CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims and Approaches

The present study aims to focus on two aspects of the selected novels of Anita Desai. These are:

(a) to pin-point and explain the psychological conflicts of the principal characters in these selected novels, and

(b) to attempt a stylistic analysis of the language through which these conflicts have been portrayed.

One aspect of the analysis deals with the content (a), while the second (b) is related to the manner of expression of that content.

To date, the critics and scholars have mostly concentrated upon the thematic aspects of the works of Anita Desai. There are more than half a dozen full length studies and anthologies available which make a critical scrutiny of the novels and short stories of Desai from different perspectives. The critics, in these studies, have invariably discussed the underlying thematic patterns, the development of her major themes, and the philosophical currents and undercurrents as displayed in the fictional world of Desai. But recently some scholars have tried to explore new areas
and facets in Desai's work. They have closely examined the stylistic features of her language which are quite expressive of her major themes as developed in her works. Some of them have also tried to scrutinize these stylistic features in her individual novels. Lately, a full length study published by Dr. Usha Bande (1988) focuses upon the delineation of her characters from the psychological angle and makes it a very revealing and useful study.

In most of the available critical material, the critics have generally touched upon the aspect of language only superficially. The power of the medium employed, i.e., language has not been paid its due attention. Some occasional remarks about the quality of 'rich poetic language', 'language of the mind', 'sensuous richness', are made here and there while discussing the themes of Desai's novels. The imagery and symbols too have been discussed at random. But no full length serious study, to date, has appeared which analyses in detail this aspect of language in Desai's work. Realizing the importance and utility of exploring this aspect of Desai's work, some scholars have made useful attempts in this direction too.

Dr. Kunj Bala in her study (1989) has attempted to probe into the close relationships between the themes of Desai's novels and their presentation through the verbal patterns. The study makes an important break-through in the
field and explores how the various components of language, i.e., lexis, collocation, syntax, speech acts, clusters of verbs and intonation patterns are all expressive of the underlying themes in the novels of Anita Desai.

The present study makes an attempt to analyse the language of psychological conflicts which the major protagonists undergo in the selected novels of Desai. As there are no hard and fast rules set in the field yet, the methods and approaches are mostly eclectic. Neither the conflict nor the manner of their expression has been examined in isolation. In this context the close relationship between the two, i.e., the matter and the manner has been explored.

There is a general belief among the readers that novels are usually interpreted in terms of their thematic patterns, i.e., plot, story, characterisation, etc. The present study aims at breaking some new avenues in the field. The novels here are interpreted from the psychological perspective. Some important instances of psychological conflict have been selected and the language of these conflicts is analysed in detail. The procedure adopted provides an ample scope to interpret and have a fresh insight into the hidden meanings of the literary works. It also helps in dispelling a long established belief of the reader that novels are read only for the sake of story
and entertainment. The novels too, like other forms of art, i.e., painting, music, poetry, sculpture, etc., are expressive of human experiences and emotions. They reflect not only the social but the mental condition of the society as well. Therefore, to understand the meaning of any literary work fully, the linguistic insights become quite essential. The literary critic and the linguist both have to walk together, not as rivals but helping and strengthening each other in their own fields with a willing mind and a ready hand.

1.2 Psychological Conflict

A thorough study of the works of Desai reveals that the main forte of her fiction is the deep delving into the main currents and undercurrents of human psyche. She is more concerned with the portrayal of inner reality than the outer life. She peels off layer after layer, the hidden impressions and experiences of the conscious as well as the sub-conscious self. Her sharp awareness of the inner reality and the massing of details is expressed in a manner that the interior self of the characters is revealed in all its prominent shades. She verbally paints the atmosphere of the mind.

The galaxy of her protagonists consists of all walks and all ages of real life. A common rustic dweller to a
highly sensitive soul is depicted in her works in a realistic manner. Though the general opinion is that Desai's protagonists are not average people but the researcher personally feels that it is not always so. We often meet such sensitive souls as Ravi, Sonu, Mr. Bose, Bina (Games at Twilight and Other Stories), recluse Nanda (Fire on the Mountain), simple Deven (In Custody), sweet Sarah (Bye-Bye Blackbird), rebel Nirode and anguished Monisha (Voices in the City), unfortunate Ila (Fire on the Mountain), optimistic Bim (Clear Light of Day), neurotic Maya (Cry, the Peacock), innocent Hari (Village by the Sea), identityless Hugo (Baumgartner's Bombay), etc., in real life. True, some of the protagonists like Maya and Monisha are really high-strung, super-sensitive, lonely, alienated souls from the mainstream of society, but they too belong to the real world.

Desai in her works tries to arrest the mental existence of her characters through such minute details, that the reader not only involves himself/herself fully with those characters, but also feels with them, thinks with them, and participating mentally with them, sometimes identifies himself/herself with them too. It is said that the great works are not only to be read alone, they are to be felt and thought, and this 'feel' of the book takes the reader out of his/her subjective self and he/she becomes one with the protagonists. There are many examples in Desai's work where
the gap between the reader and the character is bridged so naturally at times that the reader becomes extremely tense and involved in the situation. All the protagonists in Desai's novels undergo mental conflicts of varying intensity. Some of them are lost during the struggle, while others come out successfully with new realization and hope.

The psychologists believe that every individual has an intrinsic nature which is the outcome of different factors, and it is unique in itself. These different states of mind produce different reactions in different situations. The world of Desai's characters is an amalgamation of all types of human psyche. Various factors give rise to mental tension of varying intensity. Most prominent among the causes of these mental conflicts is the clash between the inner reality of the protagonist and the external situation of his/her life. Some people are basically weak, i.e., they can be easily moulded and influenced by the outside forces of life, and they lack the courage to reveal their inner reality. Some people are more strong and are capable to adjust themselves accordingly in all situations. There are other people who are unwilling to adapt themselves. Rather they prefer to influence others according to their heart's desire. And yet another category of human psyche is of those, who come out triumphant, whatever the immanent hurdles may be, because they possess not only the great 'will
and determination but also have the courage to say firm 'YES' or 'NO' when life demands. Therefore, any undesired situation in life helps in producing a psychological conflict.

The protagonists of Desai too suffer these mental agonies at various levels. They often come in clash with the outside life, with others at individual level or with the society at large. The changes brought in their mental perspective with the passage of time and experience also produce psychic strain.

The scope of the present study is limited to the detailed analysis of three selected novels. These are: *Cry, the Peacock*, *Fire on the Mountain* and *Clear Light of Day*. These novels are replete with the instances of psychological conflict. The selected conflicts either provide a different turn to the work as a whole or they signify an important change in the mental landscape of the protagonist. These novels are fairly representative of the whole fictional world of Desai. The selected conflicts also reveal to a great extent, the manner of their portrayal through verbal and non-verbal elements.

1.2.1 The Progression of Conflict

The psychological conflict first mounts gradually, reaches the apex, and then subsides finally. The diffusion
of tension also takes place differently. Various factors help in either suspending or cooling down the conflict for the time being. Sometimes it is the outside force (e.g., the invasion of the world of nature in any form) which provides the calming effect and teaches the message of acceptance to the protagonist (Nanda in FOM). Sometimes it is the inner strength of the character himself/herself that helps the character to overcome the mental strain with some new realization (Bim in CLD). At other times the change in the character's own attitude towards the outer reality helps the diffusion of mental tension (Nanda in FOM). And if the character is weak, the outside influences drive the protagonist more and more inwards: Maya in CTP, Mira in CLD, and Monisha in VIC, etc. The over-sensitive emotional and mental-scape of these protagonists fail to cope with the outside situation and finally leads to the disintegration of their psyche (Maya kills Gautama and commits suicide, Mira loses balance of mind and Monisha also commits suicide).

Different novels show different trends in the mental existence of the characters. Accordingly, the major protagonists of these novels can be placed in different categories. We have some high-strung sensitive souls, who are much affected by the clash between their individual selves and the outside reality. Initially their minds turn more and more inward. Gradually, they withdraw from society and
stop involving themselves in the external world. Nanda, Mira, Nirode, Monisha, etc., belong to this category. Nanda, who had lived a life of deprivations and unfulfilment feels safe in the secluded surroundings of Carignano. She resents even the news of someone (Raka) coming and staying with her or keeping any contact with the outside world through the telephone calls. She wants 'no one else', and 'nothing more'. She simply wants 'to be a tree, to mingle with the other trees and be there'. Though it is a different matter that in the end she longs for Raka's company, longs to love and be loved, wishes to be addressed as Nani and also realizes the futility of negation and withdrawal from life. But the cruel clutches of death don't spare her to live her life now on a different plane.

Nirode in VIC becomes a complete introvert. He has nothing to give to the world or to receive from it. He feels the 'sole natural condition' for him is the loneliness. 'Three drinks, a cigarette and a room', is his only requirement. He aspires throughout his life not for success but for failure. He does not like to rise step by step in life, nay, he wants to descend deep down into the dark abyss of failure and to be lost in forgetfulness. 'The tickets are bought, the things are packed', but he never catches the train.

Sita in WSWGS, unable to cope with the violence and
cruelty of the outside world escapes to the fantasy Island of Manori. We have some protagonists who dare to rebel against individuals and society both. Arjuna in OTP is a great rebel. He runs away without leaving any clues. Jeevan in WSWGS runs away, his mother too had earlier gone. Nirode too is a great rebel against his family. Monisha in VIC turns inward, encloses herself behind the window bars and finally puts herself on fire. But before dying she bravely advises her sister Amla to always 'walk on the opposite direction'.

In her later novels, one feels that Desai tends to lean towards more balanced personalities. The psychological reality represented through the protagonists like Hari, Sita, Bim, Lottee, etc., is expressive of that balance maintained not only emotionally but logically too. After great struggle the child protagonist Hari (VBS) neither turns neurotic nor does he become an introvert. He learns the lesson of adaptation and through Hari the author has unfolded a great social reality. One must learn to adapt oneself to the changing environment if one wants to really exist not only physically but emotionally and mentally as well.

Sita too, in the Island of Manori, being ignored and resented by her own children acquires the saner outlook of adaptation. On realizing that the children had called their father even without informing her, though deeply hurt, she
accepts the change and decides to go back to her family in Bombay.

On the other side Ila Das in FCM, though hard pressed between the basic necessities and her meagre salary, is still full of life and involvements. Deven in IC also returns to the normal life after his defeated adventures in the world of his fantasy. Sarah in BBB, too suffers greatly at the emotional and intellectual level. Belonging to different cultural context, she has to play difficult roles at times. But finally she succeeds in reconciling herself with the single role of being Mrs. Sen and she accompanies Adit to India.

And still more daring psychologically we have the protagonist Bim in CLD, who with her new realization and acceptance of life in all its shades, wins over the hearts of her readers. She also suffers the pangs of mental upheaval, withdraws inward (though temporarily) and ultimately accepts not only the reality outside, but also cheerfully forgives and forgets everything unsavoury to give new meanings to life itself. Once again she embraces everyone in her folds of love, faith and understanding. She comes out to be the most heroic of all the major protagonists of Anita Desai.

All the characters undergo mental conflict at one time or the other due to various reasons. Not only the
female protagonists, who are usually more sensitive than their counterparts, but the male protagonists also undergo psychic tension. Nirode, suffering the maximum of inner conflict, turns out to be a total wreck and becomes a synonym of internal void. He reaches a stage of mental crisis when failure and not success becomes his passionate longing. He wants to go deep down to the bottom of defeat, so that he could experience the real depth to which any human being can fall. He is aimless and cannot understand the purpose of his life. Devan in IC too has to pull throughout the novel between the world of his fantasy and the hard facts of life. In her latest novel to date, Baumgartner's Bombay (1988), the major protagonist Hugo not only suffers the pangs of loneliness and alienation but also has to undergo the psychic torture of losing his identity. His whole life is a quest in search of identity, belonging, but the poor fellow is murdered without securing anyone. Throughout his life he remains a firanghee, a stranger. He was too dark for Germany and is too fair for India. Baumgartner is a reminder of Sri Niwasan of Kamla Markandya's Nowhere man, who also suffers the similar torture. But Hugo Baumgartner before dying is courageous enough to accept the reality, and turning away from human society, he keeps himself warm in the comfortable company of cats and kittens. They understand the very 'feel' and 'pulse' of this wretched man. In this novel Desai has
added another dimension of psychic tension.

1.3 Basis of Selection for Analysis of Psychological Conflicts

Initially the selection of these representative psychological instances has been made intuitively. To avoid repetitiveness and also to bring the stylistic prominence of each instance on the surface, a variety of these mental conflicts has been selected. These instances of mental strife in the present study are significant in two ways:

(a) they reveal magnificently the intense struggle of the mind of these characters at critical moments of their lives;

(b) they also become significant on a larger scale when we review the whole fictional canvas of Anita Desai. They highlight quite prominently, not only the reasons behind a mental conflict but also the variant factors which finally diffuse the tension of the protagonist in different situations.

Through these instances of psychological conflict the reader can have an overall view, the distant view and also a closely focused view of the inner self of these characters. All the passages present variety on account of sampling, focusing and salience.
1.4 The Author and her Spectrum of Themes

Chapter II is mainly concerned with a general study about the author and her major works to date. An attempt has been made to present the overall features of Desai's work - the important themes that she has dwelt on in her novels and also the main stylistic features in her mode of expression. This part of the chapter is followed by the interpretation of those major works of Anita Desai which have not been included in the detailed analysis of this study. Desai being a follower of the stream-of-consciousness tradition of the English novel, we have no story, no plot and no chronological time sequence in her novels. An important feature of the psychological novel, i.e., 'timelessness' or the mingling of past, present and future is a very dominating feature in her work. Desai herself claims that the past and the future both exist in the time present. The present is moulded and shaped by the past experiences, and the future moments are constantly plunging deep down to the past through the present. In her themes of the agony of human existence, withdrawal, mental loneliness, alienation, search for meaning in life and dealing with the entity of time eternal, Desai comes quite akin to Virginia Woolf, a great predecessor of the same tradition. Since memory plays an important part in this type of fiction we have memories, flash backs, at times
closely focused and also the distant backgrounds quite frequently in both these novelists.

The part played by memory becomes more important because it always remains fresh in the conscious or the sub-conscious mind and never withers completely. The protagonists in Desai's novels often dip deep into the well of old memories and feel fresh. Like Woolf, Desai too weaves beautiful patterns of sounds, fresh collocations and clusters of attributives. The reader has to be very alert to discover these patterns underlying the sequence of chronological time which has been split up in most of her novels. Therefore, at times the beginning of the novel actually marks the end part and vice-versa.

The individual works in the present study have been interpreted from the psychological perspective, because I have selected this particular aspect for detailed analysis. This will also help in bringing cohesive unity in the overall pattern of the present study.

1.5 Approach of Analysis

Chapter III deals with the stylistic approach and manner of analysis as adopted in this study. It also introduces and explains those different levels at which the actual analysis has been conducted.
Every literary artist has a unique visionary world to present to his readers, which is different in its feel and perception, depending upon his personal experience and his attitude towards that experience. This visionary world of the artist is different from the world of stark reality and is also expressive of the writer's desire how it might be or ought to be. To convey this image of a personal vision and experience, the literary artist employs the medium of language (i.e., he writes in a language). But that language is not an end in itself. It is simply a means to an end. It is through language that the literary artist tries to convey what he feels and experiences. The reader too has to look at the language of any literary work in two ways. Here the meaning of Lodge's sentence becomes clear when he says that the reader has not only to look at the language but through the language to its (work's) significance. Each and every word written, the form of the sentence, the inverted word-order, the fragments of sentences at a stretch, the pause-patterns, cleverly chosen set of images and metaphors, lexical collocations and deviations from the common form, all have something to convey. The basic elements of poetry, i.e., the fertile imagination and intensity of emotion, the musical patterns of sounds, fresh collocations, rare compounds spread over the whole work, all go a long way to help the reader to have an exact feel and experience of
the writer's vision. The reader too has to be very careful in inferring the meaning not only from the written words but also from all the indirect clues made through suggestions, hints and the linguistic and textual gaps left in between. Through a close study of all these components of the language, the reader shares not only the information provided by the artist but also the slanting of his personal attitude towards that information.

Anita Desai in her thematic patterns often tries to connect the inner and outer reality. In her manner of expression too, she frequently tries to connect two or more words through similarity of sound and by drawing the reader's attention to them, to persuade him to stop and think of their possible connection, comparison or contrast. These devices further help in foregrounding the idea, reinforcing the meaning or sharpening the contrast. The punctuation marks, the correct pause at the right place provide the breathing space. The reader has to search very carefully the meanings conveyed through the verbal and the non-verbal elements of expression.

All this does not mean that the objective study of the various components of language is meant to replace the literary critic's evaluation of the works of art. Rather it aims to help and enlarge the area of his critical ventures, to dig deep at the level of language and search for
hidden beauties in order to provide a fresh insight into the work as a whole.

1.6 The Scheme of Analysis

As already explained (1.2) three novels of Desai have been selected for the purpose of detailed study. From this point onwards, three chapters (i.e., IV, V and VI) are fully devoted to the study of one novel in each chapter. A brief introduction to these chapters is given below.

1.6.1 Over-sensitive Maya in Cry, the Peacock

Chapter IV deals with the study of the individual novel, Cry, the Peacock. An interpretation of the novel from the psychological angle precedes the detailed analysis. A novel being a long narrative, the method of sampling and selection has been adopted. From this novel three instances of psychological conflict have been selected to conduct the analysis of their language. To support the arguments, a few tables and charts have also been provided along with the analysis. The three important points on which the major protagonist, Maya, finds herself engulfed in mental anguish and how she comes out of this mental intensity, has been the main concern of this chapter.

The main tussle in this novel is between involvement and detachment. The protagonist is caught between her safe.
protected past and the heavily demanding present. In a corner of her heart, there is also the feeling of self-gl glorification or a superiority complex. The past memories are a mixture of pleasant experiences and threatening prophecies. Maya escapes to the inner world of her memory, gradually of increasing fears of death and finally, leading to her total psychic disintegration from which she never recovers. Maya's mental agony, tortures, strains and inner turmoil have all been described by the writer in a life like manner. Since Desai is more concerned about the 'how' and 'wherefore' of the external action rather than the action itself, the novel stands out as a unique attempt in itself. Each passage in the study is analysed keeping in view its own uniqueness. The most prominent features of the passage have been foregrounded in the analysis.

1.6.2 Agonized Self of Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain*

Chapter V deals with the second novel FOM. The same pattern of interpretation preceding the analysis, as in the first novel, is followed here. The main protagonist of the novel suffers from variant psychic tortures in different situations of life. Her mind flits back and forth making the frequent use of flash back technique immanent. Initially, the reader learns that Nanda Kaul repels any intrusion in her secluded life in Carignano. Later on, we find
that her alienation and withdrawal were not her choice but were forced upon her. In her deep self she longs to love and be loved. Secretly she pines for the company of her great grand-daughter, Raka, whose entrance in the house was much resented earlier. Nanda is different from Maya in the sense that though she suffers the torture of loneliness, alienation, inner shallowness and withdrawal, she does not become neurotic. Her withdrawal is not renunciation, nor is it any spiritual quest for Nirvana. It is her inner barrenness that has built around her a great wall of alienation and negation, because her earlier life had been devoid of any love, faith or understanding. In the end, though quietly, she accepts the outside reality and realizes that negation and withdrawal lead nowhere and make life meaningless. Ila's involvement and Nanda's withdrawal both end in futility.

The three different turning points in the psychological perspective of Nanda Kaul have been analysed in detail. The three different situations which make Nanda Kaul lose her balance of mind for the time being highlight the changes brought in the mental attitude of the protagonist with the passage of time and experience.

1.6.3 Brave Bim and Humiliated Mira in Clear Light of Day

Chapter VI deals with the third novel, Clear Light
of Day, in detail. The interpretation of the novel is followed by a detailed analysis. The main force in this novel is the force of time as destroyer, and time as preserver. The major protagonist, Bim paves through variant phases of mental tension, depression and psychological alienation, but in the end emerges a very strong personality. Unique in her own way, she experiences and realizes the very source of love, the warmth of love and its significance in human relationships. She furthers to a great extent the message of adaptation as delivered through Hari in Village by the Sea.

From this novel also, three instances of psychological conflict have been selected and analysed in detail. This chapter is different from Chapter IV and V to some extent. Whereas earlier the psychological conflicts of only the leading protagonists have been analysed (Maya and Nanda), in this chapter more than one protagonists are involved and their mental tensions at the conscious and sub-conscious level have been discussed.

1.7 Summing Up

Chapter VII deals with the conclusion drawn on the basis of the present study. As already stated (1.1) this study does not consider either the content or the aspect of language in isolation. Rather, a close relationship
between the thematic aspect and its portrayal through language has been explored. In view of this, parts of the whole have been taken out for a detailed analysis in order to grasp their full meaning. When these parts are joined with all their significance understood, the dimensions of the complete work are enlarged. The study has aimed at better understanding of literary works leading to greater mental satisfaction and enjoyment, which is the ultimate goal of all art - verbal or visual.

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