



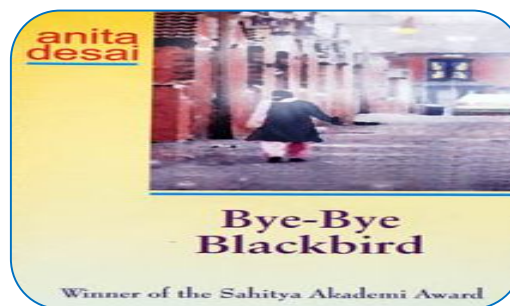
ANITA DESAI'S *BYE-BYE BLACKBIRD*: A CREST OF CROSS-CULTURAL CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT :

Every man is a child of his age. He is influenced by it though if he is man of letters, he may influence it also. An author belongs to his race and age; the spirit of his race and age finds expression through him. A writer is generally said to be "not of an age but of all ages". A creative thinker is by definition a socio-political being. Her or his significance lies in preparing and fostering certain principles, which make the earth a better place to live in. The writers, therefore, cannot confine their words merely for leisure activity; they require to be in touch with more solemn and concerned issues in the society. They are a reflection of the society. They return to the society what they receive from it. They not only reflect the various discourses of the society they live in, but also mediate to mend it as well by their own efforts. Therefore, they cannot escape from the spirit of their own age.

KEYWORDS : *man of letters , writers , fostering certain principles.*

INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai, who is recognized for her novelty and wits, is one of them. Her women characters are real flesh and blood protagonists. She has covered the all-sphere of social institutions like relationships, development, structure, interaction. She has left no corner unturned to explain how people relate to each other, as well as how much the society is responsible to shape a man's behaviour and attitudes. She has knitted her thoughts equally well about the world of men. She expresses her view again and again on how gender issues are central to politics and the nation, as well as in the family. She holds a significant place in modern Indian English novel. Shyam H. Asnani clears: "Desai achieves that difficult task of moulding the English language and idiom to her purpose without a self-conscious attempt of sounding Indian. Known for her sensitivity in the structuring of the pattern of her novels, integrity of artistic vision, imaginative mind, keen observation, sharp awareness, and competent craftsmanship, she has become a much sought after writer-sought after by publishers and readers alike."(Asnani, 15)

In this era of globalization migration has turned out to be an inevitable aspect for human beings. When Diaspora societies travel away from their home country to another country, naturally their home culture remains with them, and in the settled land, they attempt to create 'fantasy homelands' which are ethnically and conventionally alike to their native place. There are so many terms attributed to migrant community such as Diaspora, exile, expatriate and immigrant. The term 'Diaspora' is often wrongly identified or used synonymously with terms such as banish, emigrant, refugee and international. Tololyan confirms this view with the idea that the term diaspora denotes: "a larger semantic domain that include words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community." (Khaching, 11)

Different writers have different opinions on Diaspora. Salman Rushdie in his article *Imaginary Homelands* thinks that the people who have immigrated have identities that are both 'plural and partial'. He indicates: "Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground maybe, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles." (Rushdie, 257)

Anita Desai (1937), daughter of D.N. Mazumdar, a Bengali businessman, and mother Toni Nime of German origin, was born in Missouri, a hill station north of Delhi. She got her education in Delhi at Queen Mary's Higher Secondary School and Miranda House, Delhi University in 1957. She was married to Ashvin Desai, a businessman. Toni was a perfect mother who lived a very domestic life, and remained so until her fifties, when she began to teach abroad. Her family spoke German at home and Hindi with their friends. They had three daughters and a son. Anita was the youngest of the four, and she describes her family as small and intensely close knit, "My family was an oddity; it didn't belong where it was. Going to school; I became aware of its difference, of things that set us apart." (Jaggi, 2)

Anita Desai confesses that while she, as an Indian, recalls India she considers about it as an Outsider. She takes this from her German mother's point of view. She describes her mother as carrying a European core in her which protested against certain Indian things, which always maintained its liberty and its separateness. Her work has explored the lives of outsiders within Indian society and, more recently, also within the West. Her fiction has covered themes such as women's oppression and quest for a fulfilling identity, family relationship and Contrasts, the crumbling of traditions, and anti-Semitism, focus on uprooted and marginalized identities. East and West are treated as mirror images of each other, the serenity and nuisance of the central female character. She gives a new dimension to English fiction by emphasizing on the principal characters as on matters economic, political, social class, namely, the upper class and the aristocracy.

Anita Desai's novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971) portrays the plight of Indian immigrants in London. The novel explores the 'Arrival', 'Finding and Recognition' and 'Departure'. It describes cultural and cross-cultural encounters in the lives of three major characters, namely, Adit, his British wife, Sarah and his friend, Dev. Dev arrives in England for higher studies, stays with Adit and Sarah. He is puzzled when he finds Indians humiliated in both public and private places. In the second part he is changed. He begins to feel a charm for the country. In the third part Adit develops homesickness for India. Dev stays on there. Adit comes to England and marries an English lady, Sarah. Having a job and wife, he leads a happy life there. After some time his friend Dev comes to England for higher education but he does not like the pomp and show of England. Adit faces racial discrimination and cosmopolitanism. From the beginning of the novel he likes the Western way of life but while living in England he shows his disgust towards the way of European life and particularly of England. Adit tries to be sensible to the country he inhabits and he exists for his future. Having a flat, a middle job in a travel agency and a white well-matched wife, he seems Content with his fascination with the white cultural more. Desai sensibly describes his narrow-minded conceit in acquiring a white bride: These English wives are quite manageable rally, you know. Not as fierce as they look -very quiet and hardworking as long as you treat them right and roar at them regularly once or twice a week (*Bye-Bye... 31*)

Dev comes to England only for his education. As a matter of fact he observes the basic distinction of social and educational factors between the East and the West. He becomes eager to be an England-returned teacher and at the same time shows his abhorrence to the social system of England. He hates the men and the manners of England; but his stay there for a while intensifies his leanings to the country. England changes his Anglophobia extreme fear into an anglophile. He develops a great fascination for the English people. Adit on the other hand becomes nostalgic about his childhood memories and longs intensely for his native country India. Dev hates the ways of the English, but now changes and begins to love England and desires to seek his future existence. Sarah is the only character who resigns all claims of being an English girl and submits fully to the wishes of her husband. She

stands for her reconciliatory approach between East and West. She sacrifices her inhibitive leanings just for the sake of her husband. She outlines a proper and balanced approach to the various groups of human relationship. She proves her respectability as an Indian wife. Adit loves England; Dev hates England and loves India; but Sarah plays a middle role, of her natural inclination and willing adoption. She willingly resigns all her claims for existence in England and is ready to leave England for India with her husband.

Sarah, an English girl, wishes to keep her Indian association a secret in the place where she works because of her marriage with Adit Sen. She has a fear syndrome of her marriage with him. She is a poor conservationist, reserved and self-conscious; she suffers from a sense of guilt for nothing. She avoids the London crowds, their curiosity and their questions. She is cautious of touch and contact, and violently turns away from those who glance at her, and keeps to the loneliest path. She is struggling against the odds. Dev and Adit encounter 'the racial discrimination but Sarah's estrangement is much more complicated. By marrying a non-white, she has broken the social code and all the more so, having married an Indian, one from the country which was once a British colony, she is ridiculed by her colleagues.

Adit is puzzled by the plight of refusal of his wife to meet her old friends and acquaintances that she wants to remain alone causes trouble for Adit. After marriage she starts to undermine her past life. She has a dependency syndrome and she fears the world, their looks and enquiries. She feels secure once she enters her room at school. At school, she moves comfortably assured, performing her duty smoothly. Her anxiety, her fears all vanish once she takes up her role of the Head's secretary. To know India and to become Indian are her secrets. Her whole existence is split into two different roles: one in the morning at school and the other in the evening at home. She wants to have her real self, and be sincere and true to her husband. She does not want to give any answer even connected with her own life. She is always compelled to do what she hates most. She is the picture of a woman under stress but tries hard to assimilate and to belong. She tries to escape, to hide and to be unnoticed. When decides to go back to India, she consents to follow him like a typical Hindu wife. Before marriage, Adit once remarked: You are like a Bengali girl..... Bengali women are like that reserved, quiet, May be you were one in your previous life (*ByeBye* ..74).

Adit has now also an obsession for his native land, India. The treatment given out to the Indians there in England has forced him to take a sudden decision and to make a brave effort to go back to India. Prema Nanda Kumar pays rich tributes to Sarah saying: "We have here a heroine-a phenomenon in Mrs. Desai's fiction who is not only capable of meeting challenges but who is also on the verge of motherhood. The unborn child helps Sarah to decide without hesitation and henceforth motherhood begins to play a decisive role ..." (Kumar, 177)

However, Sarah's decision to go to India with her husband is born of any illusion. Her people do not encourage her. Even the Indians talk about the problems she may have to face, but she is not at all terrified about her future. She decides in favour of a happy home. She prefers the real world, English or Indian, she does not care much. She has resolved to adjust to the new environment. Her English self draws back and dies a slow death. In fact Adit's resolution to return to India comes as a blessing in disguise, as it makes her to solve the crisis that confronts her. Before her departure to India she pays a visit to her parents in the England countryside but spends an uneasy time there.

The war between India and Pakistan makes Adit nostalgic and awakens in him a desire to be in India. The love of his motherland shakes the latent feelings. He decides to come back to his country immediately. Earlier he was in a dilemma whether to leave England or not. Ultimately he listens to the call of his conscience by which he realizes his social responsibility. He knows no more artificial life of England. He candidly confesses to Sarah. Sarah dedicates herself to her husband. Though she has to face problems during the long journey from England to India because of her pregnancy she cherishes hobbling thought as the wife of Adit. She marries him with expectations to share the best of his mind and spirit; but she gives up her womanly desires and like a traditional Indian wife accepts her fate. She leaves her motherland for the sake of her husband and motherhood.

Similarly, Dev undergoes a drastic change in his mind. He is an example of dissimilarity. Dev

abhors Adit's mind and prepares himself fully to settle down in England for its luxurious life. The novelist proves that the love of motherland is supreme. Finally he realizes his social responsibilities and returns back home. He gives up all the pomp and show of a materialistic life. He also undergoes a transformation in his character and strikes a comparison and contrast with Adit in existential pursuits.

Deportation, the problems and complications established in the life of emigrants merged as a major theme in the novels of twentieth century authors, crossing the barriers of caste, creed and nationality. The authors are clear enough in narrating the plights of life of immigrants. Desai is one who dives deep in the unconscious and subconscious mind of the emigrants and their nausea, nostalgia and longing for their native land. Adit weighing the merits and demerits of foreign land, ultimately, he comes to the conclusion when his English self is receiving and fading and dying that to achieve his real self and to have a real life he must go to India, his native place.

Desai feels that all these immigrants are free to live or not live in England. Adit leaves England for good and Dev remains behind once. Adit's fascination for his foreign land, to everything about London, is fascinating and, expresses unreservedly: "I love England. I admire England. I can appreciate her history and poetry as much any Englishmen (*Bye-Bye ...* 160)." Dev feels disgusted to see a couple hugging each other under a lamp-post and remark about the obscenity of these people as a bunch of exhibitionists. Adit is proud of his blind admiration for England. Love, admiration and loyalty have much offer to England, and in return he feels like enjoying and celebrating. Ironically, in all his assessments, worship, land of liberty, individualism he realizes that England can provide him none of these. Wherever he goes, he becomes a victim of racial discrimination and is constantly regarded as second grade citizen. His irresistible destiny goes on as long as his wishes to stay in England.

Despite his love and admiration for England, he feels himself as an alien and a stranger. His heart is full with nostalgic dreams of his native land. He longs for many things, especially food items in his home. He closes the circle of his migration complete from India to England and again to India but Dev who comes for studies criticizes the British, laughs at Adit about his love for England. In the beginning he is fully determined that he will not stay in England. He appreciates England's green and grisly life. It is the beginning of his predicament.

Dev has hatred towards England because once England has overpowered his motherland and ill-treated his countrymen. He shows hatred toward England and its people. He hates Indians who support the Western culture. Desai describes Dev's patriotic emotions that he imbibed from the history of Indian freedom. He considers Englishmen as his enemy but at the end of the novel he decides to settle in England which shows another end of his state of mind. The psychic changes of the protagonists and their plight in alien countries have been candidly shown here. In *ByeBye Blackbird* Adit and Dev share in the major parts of novel. Both of them are the two poles of the thematic burden of enchantment and disenchantment of England. Adit analyses his fascination for England thus: I like the pubs, I like the freedom a man has here - economic freedom/social freedom ... and I like the Thames. I like old Ma Jenkins who cleans my rooms And I like weekend at the Seaside. I even like the B.B.C. (*Bye-Bye ...* 20-21).

The dark aspect of Adit's love and the bright aspect of Dev's hatred are not discern ables here see here but the aspect of their cheerfulness is easily recognizable: Pack up all my care and woe, Here I go singing low, Bye- Bye Blackbird (*Bye-Bye ...* 21).

Thus it can be easily expressed that *Bye-Bye Blackbird* depicts the plights of the expatriates in England. In the novel Desai presents a clear picture of the plight of all the characters who remain in a dilemma as to whether they should leave England or not, but the novelist leaves them free to decide. Adit who loves it leaves for good and decides to settle in India. Dev, who hates it, stays in London. In *Bye-Bye Blackbird* there are different effects on different characters. For Adit, it is an eye-opener, making him return to his country.

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