



EXPLORING CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT AND HUMAN DILEMMA IN ANITA DESAI'S *BYE-BYE BLACKBIRD*

Kalika Sharma (Research Scholar),
Dr Shilpi Saxena (Supervisor)
Mewar University, Chittorgarh,
Rajasthan.

Abstract

Anita Desai is, without a doubt, one of the most renowned novelists working in the present literary scene among Commonwealth authors. In a time when society is undergoing rapid transformations, she has been essential in establishing the concept of female selfhood by concentrating on the challenges and predicaments that Indian women experience when confronted with cross-cultural conflicts. Due to the fact that she is able to skillfully portray, in her books, the transitional stages of the perpetually changing roles of contemporary women in India, her novels have a profound cultural relevance.

In her novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Anita Desai explores the theme of human predicament that arises as a consequence of cultural hybridity, cross-cultural disputes, alienation, and other similar issues. In this book, she does an excellent job of depicting the challenges that Indian immigrants face in an English setting. Through the narrative of Adit, an Indian immigrant who arrives in England and marries Sarah, a British girl, she illustrates the predicament that the Indian immigrants in England find themselves in. Now, this marriage between people of different races becomes the source of conflict between their dissimilar cultural backgrounds. When Sarah is surrounded by the forces of these Occidental and Oriental cultures, she has the impression that she is being encircled by them.

The figure of Dev is a representation of the Indian people's animosity toward British culture. There is a gradual change in the behavior of Adit and Dev as the story develops, although in the beginning, Dev is very unhappy at the racial discrimination and disdain shown by the British people toward Indian immigrants. However, as the novel progresses, there appears to be a gradual improvement in the behavior of both Adit and Dev. When Sarah marries a black Asian, she is the one who initiates the process of breaching the barriers that have been established by British culture. We are aware that she is a member of the Western civilization, which is characterized by a sense of sophistication among its inhabitants. In the city of London, the three main protagonists, Dev, Adit, and Sarah, are forced to confront the challenge of adjusting to their new environment and then readjusting to it. Currently, this position that the three people are in is being seen as a manifestation of God's work on a mythical level, from the perspective of India.

Keywords: Predicament, marginalized, immigrant, alienation, Oriental, Occidental.

Introduction:

Anita Desai is without a doubt a notable novelist on the modern literary landscape of the Commonwealth. She is on par with other eminent Indian English authors such as Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Nayantara Sehgal, Kamala Markandaya, and others. In writing that she has done over the latter half of the twentieth century, she has expressed her concern regarding the unsettling topic of whether or not women exist. In a time when society is undergoing rapid transformations, she has been essential in establishing the concept of female selfhood by concentrating on the challenges and predicaments that Indian women experience when confronted with cross-cultural conflicts [1].

The books written by Anita Desai have a profound cultural relevance because she is able to skillfully depict, within them, the transitional phases of the perpetually shifting roles that contemporary women in India are expected to play. It is only when Anita Desai's novels are placed within a particular cultural environment that their significance in the literary world becomes apparent. Anita Desai expresses her concern on the cross-cultural confrontation that places women in a state of problems and predicaments based on their cultural backgrounds. Anita Desai, a novelist, is of the belief that women experience feelings of alienation as a result of cultural conflicts that occur in their personal lives. She encourages her women to speak up against the unequal treatment and humiliation that they have received as a result of the cultural confrontation that they have experienced.

In her work *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Anita Desai addresses the issue of immigrants who go to foreign lands, namely to England, which was becoming into a center of multiculturalism at the time. One may say that this migration of people represents a transition between the culture of the Orient and the culture of the Occident. Because they feel that the culture of the Occident is characterized by logical thinking, growth, forbearance, freedom, peace, and modernism, the people of the East consider it to be more significant and rational than the culture of the Occident. On



the other hand, people from the West have the perception that people from the East are barbaric, uncivilized, and orthodox [2]. They also believe that people from the East are not ready to accept development and are always conventional and conservative. These disparities in viewpoints have resulted in the development of a superiority-inferiority complex among their people, who adhere to their own traditions.

Bye-Bye, Blackbird is a song. The author Anita Desai addresses the topic of human predicament that arises as a consequence of cultural hybridity, cross-cultural disputes, alienation, and other related issues. In this book, she does an excellent job of depicting the challenges that Indian immigrants face in an English setting. The people who migrate from Asian countries are referred to as "blackbirds" by European civilization. As a consequence of this, these indigenous people are perpetually relegated to a position of marginalization, and they are regarded as undesirable outsiders who are not accepted by the indigenous people of the Western world. These Indians are always considered to be outsiders and live a life of seclusion as a result of this. Anita Desai uses the story of Adit, an Indian immigrant who comes to England and marries a British girl named Sarah, to illustrate the predicament that the Indian immigrants in England find themselves in. Now, this marriage between people of different races becomes the source of conflict between their dissimilar cultural backgrounds. Sarah is under the impression that she is caught in the middle of the forces that are associated with both the Occidental and Oriental cultures.

The figure of Dev is a representation of the Indian people's animosity toward British culture. There is a progressive change in the behavior of Adit and Dev as the story develops, although in the beginning, Dev is very unhappy at the racial discrimination that is shown by the British people, who exhibit their disrespect to Indian immigrants [3]. However, as the novel progresses, there appears to be a gradual change in behaviors. When Sarah marries a black Asian, she is the one who initiates the process of breaching the barriers that have been established by British culture. We are aware that she is a member of the Western civilization, which is characterized by a sense of sophistication among its inhabitants. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that the characters' thoughts on this matter are always arguing with one another. As a result, this book addresses the topic of conflict between different cultures in some way. Dev is also filled with hatred toward the culture of the West, which, according to him, is responsible for racial discrimination, cultural intolerance, bias, and narrow-mindedness, among other things, and also causes problems in interracial or intercultural marriage. Adit, despite the fact that he is fascinated by the culture of the West, always shows his disrespect when it comes to the Western culture.

The human predicament that is brought about by disputes between different cultures is portrayed by Anita Desai in her novel *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*. Her portrayal of the struggles that people who are alienated experience is a powerful one. The story sheds light on the conflict that exists between native citizens and immigrants. Both groups are confronted with the challenges of alienation and accommodation, and in order to overcome these challenges, they are forced to struggle in a foreign world. The main character, Dev, travels to London in order to begin his education at the London School of Economics. His goal is to develop his brain in preparation for a successful job in the future; however, he is confronted with the challenge of adjusting to the unfamiliar metropolis. The following are some of the words that Anita Desai uses to describe him:

One of those people who are perpetual immigrants and who are unable to accept their new home and who continue to wander the streets like strangers in enemy land, frozen and listless, but who are obediently attempting to be active, discreet, and, however superficially, to belong. (Goodbye, Blackbird and Farewell 208)

In the following paragraphs, the author goes on to emphasize the eccentricities of Dev, who has a difficult time adjusting to working in London [4]. The following is an excerpt from the study article that R. Sivakumar wrote in *Theme of Alienation in Anita Desai's Bye-Bye Blackbird*:

Using a language that is both beautiful and humorous, the novelist has accurately and detachedly described the absurdities of Dev's living in England as well as the mundane superficialities that are commonly associated with the country. The new environment, in which "everyone is a stranger and lives in hiding," does not fulfill Dev's desire to live in a place that is rich in diversity and plurality. It is a world that takes him back to India, the India of familiar faces, familiar noises, and familiar smells. It is a world that makes him feel old and nostalgic. According to Dev, the reception that immigrants receive in England is particularly problematic. They are openly humiliated, to the point where they are not permitted to use a restroom that is designated for English people; "the London docks have three kinds of lavatories—ladies, gents, and Asiatic." During his conversation with Adit, he expresses his emotions in an open and honest manner by saying, "I would not live in a country where I was insulted and unwanted [5]." "The English habit of keeping all doors and windows tightly shut... of guarding their privacy as they guarded their tongues" is something that he believes he is unable to comprehend. The silence and emptiness of the houses



and streets of London make him feel uneasy. Even in densely populated areas such as London, he finds the city to be "completely silent, deserted—a chilly wasteland of brick and tile." (<http://www.goiv.com> 34).

It is via his terrible experiences in the London tube that Dev has been able to illustrate the predicament that he finds himself in:

Dev walks into the metropolis. As he continues to descend, he goes deeper and deeper into the bowels of the Clapham tube station, which are tiled with white. Dev is rendered speechless as he is carried down with the terrible sensation of being taken to a place that he does not wish to go. The meaning slither of escalators causes him to experience panic. descending, descending, and descending still further—like Alice falling, falling down the rabbit hole, like a Kafka stranger wondering through the black maze of a prison. (Hello, Blackbird, and farewell, 63-64)

The lazy behavior of immigrants, which is responsible for their lack of self-respect and dignity, is something that Dev does not feel comfortable with. During their conversation, Dev tells Adit:

The problem with you immigrants is that you go soft." In the event if someone in India tried to convince you to switch off your radio, you would not even consider doing so. If you were to pull out a knife, blood would be spilled all over the place. There, all you need to do is be quiet and seem like you're being sat upon. I bid you farewell, (Blackbird 65 [6].

Dev's wrath toward immigrants, on the other hand, begins to lessen after a brief period of time during which he wanders around London and examines the numerous exciting sights and appealing activities that are available there. This is what Anita Desai has to say about the shift that has taken place in Dev's behavior:

He is thankful for the daffodil patches of sunshine that can be found around the city, and he walks through the streets and parks of the city. When he thinks about all of the extensive programs of music, theater, film, and art exhibitions that he sees in the newspapers, he is intoxicated by the idea that he can choose any of them to go on any day of the week. It is a peculiar summer in which he is simultaneously the perplexed foreigner, the enchanted spectator, the indignant outsider, and the thrilled sightseer. All of these roles are occurring simultaneously. (Bye-Bye 94)

From this point forward, his perspective starts to shift, and a nebulous sense of uneasiness about the English people is developing in his thoughts

. ...a tumult inside of him, a rising perplexity, a kind of schizophrenia that wakes him up in the middle of the night and shadows him during the day. He is experiencing extreme pain as a result of the brewing of turmoil within him. [Goodbye, number 96]

At long last, he is unable to exert any control over himself, and he finds himself ensnared in the allure of the splendor that London possesses. In his relationship with Adit, whom he refers to as a "Boot-licking toddy" and a "Spineless imperialist-lover," he is always moving from one location to another. (Before I Die, 21)

Before Adit arrived in England, he had already worked in a number of different occupations in England. This is relevant to the situation. Furthermore, he has worked in the field of equipment camping in addition to his previous experience as a sorting officer in a post office. Additionally, he acquires a teaching position at the Blue Skies school in addition to these. His joy is unbounded when he weds Sarah, a woman from England [7]. His happiness has no bounds. A sense of Adit's contentment might be inferred from the following description on his part:

I am content presently. When I am on my way home to Sarah, I enjoy stopping at the local and purchasing some paint. On a chilly day in November, I enjoy donning a quality tweed jacket.... It's a compliment to be dubbed a wog. I am a fan of the pubs. I appreciate the liberty; the liberty to socialize... Gold, Dev, gold, gold everywhere—gold like Sarah's golden hair—that's what comes to mind immediately. (Goodbye, from 18-19)

Subsequently, we discover that there is also a gradual change in the behavior and attitude of Adit toward London, and that a kind of bias against England begins to enter into his thoughts. As a result, he develops feelings of longing for India and starts to crave a trip back to the country. While Adit is thinking about this sensation, he decides to pay a visit to his in-laws, with whom he had almost completely lost his connection. He is "... marred by tactlessness, by inane misunderstandings, by loud underlining of the fundamental disharmony of the situation." His visit is "... marred by these things." [Adieu, Chapter 199] The fact that Adit is beginning to experience "an illness, an ache" is a potentially hazardous circumstance for him because of his feelings [8]. He freely acknowledges that he considers himself to be "a stranger, a non-belonged" in England, and that he is "hunted out by the black sensation of not belonging." [Goodbye, number 206]



Adit blames his English wife Sarah for her hatred of foreign people. He remarks:

At no point will you accept anything other than your own drab, dingy standards and your dull, uninteresting ways of doing things. You find everything else to be ridiculous and full of clownishness. I will miss you, (220.)

At this point, Adit is of the opinion that the allure of the education he had in England is no longer more compelling and compelling enough to prevent him from returning to India. Therefore, he makes an effort to extricate himself from the English quagmire and return to the region that he calls his own. On the other hand, the unfortunate reality is that a relatively small percentage of immigrants are able to realize their desire of going back to their home country. In point of fact, they are hapless blackbirds who have become ensnared in the foreign land. Remarks made by Anita Desai:

England had allowed Adit drop and drift away as if she was done with him or knew that he had done with her, and caught and ensnared his companion Dev (Bye-Bye 261).

Unendingly and indefinitely, this will continue. No alteration, no lessening of the suffering! The issue and quandary that English women find themselves in is also brought to light by the character of Sarah. Anita Desai has also expressed her struggle with feelings of isolation and powerlessness brought on by cultural alienation. It is not just Indians who go through the experience of being isolated in a strange land; English people, such as Sarah, too go through the agony and pain of alienation even in their own territory simply because of their union with foreign folks in the form of marriage. Moreover, Sarah is obligated to maintain

...to the loneliest path and walk "drawing across her face a mask of secrecy." "Those who glanced at her --made aware of her by the violence with which she turned away from them---felt apprehensive, but, since she was a stranger, gave it no thought." (Bye-Bye 34)

The issue that Sarah faces is that she also loses her identity as a result of her marriage to Adit, which causes her conjugal life to become disrupted. As a consequence of this, Sarah conceals herself from the people who are a part of her collective society. Not only that, but she also begins to worry about her own self-confidence [9]. She comes to the realization that she is acting exactly like a fake:

...like an impostor, to make claims to a life, an identity that she did not herself feel to be her own. (Bye-Bye 41)

The fact that her behavior gives the impression of being normal causes her to become anxious and sensitive: "...so cut and slashed into living, bleeding piece." In the time it takes for them to relocate to a new residence, Adit has already retired from Sarah's life after all. (Goodbye, number 164)

When she realizes that her husband is concerned about her suffering, she goes through a period of sorrow and torment. It was as if she had made the decision to be expelled from her home and her history, and she would not be dragged back to it, not even by her husband. It appeared as though she was stuck in a slow whirlpool of dark, deep water. She had begun to drift, round and round, heavily and giddily floating around. (Goodbye, Year 170)

As a result of Adit's inability to comprehend the true reason behind Sara's feelings of estrangement, the situation becomes even additional difficult. He is taken aback by the thought that Sarah is experiencing such agony. Anita Desai makes the following observation: "...it seemed to him that he was experiencing the agony of loneliness." After that, it became ludicrous for him to call her by his own name because she had lost her genealogy and identity. (Bye-bye, number 34)

Loneliness has taken hold of her as a result of the fact that she has lost all of the charm in her life and her connection with her husband. At this point in time, she has two goals: on the one hand, she wants to know who she is, and on the other hand, she wants to comprehend the reasons for her failure to live up to her expectations [10]. By using the following words, the author of the story provides a clear portrayal of Sarah's feelings of isolation:

Who was she? Was it Mrs. Sen, the Head's secretary, or Mrs. Sen, the woman who had been married in a gold and were Benares brocade sari on a day that was scorching hot and bronzed in September? Both of these characters were hoaxes; each of them had a greater, more shadowy aspect of charade about them.... But would she ever be able to accept the truth of the situation? People who were born under the spell of rootlessness, such as Dev and Sarah, are not designed to deal with situations like this... the "unreality" of their life drowns out the "paper walls" of their fort, "turning them soggy and making the pages float away on dim waves." (Bye-Bye 38)



On the basis of this, we can observe that Sarah's situation is representative of the one that all of the immigrants and their wives are in. These women have their own difficulties of loneliness and dilemmas, as they also have to make adaptations in that society that is not their own. There is, without a doubt, the possibility that they belong to the very country where their husbands are immigrants [11]. Anita Desai wants to drive home the fact that their situation is more dire than the situation of Indian immigrants, and she does so in a few different ways. According to the novelist:

The position that people like Sarah can occasionally find themselves in can be extremely embarrassing. To interpret jokes that appeared to depend entirely on matters such as a Bengali's accent, a Punjabi's eating habits, or a Bihari's intellectual limitations, which they naturally did not have any experience with or comprehension of, they had given up their early attempts made out of curiosity and a desire to join. They had learned exactly how much of this foreign world was theirs to tread, and they had given up their attempts. (Goodbye, number 28)

Taking into consideration the preceding debate, the observations made by K. Sivakumar become more pertinent when he writes: It is this incomprehension that drives such individuals to a lack of a sense of belonging. Individuals such as Dev and Sarah are not able to be a part of a world. They will always be torn by their conflicting loyalties since it is in their nature and destiny to be caught between two worlds, namely the Indian world and the European world. On the other hand, *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* had a tremendous amount of potential to become a wonderful novel that portrayed significant psychological delineation. It is unfortunate that the novelist was unable to make the most of the chance that was presented to her by the plot. The interaction between the characters, their cultures and the reasons they are acting the way they do, the crisis that each of them is going through, and the difficulties of disorientation that are a direct result of that crisis have not received as much attention as they should have. It is for this reason that the novels, but the issues that were presented in the first few pages of the novel, have not been resolved. *Bye-Bye Blackbird* by Anita Desai is a novel that explores the theme of alienation.

As a result, the three main protagonists, Dev, Adit, and Sarah, are forced to deal with the challenge of adjusting to and readjusting to their new environment in London. Currently, this position that the three people are in is being seen as a manifestation of God's work on a mythical level, from the perspective of India. In relation to this, K. Sivakumar makes the following observations:

Anita Desai's works have been characterized as a transition from a state of estrangement to a "mythic acceptance" of life and the numerous challenges it presents, according to certain sources. The final work, on the other hand, has elements that are characteristic of existential novels. It continues to unravel the problem of alienation, in all of its myriad manifestations, in an open and close manner, and it describes the impact of alienation on both individuals and society without using any equivocation. The underlying tragedy of modern India is presented in these novels, just as it was in the preceding one. The novelist perceives this tragedy as the loss of the truly human beneath the tangle of impersonal social forces. At the heart of Anita Desai's novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* is the concept of alienation [12].

As far as the problem of the protagonists from the perspective of the locales is concerned, the city of London likewise plays its role in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* by bringing dilemmas before its residents. This is the case in the novel. Even on the streets and in the homes, it seems as though there is a sense of emptiness and alone. Because of this vacuum circumstance, Dev is filled with hatred and is troubled. It is the hollowness of the houses that he finds himself in a state of shock:

It continues to be puzzling to him that the English have the habit of keeping all doors and windows completely shut in order to protect their private. This includes the houses and blocks of flats, streets and squares, and crescents. Every time Dev walks along a street that he is aware of having a large number of people on it, he is always worried because he discovers that the street is completely empty and silent, like a desolate wasteland made of brick and tile. (Goodbye, Bye 70).

When Dev is experiencing a great deal of distress as a result of the anguish of loneliness in London, he starts to despise the city. In response to the lack of response from the city of London, he is on the verge of reaching the point of revolt. There is a sense of isolation among the blackbirds in London, which is symbolized by the forlorn appearance of the Waterloo station, which is filled with haze and smog. Because of this, there is a pervasive sense of loneliness that appears to be a constant in that location. As the pair leaves London, there is a pervasive sense of pessimism that permeates the entire environment; even the words themselves lose their sound:

Words were snatched away and fell into the haze of departure, the fog of expected absence. The discourse was hazy, almost inaudible, and only an accompaniment to the scene. It was as if it were a scene from an old film. (*Bye-Bye* 257)



Through the use of the following phrases, K. Sivakumar offers his thoughts on the manner in which the issues of alienation and situation of people are addressed. As a result, Anita Desai has outlined in her books the challenges and predicaments that individuals who are estranged from society and who are trapped in the crises of a society that is changing. She excels in bringing attention to the horrible situation of highly sensitive and emotional women, who are tormented by a humiliating sense of neglect, loneliness, and despair. She does this exceptionally well. At long last, the existential dilemma of the alienated ego emerges as the primary focus of her literary works. Therefore, she is representative of "a set of new attitudes and themes" that are connected with contemporary Indian novels written in English. The issues that arise from an alienated self, have been tackled and resolved in a constructive manner in the two novels that have been published recently. *Bye-Bye Blackbird* by Anita Desai explores the theme of alienation in its 38th chapter [13]. This is what N. R. Gopal has to say about the way that Anita Desai handles the human situation that is brought on by the struggle between different cultures in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*:

Towards the end, the issues that arise from acculturation are addressed in *Blackbird*. Throughout the course of this book, Adit and Dev, who are both Indian immigrants living in Britain, experience a great deal of cultural disruption and degradation. The Indians have the tendency to develop a romantic view of England and vice versa, which is the primary reason for these kinds of problems. In this conflict, a romantic picture of India and a genuine image of India and Indians living in England and British and British people who travel to India come into conflict with one another. Another factor that contributes to the conflict is the fact that the British have been in control of India for the past two centuries. First, Adit is captivated by the culture of the United Kingdom, and then he becomes disillusioned with it. He weds a woman named Sarah who is totally captivated by the country of India. Without having any prior knowledge of whether or not the Indian family system would accept her, Sarah decides to marry Adit. For the second time, there is a conflict between the continent and the island, and vice versa. Towards the conclusion of the book, Adit travels back to India in an effort to discover his origins. The fact that the romantic immigrant's vision torments them is something that Anita Desai drives home, and she is able to do so in a straightforward and convincing manner. Xenophobia, commonly known as a hate for people from other countries, is another topic that is addressed in this book. Even though immigration is largely an issue of economic significance, it also has socio-cultural components [14]. It is only natural for a man to experience a confrontation with the foreign culture of the country that he travels. This encounter might give rise to difficulties in interpersonal relationships and, by extension, in the process of adjusting to the environment. In addition, the situation gets more severe and intricate when the cultures in question are of a significantly distinct type. (From the *Continent to the Island: Image as Archetype* in Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* 232)

To summarize, it is a modest assertion that Anita Desai, in her novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, holds the human plight and sufferings of Indian immigrants to England responsible for the cross-cultural encounter that she describes in the novel. The cultural hybridity leads to feelings of alienation, which in turn generates further challenges for immigrants in their daily lives. The Europeans have a very high opinion of their culture, whereas the culture of the East is seen to be something barbaric and uncivilized, and it is removed from progress and development. Therefore, they maintain the marginalized position of Indian immigrants and refer to them as "blackbirds," which are foreigners that they do not want to have in their country. Due to the fact that they are subjected to racial discrimination, Indians are compelled to live more isolated lives. In addition, Anita Desai brings attention to this issue by depicting the lived experiences of Dev, Sarah, and Adit. By means of their narratives, the author intends to drive home the point that this intercultural struggle ought to be resolved so that the people can be liberated from the constraints of being caught between the forces of Occidental and Oriental cultures and so that they can live their lives without having to deal with any kind of difficulty [15].

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