CHAPTER II

THE AUTHOR AND HER WORKS

This chapter deals with the different aspects of Anita Desai's work in general, major thematic patterns of her fiction, and also the interpretation of those individual novels and a few short stories which have not been included in the detailed analysis of the present study. The main focus of interpretation of these works has been from a psychological perspective.

As already mentioned (1.2), three novels will be taken up for detailed analysis and their interpretation is given in the respective chapters (i.e., IV, V, VI) where the analysis is presented.

Anita Desai has undoubtedly been recognized as one of the prominent voices among Indian writers in English. Her consistent involvement of more than two and a half decades in the field of fiction has won her wide critical acclaim in India and abroad. The recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel Fire on the Mountain in 1978, the winner of the Royal Society of Literature's Winifred Holtby Memorial prize, nominated for the Booker Prize, Desai had also been awarded the coveted Padma Shri in January, 1989. She has to her credit about a dozen novels and a short story book to date. Presently she is teaching courses in
creative writing in U.S.A., and has also been offered visiting professorship there.

The Indian writing in English, with the background of more than a century, has passed through various stages giving priorities to different perspectives at different times. Till lately, the landscape of Indian fiction remained laden with the themes of freedom struggle and its after-effects. But with the coming up of younger writers like Anita Desai, a new direction and a new vista has been opened up.

Desai has often been claimed as a novelist of the inner landscape. Her main foothold is the exploration of the deep recesses of human psyche, going beyond the skin into the constant struggles raging the soul of human beings at the conscious and the sub-conscious level, and describing the atmosphere of the mind. The gifts of modern life in the form of mental tension, strained human relationships, loss of identity, constant quest for belonging, meaning of life and soul are remarkably woven in the fictive fabric of Desai. All her characters are constantly struggling either against individuals, against social environment or even against their own inner-selves. Desai is more concerned with the inner reality than the outside world around. She is the painter of moods and wills, of desires and dreams, of conflicting choices and inner experiences. The present
study focuses its attention particularly upon this psychological aspect of her work.

Different individuals with the varying attitudes and degree of sensitivity react differently to the outside influences of social forces. Some at the very outset of failure and defeat turn inward and get isolated. Some of them become so involved within their own inner-selves as to land in the realm of insanity finally. Some others get themselves secured under the mask of self-glorification and consider themselves superior to others, and rejoice in their own pride. Some of them take revenge upon others as well as upon society for not recognizing their inner urges and identities, and a few lose their identity and sense of belonging during their abnormal growth from childhood to adulthood. And still another category of human psyche is of those who initially withdraw inward, ponder over their self involvement, meaning of life and truth, but finally emerge with optimistic attitude towards others and their own-selves. These people recognize the true value of understanding, compassion, love, forgiveness and reconciliation. To these people, adaptation, accommodation, acceptance and human bonds of love in totality become the sole motto of their lives. All these varieties of men and women, we find in plenty in the galaxy of Desai's protagonists.
With her constant efforts she has successfully brought this art into the main stream of European and American fiction. She is the follower of the tradition of stream-of-consciousness, as founded by Proust, Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce and followed by Virginia Woolf and others. In this type of fiction memory and flash back play significant role in describing the inner reality. Human memory, which always remains fresh and never withers, is a very important factor, and through it the microscopic vision of the inner desires and dreams of the characters is made prominent. This also helps in making the sub-conscious level very active. The past is revived vividly in all its prominent shades and colours. The gentle act of looking into the inner recesses of mind and soul brings forth everything that is permanently recorded on the mental slate. Even the 'time' becomes eternal. The 'present' and the 'past', the 'present' and the 'future' blend so well and create the illusion of timelessness at times.

The hard reality of modern life forces us to live our life at different levels: the personal, the physical, the social and at the level of inner self. It is in this last field, especially, where Desai successfully strives to bring to focus the constant conflict of the soul raging highly inside the mind of man. The mental landscape of her protagonists is completely peeled off, layer after layer, and thus
she involves her readers to see for themselves the hidden reality and become one with her characters. The reader can, not only visualize with his mind’s eye the real happenings inside the head and heart of these protagonists but can also identify himself with them, because she deals with the universal problems of life, death, human suffering, hopes, frustration, success, failure and the struggles of human soul and weaves them in the intricate pattern of her fiction very artistically. Summing up, we can say that Desai constantly strives to ‘connect’ the inner and the outer reality, the world of fantasy and the world of reality, the failure and success, the inner glorified self and the grim reality of outside life. While connecting all these opposite poles she passes through the dark limitless caverns of human mind and those dark and hidden things are focused prominently against the light of different mental perspectives in her works.

2.1 Major Themes in Desai’s Novels

In this section, some important themes underlying the work of Desai have been discussed briefly.

2.1.1 Psychological Themes

As already expressed, the main portion of Desai’s work deals with the deep delving of human psyche. The family atmosphere, the social environment, the cultural forces and
above all the individual sensitivity and mental capacity, all influence the normal growth of any individual to a large extent. The difference of the degree of all these elements produce different personalities who react and respond to the outside forces in a different manner. Most of the protagonists of Desai: Maya, Monisha, Nanda Kaul, Ila, Raka, Sita, Bim, Sarah, Nirode, Amla, Hari, Sonu, Hugo, etc., have to suffer the pangs of psychological conflict at one time or the other. Some of them fail during the struggle miserably due to their inner weakness and turn neurotic, while others face the inner challenges boldly and due to their inner strength they come out successfully. Commenting upon this aspect of Desai, Darshan Singh Maini writes: "Desai is essentially a historian of the inner life and of the states of mind."

In *Fire on the Mountain*, Nanda Kaul after great struggle finally withdraws herself to the secluded surroundings of Carignano and she strongly resents any kind of outside intrusion in her life. However, in the end she herself realizes the futility of withdrawal and meaninglessness of life itself. In *Clear Light of Day*, Bim is torn between her inner reality and the hard facts of life. But Bim is not disappointed, nor does she turn neurotic. Instead, with her inner strength she is able to understand things more clearly. The ultimate truth of the wholeness of love dawns on her mind.
and she feels, she can live only in togetherness and harmony of her people and not in isolation. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, unable to win over the psychic strain finally becomes a murderess, kills her husband and then commits suicide. Monisha in *Voices in the City*, too rejoices in self glorification and thinks herself superior to the other members of her joint family. Being overly sensitive she cannot bear the charge of theft, shrinks behind the barred window of her room and finally puts herself on fire. Nirode, Amla, Adit, Dev, Deven, Mr. Bose, Hugo Baumgartner, one to all are the struggling individuals and highly sensitive souls who are living their lives in parts. It is not only in the use of subject matter, delineation of her character, portrayal of the atmosphere of the mind but also in the use of narrative technique, symbols, images and the disturbed time scheme that Desai deserves to be called a psychological novelist. She registers the mental vibrations of her characters and communicates the same to the reader.

Shyam M. Asnani observes:

> Her forte is the exploration of the interior world, plunging into the limitless depths of the mind...This main thrust on the inner life of the individual, on myriads of inner impressions, passing fancies and fleeting thoughts, together with her razor-like sharp awareness of the futility of existence...Turning inward, her fiction grapples with intangible realities of life and plunges into the
innermost depths of the human psyche to fathom its mysteries, the inner turmoil, the chaos inside the mind.  

Similar opinion is expressed by Mr. E.D. Varaday: 

"All the stories exhibit psychological depth and complexity, and are laden with Anita Desai's rich imagery."  

2.1.2 Alienation and Withdrawal 

Another important aspect which is woven in the texture of Desai's fictive fabric is the sense of loneliness leading to alienation and withdrawal from the outside world. Acceptance, in many cases is considered surrender and submission. At times unacceptance and negation are thought better than acceptance. All her major protagonists wander in the secluded world of their solitary souls. Even among the crowds, they stand apart. The hectic and crowded life of 'the old house', 'the army of children and grandchildren', and lack of faith and understanding could never make Nanda (FOM) feel at home. She kept herself busy in the lone wanderings of her inner shallowness and withdrew quietly into the seclusion of Carignano. Though it is another matter, at the end she realized the futility of withdrawal and meaninglessness of life itself. Maya (CTP), an over-sensitive soul, could not cope with the 'pure intellect' of Gautama, so, she withdrew to the inner world of her mind and was always haunted by the past memories of her childhood. She always remained upset
due to her mental loneliness. 'I am alone', 'I was alone', always cries the poor soul of Maya, throughout the novel. Many of Desai's female protagonists are solitary to the point of being neurotic. Sita (WSWGS) all the time complained that Raman never understood her. Being unable to accept the cruelty and violence of the world around, she withdrew to the magic Island of Manori where she had passed her childhood. Monisha (VIC) disgusted with the joint family life and finding no outlet for her feelings and thoughts finally withdrew behind the barred window of her room, and even then not satisfied she commits suicide. Hugo Baumgartner (BR) could never feel at home in the society around. He withdrew to his flat in Hira-Niwas in the world of cats and kittens. In the dirty mess around, Hugo felt more comfortable than in the human world around. Deven (IC), unable to keep the body and soul of his family together, goes to Delhi to involve himself in the world of Nur and his great Urdu poetry. Bim (CLD) loses herself in the childhood memories of Raja and his poetry, of her sick mother, of Hyder Ali Sahib, etc. Since most of Desai's protagonists are not average individuals, but are over-sensitive souls, their hearts ache and groan silently under the heavy weight of mental seclusion. These individuals are gradually alienated from the world, the society, from their families and at times they stand at a distance from their own selves too.
Maya (CTP) is alienated from Gautama due to their incompatible temperaments. When Gautama works on his papers, inconsiderate of her 'soft willing body' or 'the lonely wanting mind', Maya realizes his coldness and painfully becomes aware of her 'loneliness' in 'this' house. She whispers: "I am alone". (p.9)

Nirode (VIC) knew by instinct that he was a man for whom: "aloneness alone was the sole natural condition, aloneness, alone the treasure worth treasuring" (p.24). Adit, Dev, Sarah (BBB), all feel alienated at one level or the other. Adit notices in Sarah, 'an anguish... of loneliness'. Sita (WSWGS) is alienated from Raman. Nanda and Raka both (FCM) suffer from this sense of alienation. The former because she was tired of her hectic life and lack of communication, the latter by her instinct.

2.1.3 Strained Human Relationships and Loss of Identity

Closely related to the aspect of alienation and withdrawal is the loss of individuality and lack of warmth among human relationships. The strained filial and family relationships at various levels hamper the normal growth of children. The 'Yes' feeling and the 'self' are lost by the time these children grow into adults. This realization of the loss of identity, sense of recognition, quest for meaning in life have been very artistically woven in the texture of
Desai's fiction. Most of her characters are the victims of these strained relationships. For instance, Maya and Gautama (CTP) suffer from this acutely. The one perceived the world through the intellect, and the other through the emotion. They always drifted apart and could never understand each other. Nanda Kaul never enjoyed any love, faith or understanding either of her husband or of her children. It was always 'his' house and never 'hers'. She always had to fulfill the wishes of Mr. Kaul, and he had always wanted her 'in silks', at the 'end' of a 'long rosewood' table to entertain 'his' guests. Her existence there was nothing more than any other 'thing' in the house. Monisha (VIC) realized, she did not belong to that big joint family. Jiben, her husband telling Monisha that she should have asked him before taking the money, embittered and shook her very soul within. It also gave birth to the feeling of revenge. From behind the barred window she told Amla to always 'walk on the opposite direction'. And for herself she revolted in the form of setting herself on fire. The unhealthy relations between the mother and her children (VIC) hinder the proper growth of balanced personalities. Nirode never enjoyed any sense of belonging. He hated his mother, envied his younger brother Arun and was also alienated from his own inner reality. Hari (VBS) also suffers from the feeling of strangeness. He feels deserted and friendless.
He belonged neither to one group nor to the other. In her latest novel, Baumgartner's Bombay (1983), the constant quest for identity and belonging is portrayed very realistically. Hugo, the major protagonist, who is born in Germany, thrown to India by circumstances, tries his luck in Calcutta, is sent to Bombay, can never feel at ease anywhere. He always remains a wanderer, a stranger, a firanghee. He was 'too dark' for Germany but is 'too fair' for India. No one accepts him and he is finally murdered by Kurt, another firanghee of the same native land.

2.1.4 Feminine Sensitivity

Another thematic pattern that emerges from Desai's work is feminine sensitivity. Anita Desai claims that for her, art is an exploration and not an escape. She believes that it is not the amount of suffering but sensitivity to suffering which enables man to share other's woes and sorrows. Being a woman herself, the element of feminine sensitivity is another beauty strewn all over her work. A woman, basically and for all purposes lives mostly on her emotional plane. That is why her reaction to the objects and atmosphere around is different from that of a male sensitivity. Her delicate heart is hurt at the very ordinary happenings. The panorama of Desai's characters is full of highly sensitive female protagonists. Love, attachment,
compassion, just other synonyms of emotion, are packed to the full in these individuals. They long to love and be loved. Maya always longs for the company of Gautama and he is always busy with his job and meetings. Nanda yearns for love and understanding, but Mr. Kaul never cares for her desires. Sita never gets love from Raman who always remains cold and casual. Monisha, Sarla, Amla, Maya all suffer due to their over-sensitive nature. Maya turns neurotic and becomes a murderess. Nanda withdraws to Carignano. Sita escapes to the Manori Island and Monisha commits suicide. They all present a group in togetherness and yet they stand apart from one another in their attitude and degree of sensitivity.

2.1.5 Relationship between Sound and Silence

Another prominent feature foregrounded in the artistic world of Desai is the perennial relationship between sound and silence. The sound is evocative, but silence becomes morepronouncing and meaningful at times. The things we say are important, but the things we leave unsaid too tend to be quite significant. The glaring written word conveys something essential, but equally significant are the ideas expressed through suggestions and hints. The textual and linguistic gaps in the work of Desai convey much more than is ordinarily interpreted. Maya, the heroine of the novel
Cry, the Peacock says:

...the things we leave unsaid would
call great volumes; what do we say,
only the first few pages of intro-
duction...Only the introduction. (p.105)

The same could well be taken as one of the unifying
factors of the wholeness of Desai's pattern of creative work.
Silence speaks louder than speech, it also hurts deeper than
words. Bim (CLD) finds silence roaring and thundering.
'If the drumbeat could drown the sound of silence'... 'it
becomes too unbearable'. The 'silence' of Baba proves more
effective in bringing to Bim's mind the true worth of rela-
tionships and their togetherness. The silence after the
storm (CTP) brings clarity to the otherwise confused mind
of Maya. The silence after the death of Monisha (VIC)
brings to light the clarity of relationships. It also
explains the meaning of Monisha's suffering to the mind of
Nirode. With the result, his inner solidity melts, and he
craves for human touch. He also realizes the importance of
love and affection. He takes hold of Amla's hand. He wants
to embrace his mother at the airport but she is cold and
stoic. Therefore, Nirode once again shivers back in the fold
of his own inner void and strangeness.

This much suffices as far as the thematic aspects of
the work of Anita Desai are concerned.
2.2 Important Features related to the Form of Desai's Novels

On reviewing Anita Desai's work from the angle of presentation in the fictional form, the following features stand out prominently.

2.2.1 Ideal Fusion of Form and Content and the Poetic Prose

Language being the only media through which the writer communicates his innermost thoughts and feelings, is also the only tool through which the reader is able to decode fully the encoded meaning. The medium of written language, particularly in the field of literature, performs the function of prompting, sharpening and also inspiring the reader for better understanding leading to greater enjoyment. Anita Desai, though writing in a foreign language, appears to be perfectly at ease with all its intricacies. In her hands, the language becomes extremely flexible. The most dominant feature of this flexibility results in the rich poetic quality of her prose. Here we find the prosaic activities of life transcribed in a poetic manner. The rich imagination and intensity of emotion constantly reverberate through her work. Brijraj Singh compares the novel, Clear Light of Day, to "an extended piece of music, subtle, sensitive, sensuous in its line and melody but also complex and richly integrated in its total effect."
Darshan Singh Maini calls her novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, "an extended ode in prose". He further opines that poetic prose had been earlier, with a few exceptions, foreign to the Indian novel in English. It goes to the credit of Anita Desai that she introduced sustained poetic prose as a predominant element in her novels. R. S. Sharma prefers to call it the "moving poetic prose". Writing about *Clear Light of Day*, R. S. Sharma comments:

> through a highly artistic orchestration of various notes, Anita Desai achieves a fictional structure which strives towards the condition of poetry and music.\(^5\)

F. A. Inamdar also believes:

> For achieving the rhythmic beauty of a lyric, Desai employs the device of repetition which gives incantatory tone to the narration... Desai is carried away by the music in words.\(^6\)

G. S. Balarama Gupta calls the novel, *Fire on the Mountain* "an extended lyric in prose..."\(^7\)

B. Ramachandra Rao also expresses a similar view:

> One of the most important aspects of her work is her ability to fuse form and content... in her work one senses the presence of a pervasive and controlling imagination fusing the different parts of the work into a unified vision... Form becomes a mode of discovering content.\(^8\)

Darshan Singh Maini calls it "the Poetry of the Spirit".
Tripathi also comments upon the poetic element in Desai's work thus:

... she is in possession of a poetic talent of the most sensitive type... Shapes, colours, sounds, odours, hues and tints - all strike at the sensitive chords and inspire exuberant effusions. Her Mayas, Monishas, Sitas, Bims are all keenest poetesses...

2.2.2 Effective Imagery

The novels of Desai are replete with the images from the world of nature, and they play an important part not only in creating the required atmosphere but also conveying the desired meaning to the reader. We have plenty of images of sound and sight spread over the pages of her novels.

Madhusudan Prasad observes:

Anita Desai... is indubitably the most powerful imagist-novelist. Setting great store by imagery in the novels as an art form, she regards it as an effective technique for the articulation of her sensibility and handles it superbly.

Her novels represent beautifully select choice of lexis coupled with fertile imagination and intense emotions.

Malashri Lal says:

Desai's propensity towards image-making and her recourse to such indigenous sources as the monsoon, the cow, the eagle and the cricket, have often been commented upon.
And R.S. Sharma finds: "...a sustained effort in her writing
to evolve a set of symbols, images or myths."12

This view of Sharma concurs with Madhusudan Prasad's observation:

In her novels, she has generously
employed symbols and images, charged
with tremendous significance.13

Meenakshi Mukerjee observes that three important
feature of Anita Desai's language are: sensuous richness, a
high strung-sensitiveness and love for the sound of words.

2.2.3 A Recorder of Minute Observations

Combined with the poetic quality of her prose and
powerful imagery, the work of Desai also displays very
minute observations of the ordinary things around, which
otherwise would have been left unrecorded and unnoticed.
Her keen ears and sharp eyes record photostatically all the
smallest details of sound and sight. The very words help
creating the atmosphere realistically and the reader can well
visualize all the things happening in his mind's eye.

B. Ramachandra Rao, in The novels of Mrs. Anita Desai, A Study, records:

Her ability to present, almost casually,
the minutiae of observed life, gives to
her work a solidity of specification.14

R.S. Sharma also expresses a similar view and says:

She observes every sight and sound
with an intensity that not only amazes
but also baffles us. Nothing escapes her eyes, not even the leg of a spider!15

Her novels fully endorse all these views. She can hear even the buzzing of flies, slowly unsticking their feet and crawling across the ceiling, the window panes, the varnished furniture. (POM:22)

2.3 Critical Review

The critics often put forth these arguments about the work of Desai:

(1) that her novels are female oriented and they lack in strong male protagonists;

(2) that the social canvas which she paints in her novels covers a very narrow landscape.

But a thorough study of the works of Desai reveals quite a different point of view. Yes, of course, we have very prominent female protagonists in most of her novels and initially it appears that Desai has the tendency to create only female characters. However, that is merely a superficial observation. By these prominent women characters, definitely and powerfully stand male protagonists as well. Directly or indirectly, their presence is always felt through the mind and the heart of these women characters, even when they are physically absent from the scene. These male protagonists have dominant personalities. They virtually try to mould and shape the individual personalities of their
countermates. In Fire on the Mountain it appears that the physical presence of the male characters is very thin as compared to the female ones. But going deep down the surface, we find that (though physically absent) their impressions and influences are written boldly and permanently on the mental screen of women protagonists. Whatever they are, that is all due to the physical and psychological dominance of the male ego over the female one. In some novels it is only the men who enjoy much better place than their partners. We have a memorable group of such protagonists: Gautama, Raman, Mr. Kaul, Raja, Hyder Ali Sahib, Dr. Biswas, Nirode, Adit, Deven, Hari, Mr. Bose, Nur, Hugo, etc. In her latest novel (BB), not only the title but the whole narration revolves round Hugo Baumgartner. It is the story of a man who always remains a wanderer, a stranger, a foreigner, a firanghee, wherever he goes. The detailed study of Desai's work reveals that the charge of female oriented novels is superficial and does not explain the right perspective on Anita Desai.

Secondly, it is also right that she has chosen a very limited landscape to paint through her novels. But that is her choice, because she is more concerned with the 'interior' self of human psyche. And this in itself contains a limitless subject. It is explored fully, not only in depth but in the intensity of emotion too. She arrests the impressionable moments in the life of her protagonists
along with the turmoils raging highly in the minds of these characters in an artistic manner. The narrowness of landscape is fully compensated for, in richness and intensity. Moreover, the social reality and phenomena of the world around, which is visible on a very small scale in her earlier novels has been growing immensely in her later work. Apart from the universal human problems, she has been dealing with the social realities of the times as well. The novel, *Village by the Sea* depicts the miserable poverty of the village people on the one side and the impact of industrialization of villages on these very poor people, on the other. The misery of Mr. Bose due to financial strains, the plight of the Artist (*GAT*), the problems of immigrants, the east west encounter, the sense of accommodation and adaptation (*BBB*), the loss of identity and individuality (*BB*) have been portrayed realistically in the texture of her creative work. Alongwith, come the complexities of modern life - the strained human relationships at all levels, the lack of faith and communication - all these and many more problems stare us in the face when we read Desai's novels carefully. The social problems like beggary, drug addiction, prostitution, theft, murder, etc., also cover a sufficient scape on the pages of her later novels. Her latest novel, *Baumgartner's Bombay* is a miniature form of individual and the social form of human world around with all its plus and minus points.
The reader in general feels that most of the critical work, as shown above, concentrates upon the thematic aspects of Desai's novels. In various anthologies and full length studies also the critics have mostly dealt with her work in general and some have interpreted her novels individually from different angles. The main focus of these critics has often been on the pattern of her fiction, characterization, themes, feminine sensibility, etc. A recently published full length study by Usha Bande (1988) interprets her novels up to In Custody, from the psychological point of view. The main concern of this study is the character and conflict which is quite revealing.

Occasionally, we do find a few comments upon the form of her presentation of themes and language also. Hers is the language of the interior, the subjectivity, the intensity of emotion, fertile imagination, spontaneity of expression, etc. Such remarks have also been observed while going through the critical evaluation of Desai's novels individually. Desai herself claims in an interview that when any thought develops fully in her mind and takes its proper shape, it urges her strongly to come out in the form of writing. And unless she does it, she is not relieved mentally. We learn that it is due to her inner compulsion, that she writes so instinctively.
But most of the literary criticism of her work often leaves aside the close scrutiny of the very basis of this literary art, i.e., the language and its various components. This aspect needs to be explored further. The present study makes an attempt to analyse the language of psychological conflict in the selected novels of Desai. How the words help in building and creating the atmosphere of the mind, the mounting of mental tension, how it reaches its acme, and finally, the crumbling fall of that tension are the various stages of analysis. Recently this area (stylistic analysis of language) has drawn the attention of many literary scholars. There are some unpublished theses on the stylistic analysis of individual works of Desai as well. A full length study published by Dr. Kunj Bala (1989) focuses on the relationship between language and theme in Desai's work with plenty of original examples from her novels. The particular aspects of imagery, symbol, myth, verbal patterns linked with the themes have all been studied in great detail. That shows a good awareness and a beginning in the area yet mostly overlooked and unexplored. The present study deals neither with purely thematic aspect of her work, nor does it deal with the aspect of language in isolation. It tries to explore and establish a close relationship between these two aspects of Desai's work.
2.4 Major Works of Anita Desai

This section of the chapter presents interpretation of all those major works of Desai to date, which have not been included in the list of detailed analysis, from a psychological perspective. Here they are presented in a chronological order.

2.4.1 Voices in the City

An Interpretation

In the novel Voices in the City (1965), the city of Calcutta stands out as an integral force and needs to be reckoned along with the major protagonists: Nirode, Monisha, Amla and the mother. The important themes of Desai's fiction like: the portrayal of the inner landscape, the sense of alienation leading to withdrawal, constant quest for identity, strained human relationships, etc., have been foregrounded very effectively in this novel also.

Nirode, the major protagonist of this novel, represents the people who are never satisfied in life. Rather they are constantly torn between the two worlds: the ideal and the real. Quite interestingly, Nirode never craves for success and he loses his identity in search of his destiny. For Nirode things are never packed, tickets are never bought, trains run off but he cannot move. He simply wants to see
what lies beyond suffering and finally realizes the futi-
ality and meaninglessness of all human endeavours to achieve
success.

The novel begins with the departure of train.
Nirode's younger brother, Arun had left in the train, whom
he had always envied. The train moves and Nirode cries in
despair:

Unfair, life is unfair-and how faint
and senseless it sounded in all that
tumult of traffic and commerce about
him. In the darkness of that un-
fairness he saw Arun's future as an
undimming brightness. (p.8)

Greatly dissatisfied with the situation, Nirode
wanted to escape. Arun had succeeded in escaping but he
could not. He chose a different pretext to run away from
the humiliations and envy, and always desires: "three drinks
a night and a room of his own". (p.11)

Nirode always felt that: "... aloneness alone was
the sole natural condition... the treasure worth treasur-
ing." (p.24)

No company anywhere could make him feel at home.
Having developed strained relations with his mother, even
a letter from her made him upset. His self-confidence was
lost and he always felt shaky. Being an over-sensitive soul,
he could not be easily lured with any prospect of success.
Instead, he always wished to fail:

'I want (it) to fail-quickly. Then
I want to see if I have the spirit to
start moving again, towards my next
failure... step by step to rock bottom.
I want to explore that depth... to get
there without that meaningless climbing.
I want to descend, quickly'. (p.40)

A little success would make him feel 'suffocated'
and 'happiness' he never aspired for. At David's expression of happiness Nirode shouts:

Happy ? ... What worse death than
at the hands of happiness? Anyone
who feels happy deserves to die... the
world would come to a stand still... (p.94)

The image of the train, frequently used in the novel, represents not only the moving wheels but also the running time. Nirode's hatred for his mother is so strong that he will never allow his mother to come to his house if he ever has one. The lack of love, faith and communication make him hate even his family name. He tells Amla: 'I've given up using a family name, Amla, and I want no more of family life.' (p.156)

Nirode feels alienated not only from his mother, his friends but also from the city of Calcutta. The incident of Monisha's death shatters him further. The mother comes to the city over the death of Monisha and Nirode goes to receive her. He wants to embrace her. The death of his sister has taught him the value of love and understanding, but his
mother drew herself away oddly that made Nirode bloodless. He has been rejected, in despair he feels: "... She no longer needed him, nor her other children. She was a woman fulfilled..." (p.252)

The death of Monisha had not made her depressed. She came there just for the sake of a formality and to wash her hands off finally. Soon she unpacks her suitcase and receives Amla very coldly. In that moment of great disappointment Nirode talks to Amla about their mother:

'She is Kali, the goddess and the demon are one... She has watched the sacrifice and she is satisfied. Don't you see, Amla, the satisfaction on her lips?' (p.255)

Monisha in the form of her diary presents her personal point of view on people and the things around. After her marriage in a big joint family, she had tried her best to adapt herself in the new environment. But she failed miserably. Being a quiet nature, she loves silence around but the house is 'full of people', 'many children', 'full of noise' all the time. Her inner consciousness works in a different direction than that of Nirode. Monisha herself informs the reader: "...if he is all interior, I am all exterior, and where can we possibly meet?" (p.111)

Monisha, who had already been alienated from her mother, finds herself alienated from her own family too. She
keeps herself busy in the work and feels that alone she could work better. She also realizes that alone she feels 'more whole'. The loneliness in that full house is not accessible. She finds something wrong with the city itself. Every one appears to be miserable and Monisha wonders:

Is this what life is then, my life? 
Only a conundrum that I shall brood over forever with passion and pain, 
ever to arrive at a solution? (pp.124,125)

When the family accuses her of theft, even Jiben's (her husband) saying that she should have asked him before taking the money, her soul shivers with disgust inside. She quietly withdraws behind the barred window of her room. She simply wants silence and she shouts at the city of Calcutta:

City of Kali, goddess of Death? Not one word from you... not a sound. No shriek, no groan... I come here for silence... cease your moaning and wailing... (p.138)

The people of her family live a practical life. They have 'indoor minds'. Though she withdraws quietly but we can smell a sense of revolt when Monisha tells Amla to 'always go in the opposite direction'.

Finally, disgusted at every step, Monisha revolts and takes revenge by committing suicide. Nirode understands her now, but it is too late. Inspite of her family's objections, Nirode takes away her body and feels:

She must be taken away, unaccompanied
by them, in peace... for a few hours
before morning, she could lie in the
quiet house in undisturbed solitude...
They wanted only to give her, before
the total annihilation, a little
respite, a little solitude... (p.247)

Amla's arrival in Calcutta and her excitement with
the prospect of a good job is soon diminished in the engul­
fing darkness of the place. Her dreams are shattered at
every step. She fails miserably on every front. The death
of Monisha further shocks her mind and she feels herself
guilty of her death. She cries in utter despair:

...how it was that she had done nothing
about the uneasiness and suspicions she
felt whenever she met Monisha, why she
had not taken her away from such blatant
oppression and destruction... (p.254)

The city of Calcutta proves a vigorous force in
shaping the destiny of all the characters in different
measure. They all find this city representing life at various
levels. Nirode finds:

Calcutta-like the rattle of the reckless
train... the very pulsebeat in its
people's veined wrists...Down below funerals
passed by... Wedding marquees shivered in
stripes of red and white bunting, and blue
neon tubing... (pp. 41,42)

To Dharma's inner consciousness, the city resembles
a tomb:

...it (Calcutta) is dead, and I do not
return to visit a tomb... I see it sinking
inch by inch into the marsh... (p.53)
Amla considers the city of Calcutta as a destructive force: "... this city, this city of yours, it conspires against all who wish to enjoy it..." (p.153)

She felt, darkness in all its shades of meaning was the true colour of Calcutta and brightness only a temporary illusion. Tripathi, while commenting on this aspect of Calcutta city writes:

There is an atmosphere of emotional and spiritual stagnation. The city symbol employed in the novel contributes to the wasteland theme. (Tripathi, 1986: 29)

2.4.2 Bye-Bye Blackbird

An Interpretation

The main current of this novel Bye-Bye Blackbird (1971) runs along two edges: the feeling of loneliness leading to alienation, and the sense of accommodation. An individual set against the adverse social circumstances, though familiar, yet mentally feels strange and disappointed. The three divisions of the novel, 'arrival', 'discovery and recognition' and 'departure' are the three different facets of human psyche which have been explored in depth and that lends meaning to the novel itself. The cross-culture problem, a theme frequently used by the Indian writers in English, too forms an important feature of the novel. The locale set here is that of England - the country of white people. The
Blackbird is an Indian Immigrant in England, Adit. The real but disappointing picture of these black immigrants has been painted with heart rending words and images.

Adit, the major protagonist of the novel, has settled abroad. He has married an English lady, Sarah, who becomes quite familiar with the Indian culture through Adit. The second individual is Dev—Adit's friend who has just landed in England for his higher studies in Economics. From the beginning to the end of the novel, it is Dev, who shifts his attitude and convictions to the maximum, and this is what presents a pleasant surprise to the reader in the end.

Initially, Dev feels very uncomfortable in the flat of Adit and Sarah. He is quite disgusted and calls London a 'jungly city'. For twenty-two years he had read about England in the books, he had become familiar with everything that England stood for. So much so that: "the books that had been his meat and drink, the English books that had formed at least one half of his conscious existence". (p. 11)

But gradually, all the magic of this familiarity and grandeur of England and its culture disappears. On the streets he is a complete stranger and 'all was strange to him'. Unable to bear the insult of being addressed as a 'wog', even by the school children, Dev got furious and remarked: "I wouldn't live in a country where I was insulted and unwanted...(I came here) To study... I will go
back to India... (p.17). The exquisite beauties of England though impress Dev to a great extent still he finds the "climate stinking." (p.55) He hates too much secrecy of the place. Here:

... every one is a stranger and lives in hiding. They live silently and invisibly. It would happen nowhere: in India. (p.56)

He is utterly disappointed with:

The English habit of keeping all doors and windows tightly shut... It never fails to make Dev uneasy to walk down a street he knows to be heavily populated and yet find it utterly silent, deserted - a cold wasteland of brick and tile. (p.63)

The more he discovers the more fallacies are shattered. Finally, the money running short, he tries to get some job. But every time his being an Indian proves an obstacle and he feels mentally disturbed. Dev falls ill and suffers from home sickness. Though Adit and Sarah look after him every carefully, they even take him to the country-side for the week-end but still Dev does not recover from the shock of being looked upon as a stranger. The remarks: "Hey, you stranger, what do you think you're doing in my lane?" (p.162), deeply shock his inner consciousness.

Gradually, the beauty of countryside helps him to recover fully, the nostalgia also disappears. The sense of alienation, the strange locale, the place where 'every one
wears a mask on the face, no longer depress him. He has learnt to accommodate, to compromise, just as Adit had earlier learnt it. By the time we reach the last part of the novel, the reader is surprised to see the change of place. It was Adit, who was returning to India, and Dev had decided to stay back.

Closely related to Dev is the psyche of Adit and Sarah, which has been explored in depth in this novel. Adit had married an English lady, Sarah. He has perfectly accommodated himself in this foreign situation. Quite interestingly, more than Adit, Sarah is willing to visit India and she never loses any opportunity to talk about India and her relations there. Delving deeper into the mind of Sarah, we feel that Sarah herself is a little island where she lives alone.

But no one recognizes her individuality. By marrying an Indian, she is often teased: "Hurry, hurry, Mrs. Scurry!" (p.32) Suffering from the acute sense of alienation in her own society she even fails to know:

Who was she – Mrs. Sen who had been married in a red and gold Banaras brocade sari...or Mrs. Sen, the Head's secretary...known for her efficiency? (p.34)

She felt as if she was just playing different roles at different times of the day. She wanted to live with
sincerity. A highly sensitive soul and a determined lady, she finally resolves:

... she would sacrifice anything, anything at all, in order to maintain... order and discipline in her house... If she allowed this chaos to reflect upon their marriage, she knew its fragments would not remain jangling together but would scatter, drift and crumble. (p.200)

And when Adit decides to go back to India she does not contradict him. Very courageously she manages everything, though she is pregnant. The decision of Adit was welcomed by all his friends. Now Sarah felt:

It was her English self that was receding and fading and dying... she must say good-bye...to England, because England would remain as it was... within the scope of a return visit. (p.221)

Sarah's courage and sense of accommodation become symbolic of human urge of acceptance and adaptation on a larger scale. Another representation of this sense of acceptance and compromise is Adit, who has settled down in England and lives quite comfortably with a belief: "I love it here. I'm so happy here, I hardly notice the few drawbacks." (p.17)

Adit is the one who ignores and avoids all insults and the inhuman behaviour meted out to Indians. Instead,
he becomes very optimistic at times and tells Dev:

'Oh, I think gold, Dev, gold.
I see gold- everywhere - gold
like Sarah's golden hair. It's
my favourite colour...''(p.19)

Gradually, Adit too suffers from psychological
strain and feels as if he has become a man of different
parts and sometimes:

...the life of an alien appears
enthrallingly rich and beautiful
to him...{(at other times) he feels
he can never bear to be the
unwanted immigrant but must return
to his own land... where he has, at
least, a place in the sun, security,
status and freedom. (p.86)

The insults and the inhuman treatment by the English
people changed this great admirer of English culture into a
frustrated soul: "He felt drained of the brightness of
life, as though the blood had ceased to flow inside him."  
(p.175) Adit soon became nostalgic. He talked of his home,
mother, flowers, everything. Even Sarah: "... began to see
now what heaved and whirled inside Adit during the long
evenings when he sat silent and unoccupied." (p.184)

Adit himself could not speak with surety when his
inner self had begun to change, it was a slow process. He
discovered what disgusted him most was: "not the occasional
slights and insults directed against him as a stranger...
but the placidity, the munificence and the ease of England."

Now, he earnestly longed with pain: "to see the fire-works and oil-lamps of a Diwali night again,..." (p.185)

On his wedding anniversary, he asked Sarah to wear a sari and a gold necklace which made her quite uneasy and Adit shouted with anger:

_ you _ English people... never accept anything but your own drab, dingy standards and your own dull, boring ways. Anything else looks clownish to you,... (p.193)

The news of India's war with Pakistan further disturbed his mind. The long accumulated anger for England and love for his native land sprung up on the surface. He blurted out noisily:

It's over... England! ... I've done with England now. Sarah, I'm going back... To India... home... Come Sarah,... I can't live here any more... I've got to go home and start living a real life...'My son will be born in India'. (PP. 203, 204)

Finally, Adit decided to return to India. Sarah also felt happy. All their friends came to the station to see them off. They wanted him to convey their messages, deliver their parcels, and send back their messages. His close friend Jasbir, clasping Adit's shoulder, broke out
at last:

'I'd like to make sure you actually leave. I can't believe it otherwise— you, the most Pukka sahib of all, going back to India and leaving all the Kala sahibs here.' (p.226)

Adit laughed and said that he was leaving all to fate, he was fast becoming a Hindu. He went off, but Dev who always had to go back, remained there, settled down with a good job and he too paid his salute to the going ones.

2.4.3 Where shall we go this Summer?

An Interpretation

The interrogative used as the title of the novel, Where shall we go this Summer? (1975), leaves a big question on the mind of the reader. The very name is suggestive of an escape. It is actually an escape from the summer, that in this context stands not only for the scorching heat outside but also for the raging inner tension, frustration, disappointment, mental discord and disharmony of the inner consciousness of the major protagonist of this novel, Sita.

The three divisions of the book represent the three corners of the consciousness of Sita. Living in a small flat in Bombay with her family of four children, and waiting for the fifth, she feels mentally disturbed and
finds life unlivable. The dull and drab routine, lack of communication with her husband and children make her realize the futility and meaninglessness of life. She fails to understand why life must be lived if it has no purpose. By her side stands Raman, her husband, who is a very practical man. Raman has great capacity for accommodation, he believes firmly that 'life must be continued' and he does not find any problem with living at all.

Sita, on the other hand, is unable to accept this complacent view of life. She feels disgusted to see everyone in the house just waiting for the meals. The meals are either being cooked or served or eaten or planned or even waited for. She accuses Raman's friends who: "are nothing—nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matter...Animals." (p.47)

Sita had come from a family where: "meals were hurried out of the way as quickly as possible." (p.49) Nobody even bothered, what they ate. The tension is always built at home due to their different attitudes towards the outside reality. Raman telling her all the time, 'you must' and Sita always replying, 'No, I can't', which always creates unpleasantness around.

Sita had come to the mainland with a hope of finding solidity, security, and joy but she also finds, instead, the jungle law of the survival of the fittest. The
scene of a wounded eagle being tortured by the black crows shocks Sita. She tries her best to scare away the crows but in vain. The children fighting and enacting film scene, the ahyas quarrelling in the street, Menaka spoiling and destroying her paintings, all hurt Sita very deeply. She is a highly sensitive soul: "nothing ever closed for her; ripped open, the wound remained open." (P.44)

Such incidents of violence around disintegrate her psyche and in that condition she desires to stop the birth of her fifth baby. She wants to keep it unborn. To withdraw away from all the madness, she promptly answers 'To Manori', to a query from her husband, 'where shall we go this summer?' With a hope of finding peace of mind and quiet atmosphere, she goes to the Island along with her two children, Menaka and Karan.

The Island of Manori unfolds another corner of Sita's consciousness. She had earlier lived there as a young, proud girl before her marriage with Raman. Moses, the caretaker of the house in Manori feels happy to see the Mem-sahib back after 21 years of waiting, and he had been paid all these years just for waiting. When Moses hands Sita the: "key to the lock of - what? She had known, she thought, but now she saw she didn't." (p.28)

She had landed in Manori with the conviction that it was a magic land, where she could stop the birth of her fifth child. On reaching there Sita's conscious self swings
backward and forward like a pendulum. Her past memories and experiences haunt her mind constantly. As a young girl along with her parents' family she:

... had been blown towards the island, that first time...rippling with enthusiasm, bounding with anticipation, sparkling with hope...
It was an auspicious landing (after partition). (p.59)

Then she had lived a very unusual life. Their house, gifted by an English friend of her father, was named 'Jeevan Ashram' and it had really become the soul of the people around. Her father became popular and was known as 'the second Gandhi, Baba Ji'. He revolutionized the whole life of the Islanders. On every front, religious, political, social and even medicinal, he proved to be Massiha of the people, they worshipped him. Various mysteries used to haunt Sita's inner self even then. She could not understand - was Rekha her step sister? Did her mother die or did she run away to Benaras? Why did her mother leave her children? From where did her father get those jewels which he used to grind and give to the people as medicine? Similar questions always troubled her mind. But she never dared to ask anything either to her father or to her sister. Then her father died penniless, the Massiha of the people died.
There seemed to be no meaning left in her life, no faith, just waiting, waiting for what she knew not and she simply turned to be: "a living monument to Waiting ... not knowing what else could be done with one's long life, too long life..." (pp. 55, 99)

Then Raman came, married Sita and brought her to the mainland, to the solidity and security, by closing that chapter of her past life. Now she realized that the appearance of solidity and security was a mere crust of dull tedium of hopeless disappointment. Her inner self and faith was shattered completely. Now she had decided and: "she refused to walk another step. She would turn, go back and find the island once more." (p.58)

Moses and his wife Miriam were the linking tie between her first life of the Island and this second return after 21 years. Sita suddenly becomes aware of the present reality. She feels everything has changed completely. There seems to be no wonder, no magic and no miracle either in the place. Another reality too shocks her to the bottom. The children are hungry, they want food but Moses informs that 'there is nothing to cook', and Sita finds it too bitter to bear. She tries her best to keep the body and soul of her children together but even they fail to understand her. She prefers the creative element, spontaneity, imagination but
here in the Island also storm, destruction, survival of the fittest prevail. The children too betray her. They find father more useful. Menaka writes to Raman to come and take them to Bombay, without even asking her mother. She is deeply hurt. Raman comes, the children are excited to go to Bombay. They ask him about their friends, admissions, toys but they don't mention a thing of the island, as if there was nothing to say anything. Even the other two children in Bombay did not remember Sita. The thought of betrayal by her own children makes her soul groan silently. She is baffled. For twenty years, in Bombay, she had tried to connect but only to realize that the chain 'can only throttle, choke, and enslave'.

Life became painful, pacing at slow speed, she realized:

Life in their flat... had been right and proper, natural and acceptable; it was this so called 'escape' to the island that was madness. (p.102)

Raman had come second time to provide her safety and security. They compromised, Sita understood and she now got ready to go back to Bombay. She was confused: "How could she tell, how decide? Which half of her life was real and which unreal? Which of her selves was true, which false? All she knew was that there were two periods of her life, each in direct opposition to the other." (p.153)
Then the shape of the future flashed on her mind, the fifth baby, the infant keeping her busy again: "All was bright, all was blurred, all was in a whirl. Life had no periods, no stretches. It simply swirled around, muddling and confusing, leading nowhere." (p.154)

Finally, she went back to Bombay to her mainland flat.

2.4.4 Games at Twilight and Other Stories

Introduction

A collection of eleven stories, Games at Twilight and other Stories (1978), presents a rich panorama of memorable characters. Basically they are all highly sensitive souls playing upon the strings of life with mixed notes of joys and sorrows. They have to struggle hard constantly, not only in the world around but even within their inner selves. Through these short stories Desai has rendered a full microscopic view of the inner reality of these characters very artistically.

A little familiarity with some of these souls is enough to make the reader not only identify himself with these individuals but also help him to involve himself and participate intensely in their woes and suffering, whom we meet everywhere in alleys and lanes around us. A brief introduction to some of the stories is presented here.
Games at Twilight

In this story the mental state of Ravi, the child protagonist, is portrayed very realistically. Initially, the parents are hesitant to allow their children to play in the scorching heat outside. But gradually, the soft pleadings, promises and the earnest desire of the children to play out, win over the hearts of their parents and they decide to play hide and seek.

After the usual unwillingness to play the 'it', Raghu does begin to play. In order to hide and illude others, Ravi goes inside the garage - a storehouse of all the broken things - and remains there in the dark for a long time. When no one finds him out, Ravi feels delighted and victorious. Soon after the din of the playing children stops, no more efforts of finding him out are made and Ravi "shivered with delight, with self congratulations. Also with fear." (p.5) Soon the fear wins over Ravi's earlier delight and he thinks it would have been much better to be found by Raghu and to be one with other children. He would have been happier among his cousins and familiar surroundings rather than to be inside these dark, lonely and strange surroundings. Soon the temporary joy and self pride is replaced by fears and tears.

With fear and hope in mind he rushes out and cries
at the top of his voice, 'I have won, won, won'. But it is too late, every one stares at him. The self pity and children's indifference bring tears in his eyes. He feels sad to realize that he had been not only out of sight but out of mind as well. He is further disappointed to think:

... he had been forgotten, left out... The ignominy of being forgotten - how could he face it? He felt his heart go heavy and ache inside him unbearably. He lay down... on the damp grass, crushing his face into it, no longer crying, silenced by a terrible sense of his insignificance. (p.10)

Now he did not want to join the children for the 'funeral game' which they were going to play.

Private Tuition by Mr. Bose

This story reveals the constant struggle raging the inner consciousness of Mr. Bose. He is never able to enjoy his family life due to his meagre salary. In order to supplement his income, he has to take on some private tuitions, though unwillingly. The thought of the ever growing needs of his family always disturbs him.

The first student, who is unable to pronounce Sanskrit Shloka's correctly and is more worried about going home after the time is over, really disheartens Mr. Bose. He feels very upset and he goes to the kitchen to have a
few moments of relaxation before the second in number, appears at the balcony:

He wanted so much to touch her (his wife) hair, the strand that lay over her shoulder in a black loop, and did not know how to — she was so busy. 'Your hair is coming loose, he said. 'Go, go', she warned. 'I hear the next one coming... Quickly he pulled himself away from the doorpost and walked back to his station, tense with unspoken words and unexpressed emotion. (p.15)

The second student, a girl, recites poetry, but Mr Bose's heart is sad and he becomes more involved in the 'red-nailed feet', and 'hemming of the saree', so that he does not hear anything at all. Moreover, the child is crying in the kitchen. The mother's inability to pacify the child further distracts his mind. The non-serious attitude of the girl also annoys him:

He let fall the red pencil with a discouraged gesture. So, in complete discord, the lesson broke apart, they all broke apart and for a while Mr. Bose was alone on the balcony... (p.19)

Finally, the student left, the child was asleep, Mr. and Mrs Bose reconciled at the dinner with their lot and the story ends with their usual laughter and teasing.
Studies in the Park

A sensitive school boy, Sonu, is the main protagonist of this story. He has to prepare for his examination, but no one at home realizes his need for a quiet and peaceful atmosphere. He is mentally tortured by the 'wild, maddening noise of the family throughout the day'. Everyone expects good results from him, his father constantly reminds him that he has to secure a first class, or he won't be able to get a good job, but no one helps him to study undisturbed. He discovers that even streets are quieter than his home.

Finally, Sonu decides to go to the park regularly and study there. Many other students, either having no home or being driven out like Sonu, also study in the park. At home no body even knows the meaning of being quiet, the children have never even heard the word 'it amazes and puzzles them'.

Soon after, Sonu realized that the park was a mini world in a compressed form. Different people with different motives always thronged the park. They spent their days, even their nights in the park. Gradually, he was accustomed to the ways of the park and he kept its timings. His father's permanent reminder that he must get a first class, finally, led to a situation that Sonu: "read without seeing,
slept without sleeping." (p.29)

The constant tension between Sonu's desires and the outside facts of life finally landed Sonu in a very pathetic state. He informs the readers:

... I felt as if we were all dying in the park, that when we entered the examination hall it would be to be declared officially dead... (p.29)

Gradually, life acquired a new meaning for Sonu. It became a perpetual search and not a mere race. This new awareness gave him great satisfaction and now he wandered about the park: "as freely as a prince in his palace garden..." (p.33)

Sale

This story portrays the inner suffering and miserable plight of an artist, who is highly praised and commended for his art everywhere, but is left to starve. This artist gets only shallow promises of bright future but his present is very dark and ugly.

Some strangers, after fixing an appointment visit the artist. They admire various techniques of his art, the focused and the unfocused elements, the colour scheme, the ideas depicted, and all of them smilingly liked and enjoyed his paintings. He too hopes to earn some money by selling off his paintings. But soon his hopes dash to the ground,
the moment they walk out with a mere promise of inviting him to see their house, the size of the painting that would suit their walls. He assures them, for the sake of a few coins, that "... I will paint snow. I will paint the Himalayas for you..." (p.48)

But the visitors tell him to paint when he is in the mood, because then the painting will be good. The artist responds quickly:

'I am in the mood now',... I am always in the mood, don't you see?... They laugh. The engine stutters to life... he clings to the handle, thrusts his head in, his eyes blazing. 'And will you give me an advance'? he asks tensely, 'I need money my friend'. (P.48)

They all run away in a car, the girl wrapping herself in white shawl, one man silent in embarrassment and another just turning the inside empty pockets of his shirts saying: "...we only came to see, I didn't bring any. I'm sorry." (p.49)

Farewell Party

This short story portrays very realistically the hypocrisy of modern life. On the one hand, it depicts the tough life of individuals and on the other it presents an exaggerated warmth of guests on the party platform where all appears to be glassy, rosy and perfumed with the
sweetest tongues, particularly, if it happens to be a farewell party.

Bina, the main character of this story, a tall and pale woman has a very hard life running between the hospital and the household chores for the last fifteen years because her eldest child is a severe spastic case. And due to her over busy life:

The town had scarcely come to know her, for its life turned in the more jovial circles of Mah-jong, bridge, coffee parties, club evenings and, occasionally, a charity show in aid of the Red Cross. (P.83)

Bina had stayed in the town for five years:

Although time dragged heavily in their household, agonizingly slow... she did not know how she had crawled through the day and if she would crawl through another, her back almost literally broken... (P.84)

Presently the Raman family was moving to Bombay on account of transfer, so this farewell party was arranged. The Commissioner's wife, who had hardly met Bina twice on such places wished and showed concern that they should have lived for some more time. Miss Dutta, another guest also expressed great shock over their departure: "... you and Bina have been so popular... what are we going to do without you?" (p.92)
Many other guests like Mr. Bose felt really upset to think about Raman and Bina’s absence. These were the same ladies who had never been so vociferous in her company, so easy, so warm, though they did not know of Bina’s difficulties at all. The men too did not lag behind. They congratulated Raman profusely on his promotion in a great metropolitan city, though in their hearts they all envied him, his promotion.

They talked as if they had known each other for years. One mother confided to Bina, winning her heart forever: “Now that you are leaving, I can talk to you about it at last; did you know my Vinod is sweet on your Tara?” (p.95)

At last the show at the party was over, good bye had been said, Bina and Raman were to be left alone for packing... just then the doctors and their wives arrived, they behaved as if they were almost a part of that self defensive family, the closest to them in sympathy. They were made comfortable, drinks were offered to them, another round of chat and drinks... One lady even sang on the sad notes:

Father, the boat is carrying me away,
Father, it is carrying me away from home, (p.73)

and:

the eyes of her listeners, sitting tensely in that grassy, inky dark glazed with tears that were compounded
equally of drink, relief and regret. (p.97)

2.4.5 The Village by the Sea

An Interpretation

The central theme of the novel, The Village by the Sea (1982) reveals that the wheel of time turns and turns ceaselessly. Those who adapt themselves to the new conditions and environment survive and others are left behind. The main protagonists here are young children, Lila and Hari, whose psychological growth is explored in depth throughout the novel. They have two younger sisters, an ailing mother and a drunken father. The inmates of the village Thul, they neither own any land nor do they have any other source of income. The big question of survival always stares them in the face. The paucity and poverty of worst type are reflected through the picture of Hari's house in this village. Desai claims that this is a real story except the names of the characters.

Living in a nearby village of Bombay these people have never thought of any other type of life. The permanent wheel of time keeps on moving but the simple innocent people of the sea beach village Thul, remain untouched with the change around. Hari, who is always in search of some job, finds a ray of hope when he sees some tin shacks appearing in the village. He is told that the factories will be built
That would provide many jobs, but the happiness soon disappears on realizing the fact that he is not trained in any job.

On the advice of a political activist, a protest march (against the building of factories and snatching away of agricultural land) is planned to Bombay. Though Hari is not affected in either way, yet he feels:

Here was the chance to go that he had been waiting for all along. (He is in a fix) Did he dare to take it—a young, penniless boy who had never been ANYWHERE? (p.65) (Emphasis mine)

The incident of Pinto's (pet dog) death and the news of his father's debt further disturb his mind. Finally:

He got up... turned away... He would get away... To Bombay. And never come back to this sad house, his frightened sisters, his ill mother, his drunken father. He would leave them and run, run as far away as he could go. (p.66)

The next morning Hari reached Rewas, it was the dawn of a new life. The transitional stage had come, he had left the old familiar and disgusting life, and was beginning to start the new one. There was NO TURNING back, alright, but the fear of the new, the unknown too frightened his little mind. He got baffled and:

was silenced by the awe when he saw the city of Bombay looming
over their boats and the oily
green waves... in ALL HIS LIFE
Hari had NOT seen so much traffic
as he saw in that ONE moment on
that ONE street. (pp.73,74) (Emphasis
mine)

He realized that: "Here in Bombay it seemed women
did not trust men to manage for them, and they were deter­
mined to organise their affairs themselves." (p.76)

Hari, actually, did not belong to the march.
Moreover, he felt:

that he belonged neither to one
group nor the other. He belonged
to no one, nowhere... He was alone
in Bombay. (p.81)

When the procession was over, he tried to reach
the address of his benefactor Mr. de Silva with the pros­
pect of finding a suitable job but in vain. Finally, he
got the job in the kitchen of a cheap restaurant. The
owner was a very kind fellow. The next door watchmender
also soon became friendly with Hari and made him his
apprentice. Though Hari remained occupied all the time,
yet his inner self always longed to meet his own people. He
informed them of his whereabouts and also the desire to see
them soon. The escape from his family had not made Hari
cruel enough to forget his native place and his family.
His people in the village too waited eagerly for Hari's
return. The life would be much easier with Hari, they thought.
His life became very hard at the Krishna Eating Houses:

... the lights were never put out in the city... Hari's tired eyes longed for the deep darkness and the quiet nights of his seaside village. He could hardly remember the soft sounds of the sea or the wind in the coconut palms... it was all so long ago and far away. He had only been away for one season, just the few months between winter and summer, but it seemed like a lifetime. (pp. 103, 104)

The monsoon set in and it became flooded all around. Hari kept on waiting for Diwali to go home. Mr. Panwallah assured him that being young, he can learn and grow, he can adapt himself to the changing conditions of life. The wheel of time turned again, the monsoon was over, the things got better just as earlier they had gone worse. The experience made Hari wiser:

He was no longer the frightened, confused (an escapist) boy... He knew he could make choices and decisions now... he had known that he belonged to Thul and that he would go back. It was wonderful to be able to choose what you wanted to do in life, and choose he would. (p.130)

Just like Sita (WSWGS), Bim (CLD), Hari too acknowledged that he could live only in togetherness and not in isolation. He returned, related all experiences of his life in Bombay to his people. He also told them,
how he longed for his own people in the village. It made him realize, he was a Thul boy and would always be one. With his newly gained wisdom, he tells his village boys:
"...we have to change too, we shall have to become different as well." (p.146)

He had learnt the principle of adaptation himself and wanted to teach the same to others. He always remembered Mr. Panwallah's words: "The wheel turns and turns and turns", and he could well understand their meaning now. He also brought time-consciousness to the timelessness of Thul. The change is visible at family front also. The mother gets well in the hospital and is brought home back on Divali. His father also feels better and with the return of Hari, happiness spreads around. The novel ends with a similar scene of morning prayer on the sea beach Rocks of worship, as it began.

2.4.6 In Custody

An Interpretation

'... they should take, who have the power
And they should keep who can.'

(William Wordsworth)

This quote from the novel, In Custody (1984), actually represents the hidden message of the narrative itself. Desai, a novelist of the inner landscape, has embraced yet another dimension in this novel. To some
extent, thematically also it presents some deviation from her earlier novels. Whereas her earlier novels are mostly female oriented, where one or the other angle of female psyche is explored deeply, in this novel the main focus is shifted towards the male psychology. That is not to say that women characters here serve merely a secondary purpose. Nay, they too have prominent positions which can't be overlooked, but the major protagonists are the representative of male psyche.

The deep exploration of Deven's psyche, a professor in a rural college of Mirapore, is the main concern of this novel. His miserable plight can be judged from the fact that he is often addressed as a 'two cigarette man', who can't afford even a whole packet of cigarettes. A constant tug of war raging between his inner world of fantasy and the hard realities of life, virtually lands him on the verge of starvation. His childhood dreams about a life of affluence had already been shattered and he felt himself:

'Withered as the last leaf upon the tree,
Shaken by the chill blast of winter,' (p.12)

This lone individual is set against an adverse social environment. His earnest longing for Nur's poetry on one hand, and a busy life of meagre means on the other hand,
always drift his inner self apart. His friend Murad (meaning desire) entices him with a grand opportunity to interview his favourite urdu poet Nur, and publishing his article in the special issue of his journal.

Deven feels tempted with the idea and hopes to realize his long cherished dream. At times in order to satisfy his inner urge, he even leaves his wife, Sarla, and his child to meet and interview Nur. On other occasions the physical restraints prove very tough and he runs away from Delhi, never to return.

The first opportunity to meet Nur, snatched with great difficulty, disappoints him greatly: "Deven had expected... him living either surrounded by elderly, sage and dignified litterateurs or else entirely alone, in divine isolation." (p.51)

Instead, he discovered this great urdu poet was always followed by the cheap, popular people of the area, who only came to eat and drink. The shabby atmosphere and the inhuman behaviour of the people around shocked Deven miserably.

Utterly disappointed in his venture, when Deven wants to leave the project, Murad does not allow him to do so. He, rather, suggests him the means to reach Nur and also fixes up his appointment with the poet. He advises Deven to buy a tape recorder in order to become a custodian
of the live-voice of the revered poet. He also suggests him how to procure funds from his college for the project.

Poor Deven who till now "had known only one way to deal with life and that was to be low and remain invisible." (p.14) He finds himself gradually, but cleverly, entrapped by Murad with his alluring and farsighted plans. Deven's frequent visits to Delhi prove utterly disgusting. And he starts considering himself a trapped animal without any hope of getting free of the cage. He cannot even find fresh air to breathe. Finally, 'Nur', the very name became the threatening topic which Deven always wanted to avoid.

Soon, Deven found himself completely shattered and cowering under the insults from all corners. He tried to leave the project on one pretext or the other, but could not. One or the other person came to help him, leaving him baffled and he could not understand:

Were these people really helping him to succeed in a unique and wonderful enterprise or simply locking him up more and more firmly in a barred trap? And was the trap set by Murad, by Siddiqui, or by Nur and his wives? All he knew was that he who had set out to hunt Nur down was being hunted down himself, the prey. (P.143)

Even Chiku, the amateur technical assistant, accuses Deven with wasting away his time and wants his pay. He even threatens to go back and wants the busfare.
The demands from Nur's family too come pouring in. Deven receives 'a letter of more demands' and a bill for five hundred rupees as rent of the room where his quiet meetings with Nur were arranged. Another bill comes for the payment of hospital charges for the medical treatment of Nur. One more letter of demand to cover the expenses on account of Nur's pilgrimage or the soul of Nur would not be saved, etc.

Confused and scared of all these demands and threats, Deven rushes to Murad with a hope of getting some financial help. But Murad too snubs him: "You have had all the fun, and all the honour - now you want payment on top of that?" (p.189)

Deven is completely ruined now in his venture. He neither could become the great custodian of immortal Urdu poetry of Nur, nor could he breathe freely the fresh air around. Instead, he himself became a trapped being, who always cried for freedom but could never attain it.

The free flow of language, the manner of massing detailed descriptions, the portrayal of life-like situations, cleverly chosen set of images and metaphors along with the select choice of lexis enhance the aesthetic appeal of the novel to a great extent.
2.4.7 Baumgartner's Bombay

An Interpretation

The latest novel of Anita Desai to date, Baumgartner's Bombay (1988), embraces yet another thematic aspect of her already versatile genius in a very artistic manner. The constant quest for identity, belonging, which has been dealt in some of her earlier novels like Bye-Bye Blackbird and the Village by the Sea on a small scale is further extended in this novel and it turns out to be the most dominating feature of this novel.

The pathetic tale of Hugo is rendered in heart-rending terms. History too, in its human form has been dug deep inch-by-inch and though unfamiliar with the surroundings of the novel in the beginning, the reader becomes not only familiar with them, but also becomes very confident by the time he reaches the last page of the book. The novel also comments upon the horrors of war.

Hugo Baumgartner, the main protagonist of the novel, had spent a very hard and pathetic childhood in pre-war Berlin. He came to Calcutta, with an introductory letter, in search of some business there. After some time he shifted to Bombay, but throughout his life, he remains a firanghi, a foreigner and is always suspected wherever he goes. Hugo always remained conscious of his outlandishness. He was
considered too dark for the Hitler's society, and now he proves too fair for India.

Hugo tried his best to adjust, to accept and be accepted, but failed miserably. Almost about 50 years of his long stay in India, had made him familiar with the land:

"Yet the eyes of the people who passed by glanced at him who was still strange and unfamiliar to them, and all said: Firanghi, foreigner." (p.19)

Finally, the cruel clutches of death relieved him not only from his mental agony but also from the sense of alienation. The very first page of the novel informs us about the brutal murder of Hugo, and the formalities which are completed hesitantly to cover up the scene. The rest of the novel portrays step by step the difficult life of Hugo through the reminiscences of Lottee, the oldest friend of Hugo.

Lotte was so much affected by Hugo's death that she could hardly control her movements. She discovered a packet of old letters from Hugo's room, and lost herself in reading and remembering everything. Gradually, she became unaware of the mess that she had made around: "The coffee spilt, the cards scattered, the bottle emptied, the glass lying on its side." (P.3)

Lotte tried to know who had written those letters and she found some were signed mama, some mutti, some mü.
The language of these letters tried to invade her mind and she tried hard to prevent that invading:

Its sweetness, the assault of sweetness, cramming her mouth, her eyes, her ears, drowning her in its sugar. The language she wanted not to hear or speak...she moaned, 'Nein, nein, nein, Hugo, no.'... Lotte wept and drowned. (pp. 4,5)

Hugo accepted everything, everyone, but he was not accepted: "to them he was no body..." (p.8)

He himself realized: "He was very aware of his lack of business; if he were ashamed of it, he was relieved too, relieved not to join the crowd, the traffic, but to amble alone into the lanes and alleys..." (p.9)

The agony of alienation and loneliness had always tortured his soul. At such moments, he withdrew himself from the world outside and plunged deep into the childhood memories. The 'present' was suspended and the 'past' was revived vividly. His father was a very well settled businessman and Hugo used to run between his apartment and the shop. His mother reigned over the home. Hugo's father hardly provided him any company, he was never taken to race courses, which made him feel sore at heart. Then the times changed, and they were no longer affluent people. Hugo recalled to his mind another incident of his school days. On one Christmas day, unlike other parents, his parents did
not send him any Christmas gift. That made Hugo very sad and sullen. The teacher tried to give him a gift but he didn't accept. Even at that young age he felt: "... he did not belong to the picture-book world of fir tree, the gifts and the celebrations?" (p.36)

After the incident, he never returned to that school. The family business had failed, his father was first arrested by the police and later he expired. After his father's death: "The apartment became strangely empty, and this emptiness matched the silence into which they sank." (p.51)

And then, Hugo was sent to India with a recommendation letter in search of some earnings. His mother did not accompany him. He bade good-bye to his mother with high hopes and a promise:

'And when I am in India, I will make a home for us. How will you like that? I will have servants for you and drive away..." (p.56)

On the very first day in India, Hugo felt very uneasy. Another foreigner, Lotte, became friendly with Hugo and both shared their suffering equally. The same fact tortured both of them:

'Where could we go... there was nowhere to go. Germany was gone... Europe was gone... let us face it... there is no home for us. So where can we go?' (pp.80,81)
Old Hugo was refused any help from his earlier partners. They had died and there sons did not recognise him. Hugo withdrew himself quietly in a small flat in Hira-Niwas. He then fully lost himself in the world of cats and kittens. The whole day, he would carry his plastic bags begging the 'left overs' from restaurants' owners and bringing home for the cats. The cats loved him, played with him and made him feel very comfortable. When Kurt, an addict, accompanied Hugo to his place, he got scared of the cats, but Hugo reassured him: "No need to be frightened — they only welcome us..." (p.146)

The stranger, who was offered shelter and food, murdered Hugo for the sake of little silver and a few coins.

Hugo had left the use of his mother tongue (German) long back. Lotte kept him in touch with that language and besides: "...she belonged to the India of his own experience; hers was different in many ways but still they shared enough to be comfortable with each other..." (p.150)

It was after a long time that he came to know about his mother's death. He felt very sad. Being ignorant, he could not perform any ceremony either. But long before that incident he had realized that his return to Germany was out of question. His inability to return to his native land intensified his anguish further:

Germany when it flourished had not
wanted him and Germany destroyed would 
have no need of him either. (p.167)

The poverty around, the squalor, the femine of 1943, and the hopelessness of Calcutta, all seemed to be set in a proper mourning mood for Hugo. Then Hugo realized:

The life of Bombay which had been Baumgartner's life for thirty years now-or, rather, the setting for his life; he had never actually entered it, never quite captured it;...it had been elusive still. (p.214)

Moreover, many social evils disgustingly crowd the picture of the novel. The drug addiction, the prostitution, the beggary, the theft, murder, which all form a part of the life of metropolitan cities, are also described in a realistic manner.

Among other characters we have some good hearted souls too. Mr. Chimanlal, Hugo's partner in Business in Bombay, and Mr. Farrokh, the owner of Cafe-de-Paris stand out conspicuously for their human love and affection. Farrokh felt bad after the death of Hugo. He would not let the police carry his bag and baggage. In a very kind gesture he appealed to the landlord: "Sahib...'Bommgarter Sahib is still here - he has not even left yet'." (p.227)

The frequent use of German words in the beginning presents some difficulty for the reader initially, but gradually he becomes familiar with the context and acknowledges the great truth—that whichever part of land we may
belong to, in whatsoever condition we live, the same pulse beats under the skin, the same suffering, the same hopes and aspirations abide in every heart and soul—which is the real beauty of existence itself.
NOTES


3. Ibid, p.201.


7. Ibid, p.188.

8. Ibid, p.79.


13. Ibid, pp.243,244.


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