III. ILLUSION AND REALITY
The theme of quest for self-realization amidst alienation and marital disharmony is reiterated in the novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*. Here again Anita Desai raises the question of domestic values as against existential angst. Sita, the central consciousness of the novel in quest after harmony amidst the discordant notes of marital life escapes from “duties and responsibility, from order and routine, from life and the city” (p.139) into the metaphoric womb of the idyllic, magical island of her childhood to avoid the all pervasive violence around her. But she realizes ultimately that “this magic, too, cast shadows”(p.63). With deep insight and empathy Desai depicts Sita’s inner turmoil and her subsequent decision to follow her husband back into the city, symbolically putting her feet in the foot-marks on the sands left by her husband. Usha Bande opines that *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* describes Sita’s predicament: she stands up to say ‘No’ to the dull tedium of a meaningless existence and ends up by realizing that ‘yes’ is the sensible word to accept, face and live life”(Bande:1988,p.105). S.D. Sharma observes: “Anita Desai has raised a question of crisis of conscience and values (CCV) of universal importance in her novel named *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* If we delete *This Summer* from the
The narrative begins when Sita, a woman in her forties, is saddled with a fifth pregnancy. She had four children with great pride and pleasure. But the prospect of bringing an innocent fifth one into a violence-ridden society that is inimical to its existence makes her paranoid with rage which puzzles her husband Raman. Marriage to Raman, a dull, prosaic businessman, or motherhood hasn’t alleviated her sense of alienation and ennui. Sensitive and temperamentally different from her family she cannot accept with equanimity the all pervasive violence in the world. Small incidents like the quarrelling ayahs on the street, her sons fighting with each other, her daughter tearing her paintings, even the debris littered on the sea-shore threaten her equilibrium of temper. She feels like the wounded eagle she had once tried to protect from scavenger crows.

Her family takes her reverence for life, manifested through her overzealous protection of the eagle, as a deliberate attempt at humiliating them. They laugh at her pointing out at the absent eagle the next morning: “They have made a good job of your eagle” (p.41). The
extent of their callousness can only be compared to her romanticism: “perhaps it flew away”. Expectedly, she shudders at procreation, an essentially violent process and decides to run away to Manori, the island home of her childhood with the weird notion of invoking the magic of the island to keep the foetus unborn and inside her forever. Taking advantage of her husband’s busy schedule at his factory, she takes her eldest daughter Menaka and her youngest son Karan with her to the island of Manori.

Jasbir Jain says that the “trip to Manori is actually a trip back to her childhood, which perhaps she has never outgrown and which had acquired a perfection of its own because it had actually ceased to be” (Jain: 1987, p.36). Hariom Prasad observes that “The island has been portrayed by the novelist as a heaven for Sita which wonderfully holds the master key to her final liberation from the existential anxiety, hopelessness and suffering” (Tiwari: ed., 2004, p.196). The island is not, however, a place for summer sojourn. The dilapidated house of the island, lacerated by rain and storm, becomes her veritable tomb and forces her at last to take a fresh perspective on her life. She blames her early life with her father and brother and sister as the reason of her
fascination with the island. The island house was her first real home and the father, with his strange "experiments", was close to all his children. As she tries to revisit the past she recapitulates the 'Prickle down the spine' (p.76) which her father's activities had created in her and that had made her grow up as 'a young woman, a tremendously uncertain one' (p.94). She had noticed with confusion the gradual dwindling of the 'chelas' around her father and how they were replaced by women from the island. She had known the fisherwoman, Phoolmaya's secret of begetting a son through her father's magic. She wondered about her sister Rekha and seeing how "it was always her guarded eyes her father met during a moving passage in the morning's devotional songs, . . . how he stretched out his hand and squeezed her fingers" (p.76), or how "it was always across the older sister's stolid shoulders that he placed his arm . . . ." (p.76). She remembers how he had duped the simple islanders by adding crushed gold and gemstones to their medicines to impress them with their so-called efficacy for curing ailments. Thus, she had accepted "the magical, fantastical element of their father's career" (p.74) in her child-like innocence and lack of worldly wisdom that that has only dawned on her after living family life in the city in the main land.
She now accepts her failure to understand the true nature of her father and her need to have planned for her future unlike her brother and sister. Hence, she concedes that had it not been the son of her father's friend, Deedar, the smart, college-educated young man, she would have never seen light and life outside that island. After twenty years, she is again in that unenviable situation as her precipitous escape to the island has landed her in the same quandary. Wrecked by doubt and worry she questions her memory of the island: “where was the magic of the island that she had promised herself, promised the children? Was this it? If it had ever existed – black, sparkling and glamorous as in her memory . . .” (p.103). She ultimately comes to acknowledge that “There was no magic here – the magic was gone” (p.112). With this realization comes her understanding that “Her time in the island had been very much of an episode on a stage, illuminated by gaudy sunset effects and played to thunderous storm music. The storm ended, the play over, the stage had to be cleared... (p.152). By calling her life in the island as an episode acted out in the theatre, she severs all attachment with the island. With her illusion shattered, she is able to regenerate herself. So when Raman comes to the island she is able to follow him back to the mainland despite
her awareness of the dull, boring life there. Her ultimate acceptance of the reality of the city life is registered by her admiration for Raman’s forbearance and fortitude:

He never hesitated – everything was so clear to him, and simple: life must be continued, and all its business . . . There was courage, she admitted to herself in shame, in getting on with matters from which she herself squirmed away, dodged and run. It took courage (pp.138-39).

She understands that reality may be harsh but it has to be accepted, in place of living in illusion and finding it being shattered always. Thus she demonstrates a dynamism of character, an aspect new in the Desai heroines till date. Like Maya of Cry, the Peacock, Sita was also on the verge of self-destruction, but her trials and tribulation in the island make her self-critical. She learns the value of compromise, always extolled in Indian myth and culture. As Bindulata Chaudhary perceptively sums up:

Between two uncompromising attitudes of Maya’s madness and Monisha’s suicide, Sita is the only heroine of Mrs. Desai
to understand and succumb to the word 'only connect', the only compromising link between the prose and passion of her life. Her reaction proves that it is very difficult for a woman, however modern she may be, to get rid of the situation she is once placed in. In spite of her dislike to the ways of the world, to the traditional life of loyalty, she resumes her return journey to adjust to the role of a wife and mother. Hence, she accepts defeat, crumples her passion and mingles with the prose of life for the betterment of human relationship (Chaudhary; 1995, p.77).

Her metamorphosis from a disillusioned woman militating against the debilitating violence of the world around her to a conformist is depicted through a narrative technique appropriate for so turbulent a psychic upheaval. Rendered in third person psycho-narration the technique marks out narratorial sympathy with the turbulent process of Sita’s psychic upheaval. In an interesting addition to her ever changing technical experimentation, Desai makes ironic use of choral commentary as prologue and epilogue to the story of the heroine. It not only foregrounds the intellectual disparity between Sita and the islanders but
also underlines their incompetence to judge her tumultuous journey from revolt to capitulation. The split narrative and its present-past-present (summer'67-winter'47-summer'67) structure delineate the thesis, antithesis and synthesis of Sita's emotional trajectory. The novel structure may be likened to a wheel with the middle section (winter'47) as its fulcrum that harks back to her experience of violence and alienation of life in the city (summer'67) resulting in her decision to return to the "magic Island" to escape that harrowing consciousness of the mainland in quest of peace and happiness. The latter section entitled "Summer'67" completes the first cycle of the wheel of Sita's life through its repetition of those violent experience in the "magic island" which joins the island to the main land making the two landscapes at one with each other. But the section initiates a new movement also - a second cycle underlining Sita's psychic growth in rejecting the illusion of the magic island and embracing willingly the reality of the mainland, albeit its violence and turbulence, with complete understanding and equanimity. The omniscient narrator's technique of psycho-narration and quoted monologue and quoted dialogue represents Sita's consciousness in its various turns of turbulence and quietude. And to capture the nuances of her psychic growth, the
narrative resorts to additional devices of character comparison and contrast and use of a number of images, symbols and motifs.

The narrative begins with a choral presentation by Moses and his friends. Moses and Miriam have been caretakers of the island house, ‘Jiban Asram’. Moses has come to receive Sita after she gets down from the automobile on the main land and ferry her to the island. Moses and his friends converse, while they wait for this legend (being daughter of a legend) to come. While trying to recreate the grandeur of Sita’s father the chorus indulges in drinking and thereby fails to work out its intention.

The chorus at its origin in Ancient Greece was a group of performers at a religious festival, especially of fertility rites. When it became an integral part of the Greek tragedy, it was sometimes represented even by a single character in the play, who would be a commentator on the unfolding action of the drama. Technically, the Chorus chants while moving from one side of the stage to the other which is called the strophe. The opposite movement - the antistrophe- presents a different aspect of the story, and finally the epode sums up the story.
In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Moses and Miriam constitute the primary chorus that reflects on the on-going drama. But being sycophants, their role as a chorus is debatable. Also we know that Sita has come to the island not to give birth to her fifth child which fact undermines use of the chorus that usually extolled the fertility rites. Further the Chorus singing in a drunken stupor discredits their very act: “they hummed and swayed and rocked” (p.12).

The chanting, the swaying, and the rocking reduce the ‘strophe’ of the Greek chorus to a parody creating comic effect: Moses has to rouse his companions with his roar, while they rock with drunken stupor. But none the less the chorus here acts as an exposition of the background to the drama of Sita’s life-to-be on the island: the legendary father and people’s expectation from Sita.

“Who has forgotten the father?” Moses harangued them but in a sing-song tone, ritualistic, almost dreamy.

“Not us, not us,’ neighed the goats, wagging about the table.
Their neighing, Moses’ growls, the sudden humming that had sprung up in their throats, together made a kind of music, like a religious chant. . .

“Who has forgotten the well?” Moses roared to rouse them again. “The only well in Manori that gives sweet water?” . . .

“How fortunate the cow that drowned in it the other day. How sweet must have been her death” (pp.11-12).

The interpolation of the quoted dialogue (of the ignorant, biased islanders) in the hitherto psycho-narration is meant to bring out the unreliability of these comic characters. The satiric edge is apparent when unlike the chorus of the ancient religious rituals it is trying to extol the qualities and achievement of a human being not of gods and goddesses. The sycophantic and inebriated chorus not only undermines its reliability but is the butt of trenchant irony when it calls the death of a cow by drowning in the well as sweet: so when the narrator reverts to psycho-narration, he does so to reiterate Moses untrustworthiness as a focalizer on Sita’s persona:
For a moment he wondered if she could be the daughter at all. . . . he had expected someone else, someone who had inherited the dignity, the mystery, and the ascetic splendour of the fabled father. She did not have it—had nothing, in fact, not even one piece of valuable luggage, seemed quite empty, vacant, stumbling. But she turned to speak to the children in the car with a certain terse crispness that brought them out.

(p.14).

The dissonant psycho-narration here highlights the subtlety of irony when it narrates Moses' expectation "he wondered if she could be the daughter he had expected someone else". The irony gets intensified when Moses compares Sita with the worldly-wise father and mistakenly passes judgment on her for her inexpensive and inconspicuous luggage rejecting the same as vacant and mundane. He also fails to comprehend her authority and decisiveness as revealed in the last sentence of the extract.

The technique presents the gap between Moses' comprehension and the reality of Sita's being. The gap widens when he notices Sita's eyes:
He saw her eyes start from her head so exaggeratedly that he was made to see their immense size and extraordinary brilliance in that dry, worn face (p.17).

This is meant to expose Moses hasty generalization about Sita’s luggage and his failure to gauge the significance of her eyes. Eyes are considered to be a window to inner reality. Their brilliance can only stand for Sita’s inner beauty and intelligence and Moses’ limited vision draws the narrator’s irony. But Sita is not spared of the narrator’s irony either.

Sita romanticizes the island both for herself and the children. Since she has kidnapped the children she wants to whet their interest in the island and its surrounding. For this purpose she comments to Karan that they are sailing in a boat. But Karan is intelligent enough to know that they are simply rowing in a boat. Menaka, who is more realistic does not agree with her mother’s point-of-view.

The woman cast a short, bewildered look at her, . . . she began restlessly turning, looking into the muddy sea as if to pierce its depth . . . Nudging the boy, she exclaimed, “Look
how dark the island looks against the sky, that shining white sky. See how exciting it looks!”

“Dark,” the boy whimpered, . . .

“Oh yes, it is so dark on the island. At night you see stars that you never can see in the city,” she assured him.

“But no lamps”, said her flat-voiced daughter.

“No lamps? Of course there will be lamps — real ones. Not electric bulbs but real lamps-lanterns. . . .” (p.18).

In this quoted passage, through a combination of psycho-narration and quoted dialogue, the narrator brings out Sita’s mental picture of the island shaped by her memory. It also shows the shock and confusion of reality. By talking about her “bewildered look” and her restless speculation, the narration shows her confusion as if there is a gap between what she had expected and the reality. The quoted dialogue between the mother and the children underscores this romantic aspect of Sita: “Of course there will be lamps — real ones.” And her enthusiasm is constantly punctured by her practical daughter which forces her to see reality:
... the island on which they had arrived seemed flat, toneless, related to the muddy monsoon sea rather than to the sky and cloudscape which steadily grew more gorgeous and brilliant by the second. The woman’s face twisted with disappointment or dejection (pp.20-21).

The use of psycho-narration brings out that aspect of Sita’s character that she is as yet not ready to accept: the island is different from her memory and it disappoints her. Her disillusionment grows at each step:

The woman, clinging now to the children, now to the cart, seemed to an irresponsible degree careless of the effects of the ride on her own condition: she had eyes and thoughts only for the country-side through which they drunkenly rolled. It was not picturesque—that seemed to startle her; perhaps she had forgotten that (p.22).

The consonant psycho-narration through all the quotations reveals the narrator’s sympathetic understanding of Sita’s irresponsibility as well as on the way she has romanticized the island. It also highlights the
moment of realization of the uglier aspect of the island: “It was not picturesque— that seemed to startle” and the “perhaps she had forgotten that.” It is the “perhaps” that underlines the narrator’s sympathetic understanding of the dilemma of Sita tossed between her romanticizing of the island and the reality. She is now exposed to the romantic confusion about the island and her life there. But the narrator does not have a critical placing of Sita’s attitude in order to show its limitations and unreality:

The palms reared up in their path, hissing and clattering their dry leaves together harshly, like some disturbed, vigilant animals. . . . There was menace in their warnings, and vigilance, also a certain promise (p.26).

The symbolic use of the trees as hissing, vigilant animals ushers in a sense of foreboding – as the narrator says “warnings” – of things sinister. It makes us anticipate a troubled time for Sita but not without a ray of promise. And rightly she faces trouble from the beginning. When she tries to enter the house, it is dark and dusty:
It had no air of providing shelter from the sea or beach – it was as much a natural part of them as an abandoned shell or lump of twisted driftwood (p.28).

The passage bears proof of Sita’s first reluctant admission of the drawback of the island and the house. By comparing the house to a shell or a lump of driftwood she shows her despair. The dirty village, the dark house, the insolent servant shatter her dream of an idyllic, magical island and she is confused. Her desperation becomes acute when she realizes there is also no arrangement for food:

Guilt wore her out. She finally sat down at the table and fed them biscuits and the milk Moses brought in a brass vessel, . . . She sat for a while at the edge of Karan’s bed, smoking another cigarette, as though this last one may convey an assurance or an answer, then lay down at his side in a heap (p.30).

Sita is desperate at failing the children and driving them to a state of hunger and deprivation. So the narratorial comment, the cigarette “may convey an assurance” shows her confusion and desperation
regarding her plan. And she recollects her hopes and actions prior to her departure for the island and Raman's reaction:

"You want to work a miracle," he mocked. "An immaculate conception in reverse."

"Why not?" She challenged with a bravado that came to her too easily once she was astride an idea, skimming on it, floating. She had kept that bravado alive, afloat through that sleepless night and the following day, the kidnapping of her one daughter and the youngest son, the long drive through the slums in the heat... even the nightmare arrival at the old house on the once magic island, to find the past all burnt to white ashes (pp.36-37).

This memory monologue holds the key to Sita's ultimate capitulation. The monologue performs dual functions: it shows Raman's criticism of Sita and his failure to understand or solve Sita's problems; it also shows Sita's growing scepticism about the island after her "nightmare arrival... to find the past all burnt to white ashes." The journey to the island has been systematically breaking her romantic idealization
of the island. But finally she accepts her idea might be erroneous. The moment she thinks the past as ashes, an unconscious process of re-evaluation of her ideal takes place.

But as she was tired out by the journey and her agitated experiences she went to thoughtless sleep with the child Karan at her side on the string bed. However, she wakes up with the memories of her arguments with Raman about the child to be born:

"You should have thought of it earlier", he said. "It's too late now."

"Too late? Why too late? It's not born yet."

He was repelled, he turned away, not being able to see her any more for hatred of her. He hated her, hated her talk.

"One can't have an abortion at this stage," he said fiercely, his face turned aside.

"Hu-... "Wh- what?" She stammered "Wh- abortion?"

They stared, uncomprehendingly, at each other...
"What do you mean – abortion ?" She gasped, her eyes burning.

"I suppose that’s what you mean- you want one."

"Mad !" She gasped. “You’re quite mad. Kill the baby ? It’s all I want. I want to keep it, don’t you understand ? . . . I don’t want it to be born” (pp.34-35).

The argument concern her decision to not to abort the child and deliver it in the city as insisted on by Raman. On the other hand she is convinced that she would not abort the child. But she would not bring about its birth into the violent world around her in Bombay. On the other hand she agrees with Raman that she would not abort the child and she would move to the magical island of Manori where the miracle of keeping the baby without being born can be materialized.

The gist of this argument as presented above is elaborated in the memory monologue interspersed with the narrator’s psycho-narration.

Sita’s unusual behaviour which flabbergasted Raman is presented in the following portion of the monologue as reported by the narrator:
Tossing clothes, cigarettes, books into the suitcase that she had dragged down from the tops of cupboards, she was silent and blind in the face of his alarm and disbelief as he stood watching and not quite believing what he saw. It was an expression that was not infrequently fitted on to his face. Now and then he exclaimed, “Don’t be silly,” and “Sita, don’t behave like a fool,” and “Think of your condition.” . . .

“I think”, she said, going back to the suitcase and the filling of it, “what I’m doing is trying to escape from the madness here, escape to a place where it might be possible to be sane again.” . . .

“It’s all a madness – the boys acting out that scene from the film they saw, fighting each other on the floor; Menaka and her magazines and the way she’s torn all those drawings of her’s I’d kept so carefully; the ayah taking Karan to that – that road side dump where all the ayahs sit and gossip and fight; the way you laughed because I tried to keep the bird alive; the people here all around us, living here, all around....” she stopped too distressed to continue (pp.33-36).
The following Cavafy poem is brought out from the depths of her memory which was "kept there as an amulet, etched there on the dull metal of her mind, and that she drew out and fondled when she was afraid":

To certain people there comes a day

when they must say the great Yes or the great No.

He who has the Yes ready within him

reveals himself at once, and saying it he crosses

over

to the path of honour and his own conviction.

He who refuses does not repent. Should he be asked

again,

he would say No again. And yet that No-

The right No- crushes him for the rest of his life (p.37).

Since she does not say 'Yes' she is on the other hand courageous enough to say 'No' and face its consequence. But Raman wants her to
stay, realizing that such small incidents are not sufficient reason to leave, but Sita is determined not to give in as she is violently afraid of the incidents that occur daily in the world:

They all hammered at her with cruel fists – the fallen blocks, the torn water colours, the headlines about the war in Viet Nam, the photograph of a woman weeping over a small grave, another of a crowd outside a Rhodesian jail; articles about the perfidy of Pakistan, the virtuousness of our own India ... They were hand-grenades all, hurled at her frail goldfish-bowl belly and instinctively, she laid her hands over it, feeling the child there play like some soft-fleshed fish in a bowl of warm sea-water. . . . How could civilization survive, how could the child? How could she hold them whole and pure and unimpeached in the midst of this bloodshed? They would surely be wounded, fall and die. . . .

Then she grew muddled. By giving birth to the child now so safely contained, would she be performing an act of creation or, by releasing it in a violent, pain-wracked blood-bath, would she only be destroying what was, at the moment,
safely contained and perfect? More and more she lost all feminine, all maternal belief in childbirth, all faith in it, and began to fear it as yet one more act of violence and murder in a world that had more of them in it than she could take (pp.55-56).

So she decides not to have the baby and goes to the island Manori to partake of the magic, the peace, the enchantment of the island so that she can avert the violence of the birth of her child:

The island had been buried beneath her consciousness deliberately, for years. Its black magic, its subtle glamour had grown too huge, had engulfed her at a time when she was still very young and quite alone. She had grown afraid of it, been relieved to leave it and come to the mainland with Raman. The mainland- the very word implied solidity, security: the solidity of streets, the security of houses. She had not realized then that living there would teach her only that life was a crust of dull tedium, of hopeless disappointment – but a thin crust, a flimsy crust that, at every second or third step, broke apart so that she tumbled in, with the most awful sensation,
into a crashed pile of debris. She had no longer the nerve or the optimism to continue. No, she refused to walk another step. She would turn, go back and find the island once more (pp.57-58).

The island glamour, the magic notwithstanding, has been buried in Sita’s memory deliberately because of the fear it had invoked in her towards the end of her life in the island. Further, the security and attraction of her life with Raman in the mainland was then an escape for the better from the enticing but fearful clutches of the island. But now that life in the mainland has turned to be unsavoury Sita delves into her memory of the island and decides to go back there again.

Interestingly, Sita’s arrival in the island is prefaced with an ironic observation by the narrator: “It was an auspicious landing” (p.59). To show us gradually that it was far from auspicious, the dissonant psycho-narration presents Sita’s life with profound knowledge and astute observation of the narrator:

There was an effervescence in the air that made Sita kick up her heels and prance like pony. She was not really a child at
that time— in another environment she might have already been regarded as a young woman, but she had lived a strange life, an unusual life, that had the effect of making her withdraw into the protective chrysalis of childhood for longer than is usual for most. She saw the island as a piece of magic, a magic mirror—it was so bright, so brilliant to her eyes after the tension and shadow of her childhood. It took her some time to notice that this magic, too, cast shadows (p.63).

The irony, however, is mild because the narrator’s sympathy is primarily drawn by Sita’s natural inclination to revert to her childhood because of the “strange life, an unusual life” she had lived in the island then. The presentation of Sita’s immaturity is ‘placed’ critically but not censured by the narrator. The analogy of the magic mirror highlights the illusory glamour of the island life but it also underscores Sita’s disillusionment with it through the elaboration of the beautifully appropriate simile of moth coming out from its chrysalis only to find the grey non-light of the island that cannot give it the warmth to fly.

On this island, strange experiences and strange sensations made her think and grow too large for the chrysalis of
children and so she slowly, unwillingly emerged. She felt this
strangeness in the atmosphere not altogether comfortable, as
a moth that has emerged from its cocoon not into sunlight,
but into a grey nonlight that does not warm the damp wings
or give them strength for flight (p.76).

Sita's immaturity is blamed for the illusion created by the island but
it draws the sympathy of the narrator rather than any explicit judgment
on her.

The neutral, discursive narrator presents Sita's gradual awakening,
as she encounters the island reality. So when the narrator comments on
Sita's reluctant admission of her father's "underlit night time aspect", he
dissipates the impact by the narratorial intervention: "Perhaps it was no
unusual prick of jealousy that chilled Sita" (p.76). It also delineates the
shocks and hurts, that are an integral part of Sita's coming up of age:

Twilight, shade and silence – these made up not only the
natural but the necessary atmosphere of the island (p.82).

The dominant narrator represents dimensions of Sita's psyche that
she is as yet unable to divulge. The psycho-analysis technique reveals the
sub-verbal stratum of her mind that foregrounds her momentous awareness of the shady side of the island and her stilted mental growth owing to her nature as well as nurture in that atmosphere of the island. Thus in Sita's childhood, her nurture is focalized as the reason of her psychological immaturity, her incapability to 'connect' with the world outside.

The mutative summary foregrounds the events that lead to her realisation. "It took her some time to..." as she gradually wakes up to the fact of the deification of her father vis-à-vis his dubious activities:

...as Sita said in her maturity, was that he had begun his life "in service" and then realized–she remembered that moment of realization, that faint smile when the pock-marked, hysterical Champa had touched his feet with her forehead - that self-sacrifice and service place power in a man's hand . . . (p.75).

The psycho-narration is concerned not merely to delineate Sita's consciousness, the vocal narrator is interested also in the father of dubious distinction. Sita's understanding of her father's true self dawns
on her rather gradually. The parenthetical clause delineates Sita's moment of vision. But it is now at the present, not in the past when it happened. Thus the narration moving between the past and present reveals that Sita's immaturity is responsible for her dependence and marriage to Raman. After her father's death:

She herself would have stayed on, in the deserted house, for she had not planned a thing, had not understood the need to plan or plot or prepare and was quite destitute . . . when Deedar's son came to cremate her father, shut the house, fetch her away, send her to college, install her in a college hostel and finally- out of pity, out of lust, out of sudden will for adventure, and because it was inevitable - married her (p.99).

The narration shows that temporal flexibility can be accorded to psycho-narration. The slow movement of the narrative of Sita's life since childhood is sharply contrasted with the swiftness of recapitulation of events since her father's death – his cremation, her days of courtship and her eventual marriage to Raman. The latter takes up only one short sentence of forty-four words. The haste of this recapitulation is
symptomatic of Sita’s unhappy and dissatisfied marriage that makes the memory of the island doubly endearing:

...ordinary life, the everyday world had grown so insufferable to her that she could think of the magic island again as of release. If the sea was so dark, so cruel, then it was better to swim back into the net. If reality were not to be borne, then illusion was the only alternative. She saw the island illusion as a refuse, a protection. It would hold her baby safely unborn, by magic (p.101).

Psycho-narration reveals the reasons for Sita’s precipitous decision to depart from home to the island. The metaphor of fish “swimming back into the net” in the embedded monologue highlights the protective security of “the island illusion” against the harsh, insufferable reality of life in “the everyday world” as lived in the mainland.

Her unplanned arrival on the island at the inhospitable, difficult time of monsoon plays havoc with her life and psyche shattering her illusion:
It can't go on like this, it is impossible! She cried every day, several times a day, in a choked voice that fought speechlessly at the grotesquerie of their situation. She wanted to explain to them that it had not been madness to come, had not been a theatrical gesture, a romantic mistake. Romantic rubbish! she protested, flushing – Manori was not a romantic island ... where was the magic of the island that she had promised herself, promised the children? Was this it?

If it had ever existed – black, sparkling and glamorous as in her memory- it was now buried beneath the soft grey-green mildew of the monsoon, chilled and choked by it (pp.102-03).

The sentences at the beginning and ending of the passage in quoted monologues within consonant psycho-narration present Sita's mental turmoil relating to the way she has inconvenienced her children as well as herself. The quoted monologues present Sita's growing desperation at her situation, which she may not have thought of before. The quoted exclamation: the island as a "romantic rubbish" presents her moment of maturity in understanding.
The process of maturity and learning continues to reveal her gradual disillusionment with the island along with her realization of failure in maternal care for her children. The passage also traces her capacity for growth, and acceptance of reality of the mainland in preference to the island illusion. That is why when Raman comes to the island she feels relief and can follow him back to the mainland.

She felt one violent pulsation of grief inside her, like a white bird flying up with one strident scream, and then plummeting down, thinking, "It is all over -" and then a warm expansion of relief, of pleasure, of surprise – oh happy surprise! (p.128).

The passage represents Sita’s grief along with her sense of relief metaphorically through the image of the white bird plummeting down with relief and pleasure. The symbolic fall of the white bird represents the shattering of Sita’s brief stint at independence as well as the end of her trouble that heralded her psychic upheaval. Thus, the psycho-narration of the narrator represents with sympathy the vicissitudes of her life in its passage from illusion to reality.
Like psycho-narration quoted dialogues, though they are very few, reveal Sita's inner world.

The first quoted dialogue, when she tells Raman of her decision not to deliver the fifth child, is in fact Sita's memory monologue that underlines the mental incompatibility between the couple. Her recapitulated conversation with Jivan bears witness to her immaturity:

"Why can't you and I sing, Jivan, when she sings so well?

...Sisters should be a little alike."

"But you are not sister", he said then.

"Well, we are really – even if we don’t look it." Here Sita became her proud self with the long neck and the brilliant eyes (p. 78).

This dialogue reiterates Sita's intellectual immaturity despite her beautiful eyes and physical beauty. Jivan, inspite of being younger, is more worldly-wise as he has gathered information, not only about Rekha but also about their mother who has left the husband and the children
and has gone away to Benares. But Sita refuses to acknowledge the truth of Jivan's wisdom at this stage.

But it is not only a matter of immaturity as of an essential difference of attitude to life that holds the key to Sita's psyche. This is observed when she tells Menaka of the need for:

"I wish I had your talent. I would nurse it so carefully-like a plant-make it grow, grow. I used to think-after I left this island and had to think what I would do next-that if only I could paint, or sing, or play the sitar well, really well, I should have grown into a sensible woman. Instead of being what I am," she said with stinging bitterness. . . "I should have known how to channel my thoughts and feelings, how to put them to use. I should have given my life some shape then, some meaning" (p.117).

Her conversation with Menaka holds the key to her mental unrest and dissatisfaction with life. Here art is given as an alternate option of life which the prosaic and practical family of Raman-including her own children-fails to perceive and alienates this sensitive individual.
The narration returns to the chorus at the end of the narrative which presents the crowning image of Sita as the misunderstood character on the part of the islanders. In the antistrophe, the narrator presents the islanders denigrating Sita, calling her mad, angry, old and shabby and in the 'epode,' they completely reject Sita:

"Let her go. Who cares? We will only remember him, the father. How he lived, and his magic? The island is his, it is really his."

"Still it is his," the sick man agreed in a quaver.

"Who is she to come here to live?" Jamila demanded. "Let her go."

"Let her go," Moses growled, and they all dipped their heads and drank (p.157).

Thus the technique of choral presentation reveals the islanders’ total incomprehension of the character of Sita. The divide between the princess and the minion is too great to expect anything beyond such misunderstanding only. Sita’s return to the island after twenty years provides her with scope for analysis of her experiences and leads to the
development of dynamism of her character. Anita Desai’s poetic presentation lends pathos and intensity to Sita’s struggle towards self-realisation and the novelist’s use of images and symbols operating at multiple levels foreground Sita’s ontological uncertainties.

Her refusal to deliver the child is very much an archetypal urge of her to avoid violence and the iterative symbol of the island underlines the quest motif of the novel. The use of analogical naming device relates the predicament of this modern Sita to the puranic one in The Ramayana. The semantic connection with the epic transfers to Sita traits like sacrifice and obedience of the mythical heroine. Like the latter living in Valmiki’s ashram in a forest banished by husband Rama, Sita of the novel willingly makes her an exile in this sparsely populated island and lives in ‘Jiban Ashram’. The puranic Sita gives birth to twins and this Sita lives in her island home with two children. The puranic Rama performed the ritual of Yangya with a golden statue of his banished wife by his side but Raman in the novel comes to the island to fetch the children along with her to his place in the mainland. The puranic Sita, inspite of all her gentleness and obedience, is the earliest feminist who shunned Rama’s condition of reconciliation in the face of his repeated neglect and preferred to enter
into the bowels of the mother Earth, but this Sita, who abandons her husband and society, meekly follows him back to a world full of “dull tedium, of hopeless disappointment” (p.58). The semantic parallelism between the novel and the epic is proffered with irony and underlines the gulf of difference between the two Sita’s: the one uncompromising in adhering to her separate self, her personal identity while the other compromising with the same in order not to lose her home and family.

Like the naming device, description of physical features of people and their environment have been exploited by the novelist for character delineation. The first such presentation is Sita’s attire:

Then the woman came slowly, clumsy out of the back seat, sighing, shaking out the crumpled fold of her sari which . . . seemed to be coming apart (p.14).

This initial observation of Moses is later elaborated by Raman’s thought of Sita’s whims regarding dress:

He had always been dismayed by the extravagance of her dress ... for it was not that she was extravagant in one direction alone ... but that she was extravagant at times in the
direction of opulence and then quite as energetically, in that of shabbiness (pp.129-30).

Thus, Sita’s attire represents her ambivalence towards personal appearance. The description of her dress is, however, contrasted with her physical features especially the presentation of her eyes. There have been several references to Sita’s beauty and her brilliant eyes:

He saw her eyes start from her head so exaggeratedly that he was made to see their immense size and extraordinary brilliance (p.17).

If the eyes of a person are a window to his/her soul, Sita’s brilliant eyes would stand for her extraordinary intelligence and sensitivity. But, despite the brilliance of her eyes, the same are opaque and blind to the vision of truth and reality.

The woman disregarded its [pond] filth, its solid green layer of germs and disease, and thought beautiful for there were women closely wrapped in saris of scarlet and crimson on the stone steps, . . . (p. 23).
The image of the pond underlines the irony in the perceptions of Sita and Moses. Moses, living in the island, thinks it dirty and sees only the scum, while Sita sees only the colourful women and not the pond full of slime and disease. This selective vision and its attendant incapability to comprehend differences is poetically represented through the image of the house:

So they walked towards the sky which was a vast pink Japanese lantern swinging low over the sea in the great mass of surrounding darkness ... Here she halted for the house was pitch dark (p.26).

The narrative presentation here reflects Sita’s consciousness through geographical contiguity. Her house, the supposed place for her regeneration being in darkness prophesies the failure of her endeavour. The metaphor of the Japanese lantern underlines, however, a little ray of hope. As S.Rimmon- Kenan observes: “Landscape can be analogues not only to a character trait but also to a passing mood’ (Kenan:1983,p.70). Thus, the sky as vast pink Japanese lantern and the pitch-dark house reflect Sita’s confusion at the moment of her arrival in the island. But gradually the house would become the hermitage (ashrama) of her
sadhana for redemption and transformation. The hermitage of life (Jiban ashrama), her home in the stormy island is symbolically dark at the beginning but Sita’s life in that home would lead her to the ultimate vision of light- a perfect understanding of her experiences and the resultant wisdom. The island house as the locale of her penance is set in contrast with the ‘other house’ of her living in the mainland that was darkened for her by her experience of pervasive violence and her sense of alienation from the members of her family.

The stormy island landscape serves as a metonymy of Sita’s turbulent psyche–as well as shocks her into proper understanding of her illusion about the island. Gradually the island doles out multitude of shocks till she is totally disillusioned.

Then she went in at last and saw what had become of the house is twenty years of absence – a waste of ashes she saw,. . . Dust lay as casually as sand on a beach . . . It had no air of providing shelter from the sea or beach . . . (p.28).

The island house is in a dilapidated state and neglect of twenty years has reduced the once beautiful place to this unliveable condition.
The house in the island works as a metonymy of Sita's persona underscoring complete neglect of her mental and extraordinary physical beauty, reducing her to "a woman unloved, a woman rejected" (p.133).

The house also serves as the objective correlative of her psychic growth. When she arrives in the island the house was pitch-dark, but in the penultimate stage, when she accepts the reality of life and existence, she sees the "window pane of the house on the knoll lit by the setting sun to a mysterious brilliance..." (p.152). Thus the house as a symbol stands for the illumination that has come to Sita when she acknowledges the reality of life and the value of pleasure and pain with equanimity and peace on mind.

The trials and tribulations of Sita's life are delineated through the symbol of voyage. Ensconced between three voyages, the story takes the shape of a spiritual journey leading to psychic regeneration and brings to the mind D. H. Lawrence's The Woman Who Rode Away. Journey is analysed in The Mammoth Dictionary of symbols as a "spiritual adventure, the descent into oneself, to meet the self, crowded with hindrances and small victories, suffering and joy, until serenity is achieved" (p.219). Sita also goes through both physical and emotional
turmoil before her complete regeneration. Her journey to the island, all along from '47 to '67 is that of a person in search of one's own true self. Sita's saga of growing up through varied experiences of suffering and joy is designed in the form of a Bildungsroman like James Joyce's Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man.

The image central to the representation of Sita's consciousness is the island. As the The Mammoth Dictionary of Symbols states: "An island is a heaven of peace, far from the crowds and bustle of city life, it symbolizes the ideal of our aspirations and inaccessible desires...." (p. 214). The island, therefore, can be interpreted as standing for Sita's aspirations for an ideal life of peace and equanimity, a veritable heaven on earth. But Sita, who has escaped to the island for spiritual regeneration by partaking of its magic, sees the reality at hand and acknowledges the improbability of achieving her desire. She cries in hopeless anguish: "Where was the magic of the island that she had promised herself, promised the children? Was this it? If it had ever existed—black, sparkling and glamorous as in her memory..." (p. 103). Her self-questioning and doubt paves the path to maturity. Her disillusionment increases in proportion to her self-analysis. Her mental
turmoil is represented through the setting and atmosphere of the island and the sea lashed by the storm and downpour of the monsoon. The turbulence in the landscape finds a parallel in her turbulent psyche. But her stormy mind and its rebellious unquietude are calmed when she accepts the reality of the season:

The monsoon continued like an unceasing burial. There was nothing to do with it but watch it, listen to it, sighing at the window (p. 106).

The image of a mass of jelly fish which Sita sees in the sea floating in a helpless condition serves as the objective correlative of her unborn child. Anita Desai in an interview to Jasbir Jain speaks about Sita's desire to perpetuate her pregnancy as a kind of "rebellion right through to the last moment." Sita's abhorrence of violence and her reverence for life are revealed through other "small incidents" like the sight of Jellyfish. One such is the attack of crows on a wounded eagle. Sita's unconscious identification with the eagle undergoing the violence of attack by the crows ends ineffectually as she fails to save the victim from its predators. In another incident Sita's secret desire for love and admiration comes to the fore. She had once seen a Muslim couple in the Hanging Gardens. The
all absorbing love between them becomes a kind of an ideal. But the mention of this incident enraged Raman. In another incident Raman and Sita had seen a foreigner asking for direction to Ajanta. While Raman thought him foolish for standing on the wrong side of the road, Sita was impressed by his resilience in the face of ignorance. These incidents not only show the romantic streak in her consciousness but also highlight her marital incompatibility with Raman who considers her identification with the stranger “practically as an act of infidelity” (p.53).

The island experience teaches her the futility of illusion and she moves away from her negation of life-force to an act of participation in the same and here the sea serves as the symbol of her vision of life-force. Her changed attitude towards the sea holds the key to her psychic rebirth. By reconciling with Raman she rises above her rebelliousness and relates herself to her surroundings. She finds her cathartic vision in the poem of D. H. Lawrence’s *End of Another Home Holiday*. Sita’s metaphoric rebirth, her complete surrender to life-force is presented in her game in mud. Her education is complete – she has given up her self-consciousness. Being able to touch, feel and to be one with the earth, she gives up the last vestige of her ego and learns to accept and laugh and
live again. Sita’s enlightenment is suggested through the symbolic representation of the homing birds at sunset suggestive of her decision to go back. Her return to the mainland is symbolically presented through the putting of her feet on the footmarks left on the sands by Raman. Through this gesture she reveals her acceptance of the traditional values governing life in the family and society against which she once rebelled.

Sita’s distinctive character traits are also delineated through comparison and contrast with other characters. To begin with, Sita is shown as a person different from her kith and kin. The magic she wants to partake of in the island is the creation of her father but she never understood nor believed in him when he was living. But as R. S. Sharma rightly observes that both Sita and her father “are looking for an earthly paradise, but their approaches differ. While her father thinks of life on the island in terms of an ashram, an abode of learning through action, Sita thinks of it as “a piece of magic, a magic mirror,” where she wants to escape from the violence that pervades in her life” (Sharma:1981,p.105). Although Sita’s initial view of the island is that of a romantic escapist but it also turns to be a locale for her education and recovery from the Romantic dream. Sita is also both physically and intellectually different
from her siblings Rekha and Jivan. Rekha is stolid, fat and 'graceless' (p.77) while Sita has long-neck, brilliant eyes and is an extraordinary beauty. When Jivan and Sita constantly prance around, Rekha never moves. More importantly, inspite of the watchful eyes of the father, Rekha has been able to plan for her future and becomes a singer in the AIR immediately after their father's death. There is another crucial difference between the sisters: Rekha, the favourite of the father, gives a "saurian" smile (p.98) at the death of the father and leaves the island even before his cremation. But Sita bemoans the father's death and "had not planned anything, had not understood the need to plan or plot or prepare and was quite destitute"(p.99). Even her younger brother Jivan has been able to escape from the island and later becomes a trade-union leader. Though she is older than her brother, he is more resourceful, observant and well informed. It is Jivan who informs her about their mother's flight to Benaras and also the fact that Rekha is only a step sister. The difference between Sita and her sister and brother highlights the former's lack of practical sense and worldly wisdom, lost as she is in the Eldorado of her Romantic dream.
It is Raman, the practical young man's timely intervention that saved her from penury and destitution. But marriage to Raman makes her disgruntled as there was no mental compatibility between the couple. While Raman is practical and rational, Sita is romantic and high-strung. While the children trusted the father they ran away from her. Their individual reactions to the traveller, to the Muslim couple, to the eagle are instances highlighting their incompatibility of mind. And the same polarity between the couple is revealed through their discussion regarding the birth of her fifth child. So when she expresses her desire not to give birth to the unborn child, the practical Raman logically construes her statement to be her desire for abortion which horrifies Sita.

She also does not find any compatibility in mind between her and his family and feels suffocated in their cooking-eating-cooking existence. Rebelling against their traditional way of living as women of the family, she starts smoking to shock and infuriate them. She denigrates them for "their subhuman placidity, calmness, and sluggishness" (p.48). But they remained totally unaffected by her revolting behaviour and only "wished to be left in peace to eat, to digest" (p.49). She calls his friends "nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matter. Animals" (p.47).
Raman is baffled by her passionate outbursts and ultimately turns himself away from her harried, worn, grotesque face.

Thus Sita is represented as not only temperamental and emotional but also as a person with independent thought and opinion, who detests drudgery and wants to run away from unmitigated boredom. She is frightened by the all pervasive violence of her surroundings. Her abhorrence of violence and reverence for life, holds up the dichotomy between her sensitivity and the callousness of the world around her.

She craves for the kind of unquestioned love she had once espied between the couple in the park. She remains, however, unloved, uncared, and misunderstood. Her departure to Manori is a manifestation of her discontent which had prompted her to say the “No”.

At last she finds the solution to her queries and confusion in this poem of Lawrence. Her desire to say ‘No’ is chastened by her decision to accept by saying ‘Yes’ and thereby resolving to connect herself to the world around her.

Thus, we see through Sita’s struggle and eventual acquiescence a woman in search of a meaningful life amidst ennui and alienation thrown
up by her world. She sets out in the quest of the magic of the island but the resultant disillusionment stems from her self-analysis and adult perspective. Visiting the island and living her troubled life there, she understands the pain concomitant with the enticement of illusion. She comes to realize the great value of compromise with reality and acceptance of adult responsibility in place of childlike chasing after mirage. She now follows her husband to return to the humdrum existence in the city, thereby revealing her growth in consciousness. However, some critics question her volte face, credulity and compliance in face of her earlier rebellion and dependence. Anita Desai sets up the right perspective to resolve the contradiction in Sita's behaviour when she talks about the unborn child in an interview with Atma Ram:

It is born. It adjusts. It compromises. It accepts dullness, mediocrity, either closes its eyes to or else condones destruction, ugliness rottenness. In other words, it leads an ordinary life of the kind its mother tried so desperately to change only to find she could not. (Atma Ram:1977,pp.97-98).