



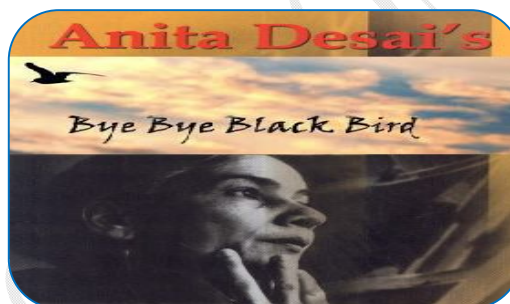
CULTURAL CONFLICT IN ANITA DESAI'S *BYE BYE BLACKBIRD*

Dr. Suporna Mitra

Dept. of English , Assistant Professor , Lonavla Education Trust's, Dr.B.N.Purandare Arts,
Smt. S.G.Gupta Commerce & Science College, Lonavla.

ABSTRACT :

Anita Desai is one of the leading writers of post independence Indian English Literature. She is a novelist who lays bare the inner turmoil of her characters. Unlike other writers of her time, Anita Desai is never showed interest in political or social issues. That is why she is called Virginia Wolf of India for her novels documents the inner weather of her characters especially women. Anita Desai's *Bye- Bye Blackbird* gives a realistic picture of the plight of Indian immigrants in London. In this novel Anita Desai has dealt with the problem of conflict emerging out of east west relationship. In one of her interviews to Atma Ram, Anita Desai had said that of all her novels this novel is the most rooted experience. Practically everything drawn in this novel is amalgam of her own experiences during her stay with the immigrants in London. Culture conflict arises out of culture shock which is a feeling of depression that overwhelms one when he realizes the difference between the way of life he is familiar and that he is with new environment. Anita Desai has given a vivid description of the problems faced by the expats in a foreign land through the characters of Adit, Dev and Sarah, English wife of Adit. The purpose of the present research paper is to lay bare the traumas of cross cultural adjustments, the anger, shame and frustration of immigrants.



KEYWORDS : Cultural Crisis, Dislocation, Exile, Alienation.

INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai's *Bye- Bye Blackbird* gives a realistic picture of the plight of Indian immigrants in London. In this novel Anita Desai has dealt with the problem of conflict emerging out of east west relationship. In one of her interviews to Atma Ram, Anita Desai had said that of all her novels, this novel is the most rooted experience. Practically everything drawn in this novel is amalgam of her own experiences during her stay with the immigrants in London. Culture conflict arises out of culture shock which is a feeling of depression that overwhelms one when he realizes the difference between the way of life he is familiar and that he is with new environment. Anita Desai has given a vivid description of the problems faced by the expats in a foreign land through the characters of Adit, Dev and Sarah, English wife of Adit. The purpose of the present research paper is to lay bare the traumas of cross cultural adjustments, the anger, shame and frustration of immigrants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

(Sivakumar,2011)¹ in his work on *Bye Bye Blackbird* studies the existential problems of adjustment, belongingness and rootedness in the lives of three major characters - Dev, Adit and Sarah.

(Brindashree,2013)² studies the complexities and the dilemma of the immigrants in Exile literature by focusing upon its attraction, repulsion and their exploitation by the vested interest.

(Jena,1985)³studies the interaction between the locale and the individual. How the external landscape becomes the internal climate of the characters enmeshed in an existential groan.

METHODOLOGY

The present paper explores how cultural alienation affects the sensibilities of the characters. The methodology applied in the study is analytical.

DISCUSSION

Anita Desai in *Bye Bye Blackbird* beautifully records issues of alienation and accommodation that the immigrant has to confront in an alien yet familiar world. The migratory blackbird is drawn to and repelled by the white England as its new habitat. The writer captures this conflict through Dev. Anita Desai narrates the various experiences that Dev undergoes and the cultural shock they give him. It is not singly an unfamiliar world that builds up the tension within him but the gap between the expected and the immediately received.

The novels opens at a very poetic note Dev, the chief protagonist of the novel, arrives at England to pursue higher education at London School of Economics. Initially he faces adjustment problem in London. Since childhood he was taught to appreciate the British history, literature and art. Whatever he learns about England through the books, Dev seems to understand that he recognizes the values and tradition of England but gets a cultural shock when he finds that what he has learned about England in his homeland is a contrast when he arrives in England. The conflict between the imaginary world created in the Indian immigrant through his colonial education and reading and the reality that confronts him is highlighted, "It is not the familiarity rather it is a gap between the expected and the immediately received that keeps disturbing him."⁴ (R.S .Sharma, 1981).He also discovers that his values find no solace. Dev represents those immigrants who fail to accept their new homes and continue to walk on the streets' like strangers in enemy territory, frozen, listless ,but dutifully trying to be busy, unobtrusive and however superficially to belong⁵(Desai, 1985).How different is the East from the West, this realization dawns upon Dev when he comes to stay with Adit. As the plot unravels itself, we find Dev transforming into a completely disillusioned man. He feels himself an alien among his country brethren as well as Englishmen. They do not recognize their neighbours and behave with them as strangers. The absurdities of Dev's existence of England and its drab superficialities have been recorded by Anita Desai with accuracy. Dev's longing for a life with its variety and multiplicity remains unquenched in the new atmosphere where "everyone is a stranger and lives in hiding. Though Dev secures a job for himself, he feels frustrated and develops an aversion for London for ill treating the coloured immigrants. When Dev arrives in London, he does not receive a warm welcome instead he comes across various comments on Indians such as "Wogs" and "Macaulay's bastards". The London docks have three kinds of lavatories—Ladies, Gents and Asiatics. A pedlar refuses to tell Dev, the price of a Russian icon, taking him to be too poor an Indian to buy it. Dev feels insulted and wants to leave the country where he is unwanted and insulted. Through Dev, Anita Desai captures the psychic journey of an Indian immigrant. Dev becomes nostalgic about India – the India of familiar faces, familiar sounds and familiar smell. He candidly vents out his feelings before Adit that he will never live in a country where he feels unwanted . What turns him off is the immigrants sheepishness and loss of self-respect."The trouble with you immigrants",said Dev to Adit,"is that go soft . If anyone in India told you to turn off your radio, you wouldn't dream of doing it. You might even pull off your knife and blood would spill. Over here all you do is shut up . But when Dev wanders about in London streets observing its various attractions and allurements, a slow change comes over him. He is caught under London spell and changes his place with Adit, whom he once derided as "boot licking and

spineless imperialist lover.”⁶(Desai, 1985) Dev’s newly developed attraction of England creates a dilemma for him whether to stay in England or go back to India. He suffers from Caliban complex, now loathing, now adoring.” Like Caliban, he is trapped within the colonizer’s conceptual and operational mode of existence.”⁷(Desai,1985)At last Dev decides: All I want is-well yes, a good time. Not to return to India, not to marry and breed , go to office, come home and go to office again but-to know a little adventure, to know, to know,”⁸(123)

In the character of Adit, a young man from India who resides in England with his English wife ,Sarah because something oriental in her attracts him.Finding no jobs in his country inspite of a degree from a British University. Adit has returned to his alien land and settled down there for the last few years. Anyhow, he has got a job as a travel agent and has been generally satisfied with his life. Like any alien even Adit is subjected to humiliation . On the surface he declares that he loves England. He tells Dev that he hardly notices the drawbacks of England and considers himself an admirer of its golden beauty:” I like the freedom a man has here: Economic freedom! Social freedom!”⁹ (Desai,1985)

Even the self- satisfied expatriate gradually finds himself estranged from the new environment. A person born into a culture imbibes it as the very air he breathes. Culture is something which cannot be thrust upon a person. Adapting an alien culture is often found difficult because the value systems are often different. Culture is threatened when one becomes aware of the disparity between his own culture and alien culture. Despite all the attempts made by Adit to adapt the alien culture, he realizes that he is a misfit. All the years that he had lived in England, Adit had been feeding his subconscious mind that he loves everything about England. He is contented with his life in England. But it proves to be the tip of the iceberg. Adit’s final visit to his in-laws disenchants him. The truth that he is an Indian and can never breathe the English air freely dawns on him. The hypnotic charm that England had over him is over. He becomes nostalgic. He longs for Indian food, music and friends. Adit decides to return to India though he knows that the chances of having a bright future is dim but “whatever it is it will be Indian, it will be my natural condition, my true circumstances. I must go and face it all now.”¹⁰(Desai,1985)

Sarah is an English woman whose social and psychological problem arises after she marries an Indian, Adit. Both of them are ordinary and make no big demands on life and do not have any deep yearnings or desires. After their marriage, they settle down in Chapman, a small town. They have to adjust much because of their different cultural backgrounds. By marrying an English girl, Adit incurs the anger of society. Sarah too suffers from the same account. Sarah is always subjected to the jibes and taunts of her colleagues in the school where she works as a clerk. They ignore her and taunt her. What of grownups even the young castigates her. In course of time, Sarah completely alienates herself from public and private life. She avoids conversation with her colleagues who often discuss her married life. They wonder how she is able to adjust with an Indian husband. Sarah is not socially lonely but psychologically lonely too. At home, there are Adit and Dev and their social circle and in school, she has her colleagues. But amid the crowd Sarah is lonely. She cannot enjoy the company of her countrymen, nor can she feel at home in Adit’s social circle. Her bewilderment and frustration is the result of cultural shock to an unfamiliar culture which causes a breakdown in communication, a misreading of reality, an inability to cope.

The strain of inter-cultural marriage is such that it affects her day to day life. She prefer going to a departmental store for shopping instead of the stores of Laura Lane. She does so because she does not want anyone to know about her Asian connection. But, in spite of all precautions, she cannot escape from the charade which is now part of her life. She does not know where she belongs to and is fed up with putting on faces. She wants genuineness and that would come only when she leaves England for good. In England, she is not at peace. Her identity crisis is described more than once in the novel which makes her lonely. The question always nags her as to who she is. Sarah’s problem is human. She wants to be a real person, whether English or Indian.

She is at pains to stress her individuality. When is receives a letter from her mother she is irritated. She is equally irritated with Adit when he addresses her as Sally. The reason is that she is trying to distance

herself from her parents emotionally. She tells Adit, "Don't you treat me with that word she always does- as though I'm not an individual with my own life to lead..."

Sarah maintains the pleasant wedded life into an over-stimulant family in India – in-laws who are waiting to revere her with extended hands, the moment she decides to visit India. This happens at a crucial time when she is expecting a child. Sarah does not regret leaving England. Her consent shows that she has reconciled to being the wife of an Indian whom she loves.

CONCLUSION

Anita Desai through her novel *Bye- Bye Blackbird* depicts the gnawing sense of immigrant sensibility through Adit, Sarah and Dev. No matter what reasons compel an educated Indian to migrate to lucrative abundance of West but adaptation of an alien culture is difficult. Adit appreciates England because it has given him social and economic freedom. He praises its people and their habits but later he realizes that he cannot shed his Indianness. Adit feels homesick. He is reminded of the colourful festivals of India. He feels out of place in England. He has betrayed himself very long and he decides to go back to India and face the reality. On the other hand Dev's Anglophobia changes to anglophilia. He develops fascination for the English people and English countryside. He discovers that the English country is full of interesting things and recognises that the English people have a sense of beauty. Sarah feels displaced in England by marrying an Indian. She feels that the real solution to her problem lies in her leaving England and going to India.

REFERENCE

- 1 Sivakumar, R(2011). *Theme of Alienation in Anita Desai's Bye Bye Blackbird* Asian Review of Social Sciences (ARSS) Vol.2.No.1 2011 pp 32-38
- 2 Brindashree, V.(2013) Exile and Cultural Alienation in Anita Desai's *Bye- Bye Blackbird* - An Analysis The Dawn Vol.no2 January-June 2013 pp 247-255
- 3 Jena, Seema(1985) *Voice and Vision of Anita Desai* (45-49), New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House.
- 4 Sharma, R.S . (1981) Anita Desai(p 45), New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann.
- 5 Desai, Anita, (1985). *Bye-Bye Black Bird*.(208), Delhi: Orient Paperbacks,.
- 6 Ibid. P. 21
- 7 Ibid. P. 39
- 8 Ibid. P.123
- 9 Ibid. P.18
- 10 Ibid. P .204