte refers back to the past.

Chapter IV is once again in the past as narrated by the narrator and describes Baumgartner's arrival in India, his stay prior to the War, his meeting of Lotte and his life as a prisoner in India.

Chapter V is in the present – the afternoon of the same day. Baumgartner leaves Lotte's house and takes the German boy home with him. The boy's mention of the silver trophies reminds Baumgartner of the past. Hearing the boy's depraved stories and after his sudden departure, Baumgartner shuffles back to his room thinking about the boy's madness.
This "madness" connects the next Chapter – VI – to the past – the scene of the partition riots in Calcutta as narrated by the narrator. The city's streets "black with litter", broken lights and a strong "odour of decay"(162) make the internment camp seem an "area of order and comfort"(162). As if to intensify his already panicky situation, Baumgartner receives finally his packet of postcards that had been sent by his mother from October 1939 to February 1941. His life in ravaged Calcutta of the pre-partition days, his days with Chimanlal in Bombay. Independence Day of India, his days at the race-course, his adoption of cats, his meeting of Lotte once again and his routine of doing "nothing"(211) – all action is in the past but the chapter ends with the present routine of Baumgartner – "watching his cats devour a bag of fish he had brought them, dozing with one of them ... strolling down to Lotte's for a drink ..."(211).

Finally, Chapter VII is in the present. It is very late in the night and Baumgartner feels tired waiting up for the boy. He lies down on the divan, reads his mother's letters once again and falls asleep. The German boy returns many hours later, murders Baumgartner and leaves with the silver trophies. After the discovery of the murder, Lotte is summoned and after much shocked weeping leaves with Baumgartner's old postcards of his mother.

The chapter ends with the first scene that it had begun with – Lotte sitting with the cards spread out in front of her. This is in the
present. Thus, the structure of this novel merits special mention because of its ability to capture the history of two nations and two cultures within a span of twenty-four hours through memory. This was a feat achieved only by modernists like Joyce.

N. R. Gopal comments that “From the point of view of technique the novel is not very important except for the use of language”\(^5\). However, my study has highlighted the significant aspects of Anita Desai’s fictional technique adopted here and has also shown how the novelist handles the novel’s structure on the lines of certain modernists. This handling of structure is Anita Desai’s special achievement in this novel. Hence, it will not be correct to say that the novel’s technique is not very important.

Anita Desai has used a few significant symbols to further the theme. The foremost amongst them is the prison number of Baumgartner’s mother stamped on her post-cards: J 673/1. At first, these post cards create a wave of nostalgic memories in Lotte. Yet afterwards they provide her with “clues to a puzzle, a meaning to the meaningless”(230). This number is symbolic of the fate of the Jews under Nazism when during the Holocaust, thousands of Jews were massacred. This fact in ironically reiterated by the epigraph at the very beginning:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{In my beginning is my end. In succession} \\
\text{Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,} \\
\text{Are removed, destroyed, restored} \ldots
\end{align*}
\]

T. S. Eliot, ‘East Coker’
Thus, Baumgartner's beginning of his life as a Jew is also the beginning of his 'end'. It is his race that brings about his loneliness and isolation both in Germany as well as in India. In the end too, he is murdered by an Aryan German. Had Baumgartner not been so isolated on account of his race and had possessed a family of his own, his murder might have been prevented. However, this was not to be.

The second part of the epigraph is suggestive of the continuation of life in spite of the 'ends' that occur. This is therefore once again, symbolic of the continuation of life irrespective of Baumgartner's murder. This is brought out again in the scene of the crowds that gather to see a dead Baumgartner being led away:

Everyone drifting out ... to see it ... go. Standing in the sun, speculating on the murder, the murderer. But the heat driving them away ... disappearing. Other things to do, after all. Have to get on, with living(229).

With birth also comes death. Yet life continues to be lived. Baumgartner's birth is also indicative of his death. More so, due to his race. But even though he is murdered, he has no mourners except Lotte. The others present are not mourners but spectators who indifferently carry on with life and the business of living.

Mention has already been made of Baumgartner's fondness for cats and his attempts to substitute them for human companionship.
Thus, his collection of pet cats is symbolic of his insecurity and lack of love.

The other important symbol that has already been mentioned is the city of Venice. This city which appears to Baumgartner to be a mixture of the East and the West is symbolic of his own divided self. Is he a German – someone from the West or an Indian – someone from the East? Since, Venice is both the East and the West, it symbolises Baumgartner’s own state – he is also a mixture of the West and the East. He therefore feels at home in Venice.

The imagery in this novel has been used very sparingly. According to S. Indira, Baumgartner’s grief is a “subdued grief” and so the imagery here is “never explicit or exuberant but subtly suggestive”\(^6\). She further comments that Anita Desai has “come a long way” from Cry, the Peacock:

\[\ldots\text{ the highly metaphorical style, the abundance of imagery, the hysteria of restlessness that have crowded the previous novels are absent in this novel}^{7}\].

Even then, certain significant images have been used which enables the novelist to portray in this novel “a powerful dramatization of the loneliness of man”\(^8\).

The image of his father walking so confidently is contrasted with Baumgartner’s own shuffle:
His father. When he walked, there was no obstacle, and no hesitation. He strode, he paraded - his head held high ... with authority(23).

In comparison so this steady and confident gait of his father, Baumgartner is “an old turtle trudging through dusty Indian soil”. S. Indira has very aptly provided the reason behind this context. His father “belongs” to that place, is known and respected as an “affluent... proprietor of a flourishing furniture business”. In contrast, Baumgartner has “no sense of belonging to India as he is not accepted there as a natural citizen”. The coming of Nazism is subtly hinted through a few images. The street when framed by the window of Baumgartner’s house had been initially a “sunlit delicate, precious scene”. Later, “coming loose from the window-frame, it had crashed two storeys into darkness”. The few figures on the street appear “threatening while the displayed objects on the shop windows seem “covered by a layer of dust” while the “bared fangs” of the displayed denture “seemed fierce rather than comic”(30).

Baumgartner’s entry into India is related to images of blood and violence:

... the tonga ambled ... its horse narrowly escaping death a hundred times, its driver screaming abuse ...
till blood ran from his mouth – Baumgartner took it to be blood ... the lobby ... streaked with the red hat
the alarmed Baumgartner took to be blood from a gun battle ... (84).

Baumgartner’s isolation for being a Jew continues to haunt him even in India on his train journey to Calcutta in the form of an animal:

... an animal in its grey pelt, keeping pace, clinging, refusing to part. An animal like a jackal in the day, a hyena in the night. In the darkness, it continued to chase the train, chase Baumgartner (89).

His fear of being recognized as a German Jew thus takes on the shape of animal images.

The reaction of the prisoners on hearing the news of Hitler’s death seems unreal. Hence, it appears “like a scene in a play – as if actors had rehearsed their parts and were now playing them on the stage” (134). Much to Baumgartner’s disappointment, the men start to sing in emotion-strained voices “the song of graves and funerals, of death on battle fields, of ending and defeats” (135). This appears unreal to Baumgartner because for him it was not his defeat:

... Their country might be destroyed but this meant a victory, terribly late, far too late, but at last the victory (135).

Hitler’s death certainly meant liberation for the Jews, hence their victory. But a lonely Jew in an alien country – which Baumgartner was – made
him a pathetic representative indeed, a "crushed and wrecked and wretched" representative of this victory" (135).

After the murder of Sushil – the clerk who occupied the loft built above the landing outside Baumgartner's room in pre-partitioned Calcutta – the blood that flows out turns ominously to be the blood of his mother in his dreams. This image brings out the depth to which his mother's death haunted him:

... in his dreams, the blood was Mutti's, not the boy's. Yet his mother – so small, weak – could not have spilt so much blood ... The blood ran ... down the stairs ... soaking his feet ... (179).

This image also prefigures his own death:

... the thing on the divan – a nondescript bundle ... a part of the general litter. Except that it oozed the filthy black stuff that was spilt everywhere (223).

Violence and war seen to pursue Baumgartner and the Hindu-Muslim riots in Calcutta only confirms this to him:

Baumgartner felt himself over taken by yet another war ... Done with the global war, the colonial war, only to be plunged into a religious war. Endless war. Eternal War (180).

These images of violence and war pursuing Baumgartner also hint at the prefigurement of his own violent death. At the same time, this
juxtaposition of violence with the passive, gentle nature of Baumgartner heightens the poignancy aroused by his death.

Baumgartner’s ingrained sense of insecurity in an alien land is brought out very effectively in the image of his chance visit to a small, remote, primitive temple. He has a feeling that he is being watched stealthily. Again, sensing a weird feeling of the presence of death and danger, he rushes out. Yet, later he laughs in “humiliation and mortification” for he feels that he had been “expelled from some royal presence”:

Indigestible, inedible Baumgartner. The god had spat him out ... he had not been found fit. Shabby dirty white man, firanghi, unwanted. Raus ... (190).

Finally, the bizarre, weird and grotesque images of the German boy’s experiences in India—some of which have been mentioned earlier—bring out his diseased frame of mind while establishing him to be “an emissary of the devil”(157). It is indeed tragic that a meek Baumgartner “slow as a snail ... a turtle”(194) is killed by such a heinous boy.

Anita Desai has used a good number of both German and Indian words to create the appropriate atmosphere. In India, Baumgartner speaks a smattering of new words that he picks up to suit his own purposes. They are: chai, khana, baraf, lao, jaldi, joota, chota peg, pani, kamra, soda, garee ... (92).
Notes


4. ibid., pp 185-186.


7. ibid., p 171.

8. ibid., p 189.

9. ibid., p 172.

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