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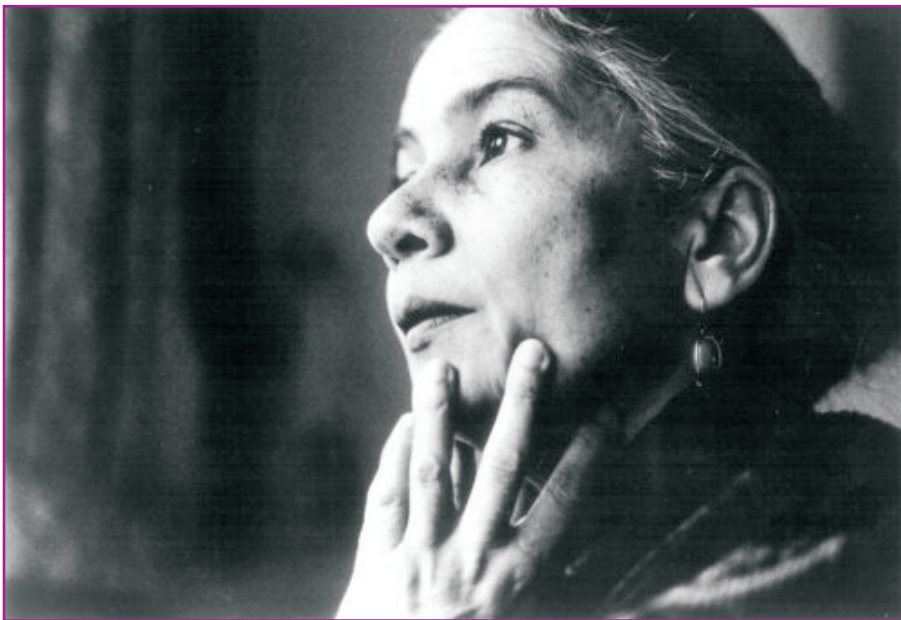
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## THE CULTURAL CONFLICT OF THE EAST AND THE WEST IN THE NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI

**Dr. S. Durga Malleeswari**

Asst.Prof, Dept of English, GITAM University, Hyderabad.



### ABSTRACT

**A**nita Desai dealt with the problems of the cross-section of a society, in reality, she is basically facing the flux of cultural change, which is constant. Interestingly she tacitly portrays the problems of individuals in a tradition – bound and culture-ridden society. She portrays the characters' agony between the two cultures and always tries to assimilate and try to imitate the other cultural nuances. The cultural conflict acts as under current and influence the background of the situation. Anita Desai unconsciously carry out the responsibility of safeguarding the culture of the

society and she also would expose the ills of the culture. Besides this, she deals with other cultures with a clear understanding. she usually feels that culture is something indispensable in one's life and a unique situation arises when the individual encounters another culture. Anita Desai's works bring out the concept of cross-cultural conflict. Some of her works concentrate on the cultural conflict of the east and the west, and the relationship of these two cultures is considered as a raw material for her to delineate themes and characters

**KEYWORDS:** Anita Desai Selected Novels –cultural conflicts of east and

west characters.

### INTRODUCTION

Most of the creative works reflect the problems of human existence and the setting is the society with its varied facets. The exploration and exposition of the societal problems vary from context to context. Apparently the major motifs - like isolation, identity crisis, moral and emotional bankruptcy and the serious erosion of human values take on universal dimensions, so much so that readers across continents relate easily and deeply to their predicaments. Though she dealt with the problems of the cross-section of a society, in reality, she is basically facing the flux of cultural change, which is constant. Interestingly she tacitly portrays the problems of individuals in a tradition – bound and culture-ridden society.

Many creative writers in their works have successfully dealt with the theme of culture. Moreover, they have purposefully explored the

contexts of the real, complex and intercultural conflicts against the background of racial and cultural outlook of the people of the two cultures. R. Chadha says:

The rich variety and complexity given to the theme in their novels demonstrates that they are fully alive to the realities of this situation.(1)

As a novelist Anita Desai unconsciously carry out the responsibility of safeguarding the culture of the society and she also would expose the ills of the culture. Besides this, she deals with other cultures with a clear understanding. she usually feels that culture is something indispensable in one's life and a unique situation arises when the individual encounters another culture. Anita Desai's works bring out the concept of cross-cultural conflict. Some of her works concentrate on the cultural conflict of the east and the west, and the relationship of these two cultures is considered as a raw material for her to delineate themes and characters

Anita Desai, in some of her novels, presents characters that oscillate between two cultures. Fundamentally she accepts that an unfamiliar cultural milieu will certainly create volatile problems that test individuals' fortitude. she highlights this particular aspect to streak of the theme of cultural collision hold mirror to the multi-cultural exposure and awareness. The cultural set up of each country prescribes certain norms governing the behavior of people. In the Indian context, generally, man expects the woman to be quiet, obedient, and almost docile. On the contrary, the Western scenario offers a different scenario. Women wish to be independent, assertive and strong and lead life on their own terms. This psychic trait is characteristic of the respective cultures. Development of this temperament is by virtue of the country's historical background, cultural and educational background and political awareness. The culturally, geographically and spiritually displaced faces bitter experiences and eventually launch a quest for a new self to get acclimatized to the new culture and ethos.

As the victims of dislocation, rather cultural dislocation they all face the cultural dilemma. They tend to retain cultural identity and cultural practices in their beliefs, values, etiquette, manners etc. John McLeod comments:

These beliefs, traditions, customs, behaviors and values along with their "possessions and belongings" are carried by migrants with them when they arrive in new places. (2)

Various factors make an individual feel culturally alienated and force him to launch a quest for re-rooting. This mission involves formidable problems. Anita Desai explored this problem in her novels such as *A Journey to Ithaca* and *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*. It is significant that she is trying to do away with the glorification of native culture that is often widely seen. A comprehensive study suggests that to a great extent she wrote with multi-cultural commitment, which testifies to her broad outlook, and commitment to her art.

She is aware of the position of the individuals especially women in the Indian family and her novels portray the change that is brought in her attitude in the changing cultural context. The problems of women in marriage, love and personal relationships always plays major role in her novels. She shows the need for a new morality in which a woman is treated on par with man equal and the relationship between the two to be built on mutual trust, love and understanding. In each of her novels she pleads for the new marital morality based on mutual trust, consideration, generosity and absence of pretense, selfishness and self-centeredness.

Though the theme is almost identical in Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye, Black Bird*, the backdrop of action is different. It is not an Indian experience of a westerner rather the other way round. Anita Desai observes that "Of all my novels it is most rooted in experience and the least literary in derivation."

Prof. Iyengar makes a valid observation about the difficulties of assimilation stating that Anita Desai, in her novel, *Bye-Bye, Black Bird*, moves out of familiar Delhi and Calcutta and vividly projects the prison, physical and psychological, in which the colored immigrant is caught, but the difficulties of adjustment there and those of return to India. The major symbol is that of the black-bird which, not knowing when their right a migratory bird is. The color of the bird symbolizes the colored immigrants in England who lead an insecure life, not knowing when their right to be there would be questioned

In *Bye-Bye, Black Bird*, the stay of Dev in England provides him an ample scope for cultural introspection. He is in England to join the London school of Economics and his association with English interracial couple Adit and Sarah paves way for understanding the mixed rather varied attitudes. He encounters racial and cultural

differences that unnerve his disposition. He experiences prejudices and open insults and he feels alienated in a different cultural milieu. He is a victim of racism, for he is denied a job on racial considerations. His bitter experience when he wishes to buy a Russian Icon pierces his heart. He understands that the seller doubts his financial status. He abhors Englishmen and women scolding Indian immigrants as “wogs” and “pigs”. These insults make him think about self-esteem and test his patience. He tells Adit: “I wouldn’t live in a country where I was insulted and unwanted.” He can’t understand how his host, Dev tries to accept all the insults given by the English people. The picture he visualizes about England, by virtue of reading literature, turns out to be a bleak one. The refinement, the grandeur and the etiquette, that is glorified in books, he finds them missing. The realities of the west shocks Dev but the picturesque descriptions of nature by the poets of England made him cherish the very thought of it.

Anita Desai convincingly presents the cultural dilemmas of individuals, the distinct feature in her selected works with this theme is the aspect of mixed marriages. Sarah, in pursuit of peace and happiness, confronts annoying situations. The conflict between the two cultures poses serious challenges and struggles to come to terms with their predicaments. The extents of the problems they face vary from context to context. The problems cannot be generalized as culture specific as these problems may crop up irrespective of region, race and creed.

Besides dealing with the conflicting tendencies of mixed marriages, Anita Desai selected novels portray the problems of expatriates and their problems of adjustment. The expatriate looks back and the sense of nostalgia in him or her is immense, on the other hand the immigrant for survival aims at the assimilation of the alien culture. Immigrant experience always remained a contemporary theme for fictional endeavors. It has been extensively explored by writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ved Mehta, V.S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakurni, Gita Mehta, Rohinton Mistry and so on.

Thus Anita Desai delineates the lives of individuals caught in the web of two cultures. The works are examined to establish the notion that women Western or Eastern, are lovable and loving, sensitive and sentimental, individualistic and assertive and that pride, vanity, jealousy and selfishness are weaknesses common to both the cultures.

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