



Culture Alienation in Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird*

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Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* explores the themes of exile, cultural alienation and identity crises through the experiences of Indian immigrants in England. The novel outlines the problems and hardships of exiled and diasporic people caught in the crises of a shifting society. It attempts to convey the confusion and difficulties of the exiles through Desai's inventive method, captivating drama, and impeccable style. The novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* simultaneously presents a comprehensive view of both Indian diasporic literature and exile literature. The novel critiques the racial prejudices and social barriers that immigrants face, emphasizing the alienation that leads to psychological turmoil. Through the contrasting perspectives of Dev and Adit, Desai portrays the complexities of migration, where nostalgia for one's homeland clashes with the desire for assimilation.

Key words: Diaspora, Exile, immigrants, cultural, Alienation

The concept of cultural identity is associated with belonging to a group. It addresses the elements of a group. It addresses the facets of a person's vision and conception of themselves. The representation of any social group with a unique culture that makes up the cultural identity, including religion, race, country, generation, socioeconomic class, geography, and so on. *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, written by Anita Desai in 1971, is an example of how cultural interactions can represent cultural identity.

The story revolves around Dev and Adit, two close friends in London. Adit married Sarah, an English woman, and lived in London for a longer time. The study of cultural identity examines the various viewpoints and aspects associated with methods for examining the differences in societies with unusual social values and beliefs. Culture is dynamic and adapts to society's demands.

Additionally, it can be used to characterise our way of life and the values, beliefs, and attitudes we employ on a daily basis. The cultural aspect emphasises religious and artistic values in different ways depending on the situation. Cultural identity has taken on a completely different form in the modern day, encompassing the assessment of a variety of factors, including race, beliefs, language, religion, and lifestyle, as well as concerns of gender identity, national identification, ethnicity, and aesthetics. By using social and psychological burdens, the novelist posed the subject of cultural identity while representing the deepest thoughts of the human psyche. The meeting of the west and the east yielded fresh insights on cultural conflicts.

The novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* by Anita Desai ventures out into uncharted territory. After Adit and Dev, two educated Bengali immigrants, choose to adopt English beliefs and mannerisms, the novel presents cultural questions. People frequently encounter environmental changes when they relocate, which frequently results in ongoing difficulties acclimating to the new cultural norms and beliefs. Through cultural contacts, the shifts in cultural practices also cause perplexity, anxiety, anguish, and irritation. Regardless of the language in which they were composed, the great legends bear witness to this through their profound ideas about humanity and how it can benefit the sick aliens and exiles.

The intense emotions and passions of men and women worldwide, regardless of their differences in race, religion, nationality, government, or colour, are the subject of and foundation for literature worldwide. The literary landscape of the twentieth century is where the issue of cultural estrangement and exile is most prevalent. In the rapid technological advancement and international communication, the roving characters in front of us and their robotic march serve as a reminder that true relationships are lacking.

The phenomena of cultural alienation and exile have spread throughout the world. The exile and alienation of displaced people are vividly shown by Anita Desai in her novels. Desai has the ability to read people's thoughts and recognises

that they are feeling alienated. In *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, these emotions turn her characters into victims.

Culture shock, which is a depressive state that overtakes a person when they recognise the difference between their normal way of life and their new surroundings, is the root cause of cultural conflict. All of the characters are extremely alienated from one another, which is a result of Desai's preoccupation as an author. One or more enduring characters who occupy distinct places in our hearts are featured in each of her novels. Once more, she makes the projection of female protagonists living in a closed, secluded, and distinct world away from issues involving passion, love, and hate the main focus of her character representation. Desai portrays each of her characters as an unsolved and challenging enigma, which sets her apart from other Indo-English novels.

Anita Desai provides an unexpected window into the deeper psychological states of her protagonists because she is concerned about the isolation of the characters. In her interview Desai states that:

I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated, or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against, or made a stand against, the general current. It is easy to flow with the current, it makes no demands, and it costs no effort. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out "the great No," who fight the current and struggle against it, they know what the demands are and what it costs to meet them (1).

Anita Desai's novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, captures the confusions and conflicts of another set of alienated persons. It has rightly been maintained that in the novel "the tension between the local and the immigrant blackbird involves issues of alienation and accommodation that the immigrant has to confront in an alien and yet familiar world."

Desai addresses the intricacies of alienated immigration in this book by emphasising both its allure and a strong sense of disdain or distaste. Prejudice

against foreigners is disliked in the book. The novel's origins are undeniable, and it is not a replica of real connections that pose ongoing and significant problems for exiles and cross-cultural interactions. According to Desai, "*Bye-Bye Blackbird* is the closest book to the reality of all; almost everything in it is taken straight from the experience of living with the Indian immigrants in London" (31).

Dev, who comes to London to further his education, is the main subject of *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. As the story progresses, it is possible to observe him evolving into a fully realised individual who has let someone down. Both Indians and Englishmen make him feel isolated in London. English guys are quite insensitive; they treat Indians as though they are outsiders and do not acknowledge that they are their neighbours. Dev finds the complete quiet in London to be unsettling and uncomfortable.

Dev understands how strangers in their community view him. He observes that Indian immigrants are rushing westward and that they are severely missing their homeland. He feels incredibly suffocated in the tube station and thinks of himself as a stranger wandering around in a pitch-black prison: Dev contact starts to blossom from Adit, who has moved to London with his wife, who was born and raised in England. As Dev leaves to look for work at random, he is surrounded by issues. He finds it too hard to cope with the intense silence in the nearby blocks where people don't care about one another. Dev, who is feeling lonely and alienated, is called a fool by Adit for trying to find his identity in a foreign country.

Dev is a victim of estrangement and accumulates a lot of experiences. He makes comparisons between India and London. Dev is neurotic as a result of his time in England since he cannot give his experience and final decision any significance. He is conscious of the confusion and confession that the external pressure has generated in him. Dev makes the ultimate decision not to go back to India and not to guide the people there. He begins to gradually acclimatise to the

new surrounding environment. His friend Adit Sen, a young Indian man, and his English wife reside in England. Adit first worked as a teacher in England before accepting a small position at the huge Blue Skies. But for him, the intimacy does not negate his sense of cultural identification. England became wealthy, fertile, and successful; even when he considers traveling to India, he is mostly reminded of Indian cuisine, attire, and music. Adit recognises that she is separated from the English people and feels like a stranger in England. He describes himself as an outsider who doesn't belong in England.

The novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* has an international theme since Adit marries Sarah, an English girl, and becomes the target of white society's ire. Ironically, Sarah, Adit's subservient wife, is the one who suffers. She has violated the social code of England by marrying a brown Asian, and she is constantly being made fun of and insulted by both her co-workers and the students at the school where she works as a clerk. Although her friends are interested in asking inquiries about her husband and family, she always steers clear of them.

Sarah responds to many inquiries from Julia, a teacher at her school, with strange remarks like, "she was still breathing very hard at having so narrowly escaped having to answer all the personal questions" (11). They would have been more than willing to believe her, but the letters from India about her Indian husband would have made her stand out like someone who poses as someone else and makes life claims that she didn't feel were her own. The younger generation was likewise following the older generation, and they were enraged and provoked to hurt some of the others. Once she crossed the street, she heard them yell, "Hurry, hurry, Mrs. Scurry, and Where's the fire, Pussy cat?" (35). They pretended not to see her at all as she old-fashioned her way through a crowded mob of people and animals. The awful experience she had at work at the hands of her co-workers and students is discussed here. However, her marriage has a significant impact on her that permeates all aspects of her life. She stays away from the shops on Laurel Lane, where she resides when she goes shopping because she fears that doing so will

compromise her relationship with India. Despite taking every precaution, she is unable to escape the predicament that has become a part of her life; therefore, she prefers to travel to the large department store where she would stay an unknown customer and no one would know she has Asian credentials.

The constant conflict between her real life and her guilt about attempting to impress others, reality, and appearance speaks volumes about her and can lead to a long term mental illness of a kind that involves a relationship breakup. She is tired of changing her identity and is unsure of her place in the world. She wants individuals who will be faithful and devoted to her, and that will only happen when she finally leaves England at the end of the book. Finding peace in England does not make her happy or comfortable.

Throughout the novel, she experiences estrangement on multiple occasions, which leaves her feeling alone and raises the question, “Who is she?” After getting married to Sarah, the Diaspora person in the quest finds herself in a circumstance where she feels alienated; she loses her identity and her name, and she becomes dispersed while seeing people vanish. The intelligent Adit imagined that only a stranger would discover her and that she had lost her identity in England after marriage, with a sudden silver dropping on the light of glamour. It is simpler for a lady to fit in with her new family and friends if she marries someone from the same culture. However, intercultural marriage creates adjustment issues that are difficult to overcome and deal with in society. The issue in Sarah’s case is difficult because she married someone whose race was once subjugated by her own. The greatest irony is that Sarah is homeless in her own country.

Whether Sarah is Indian or English, she aspires to be a true person. She has had enough of being in the middle without a real identity. She does her best to maintain her integrity as a wife by making sure that her marriage is not ruined. Though not as deliberately as she did, her husband Adit had also been experimenting with his ridiculous appearance to give the impression that he was charming. However, he also acknowledges that his existence in England is wrong, and Sarah is

well aware of this as well: “His whole personality seems to her to have cracked apart into an unbearable number of disjointed pieces, rattling together nosily and disharmoniously” (200).

Adit is considering leaving England permanently after the Indo-Pak War in 1965, and Sarah is well aware of this. Adit is unstable at this point and requires a supportive, understanding wife, and Sarah is a decent, responsible wife. She understands and supports her husband better than any other wife in Anita Desai’s novels. She would give up anything to keep her home and her connection with him disciplined. She is aware of how to respond to her spouse in the aforementioned situation:

She could not tell what effect the smaller refusal or contradiction might have on him - ...Rather she would sacrifice anything at all, in order to maintain, however superficially, a semblance of order and discipline in her house, in her relationship with him. His whole personality seemed to her to have cracked apart ... if she allowed this chaos to reflect upon their marriage, she knew its fragments would not remain jangling together but would scatter, drift and crumble. (200)

Adit Sen’s English wife, Sarah, shares her husband’s sense of alienation. The two social worlds that she lives in do not intersect with the two irreconcilable cultures that divide her. Her marriage causes her to become estranged from her community. Because she is English, she continues to be an outsider in the Indian community. She is not a person who has been physically uprooted; she does not belong anyplace. However, she is in a vulnerable state. Finding new roots is not Sarah’s problem; rather, it is one of up rootedness and, consequently, depth. She discovers that she is an outsider and unfamiliar with the world she is a part of. Sarah feels reluctant to leave her home at the time of her departure, “it was her English self that was receding and fading and dying, she knew, it was her English self to which she must say good-bye” (200).

Anita Desai's vivid, rich imagination is only seen to be at its peak. Since the Indian characters define themselves by their responses to the foreign surroundings, the establishment of the physical environment is crucial to the novel's success. Portobello Road symbolises urban England, while the picturesque and romantic countryside of England is depicted with all the attention to detail and love that one expects from Anita Desai's writing. All of the figures in London are given an appearance of unreality and free copying of people due to the city's densely packed bazaars and crowds. Indians are volatile and act in a manner typical of East Asians. White people's awareness of their race is in line with how English people act.

Sarah, Dev Adit, and the other three main characters all act in too predictable ways. They are trying to figure out who they are. Adit's abrupt decision to return to India, Dev's shifting views towards England, the tension, and the hatred are all accurately depicted. Sarah faces the most difficult decision of her life when she must decide whether to accompany Adit to India and raise her child with yet another uninteresting identity or to stay in England and enjoy her promoted job as long as her child has an English identity. Through the three major characters in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Anita Desai effectively exposes the issue of identity crisis and provides a piece of in-depth information and insight on the subject.

For many exiled or immigrant writers, writing novels about their home nation based on memory has proven to be a formidable undertaking. She addresses the issue of adjustment that Black immigrants in England experience in the novel. She brings up this issue by depicting the circumstances of three distinct persons. The three main characters in the novel Dev, Adit, and Sarah all deal with identity quests by examining the impact of racial hatred on their sensibilities. In order to comply with societal expectations, the characters are compelled to practice manipulation.

Desai starts her characters with thoughts of self-analysis after placing them in particular delicate human situations. The story progresses as people adopt new

perspectives, realise who they are, and frequently experience alienation. Many times, in order to accept the truth of the situation, one must enter a realm of imagination. Adit's nostalgia takes on the horrifying aspect of a disease or pain within himself. It starts off suffocating and eventually gets him tired of being in England. He thinks of himself as stronger and wins. In a sort of aberrant dimension of disease, he wanders around London in quest of a sense of belonging, but the city seems completely different; he just cannot recognise his workday, exhausted London as his former golden Mecca. The main characters' identity quest remains ongoing, and they are unable to make a snap decision about what to do. Desai portrays the Indian immigrants' anguish, sorrow, and hopelessness. Similar to this, Jhabvala uses the multicultural and multifocal interactions of the European migrants in her book *Heat and Dust* to explore the cross-cultural encounter and identity crisis. Jhabvala and Desai both do a good job of exposing the sociocultural sterility of Europe and India, respectively.

The difficult situation of these outsiders in an alien Indian and European culture was beautifully observed by Desai and Jhabvala through a number of uprooted and alienated characters from their homeland. Desai's attempt to visualise the differences on the social, political, and cultural fronts where they wanted to be merged with Europe and India but their European and Indian thoughts never left them ultimately led to their characters being in a crisis in an alien culture.

A number of Indian authors have written about cultural struggle, exile, expertise, and man-woman relationships. Due to the abundance of the West, many educated Indians have migrated to postcolonial India. In this book, Sarah is the most attractive character. Both at home and work, she is a dedicated and selfless lady. She is so spiritually aware that she asks herself too many questions about her life, some of which she finds difficult to comprehend. She separated from her parents after being married in order to fulfil the new duties that come with being a wife. She is prepared to travel to India and let go of all she has ever loved.

In the novel, *Bye-Bye Blackbird* the ontological instability, alienation,

cultural struggle, and misery of uprooted individuals are depicted by Anita Desai, a specialist in explaining the action of criticising the psyche. Through her works, Anita Desai has eloquently captured the predicament of those who have been uprooted. Her works clearly address the experience of exile, cultural conflict, human relationships, and existential issues that are prevalent in the literary scene of the twentieth century, and the readers are able to obtain a quick study of these issues.

Despite her social dissatisfaction due to racial prejudice and her separation from her people, the novel's analyses how shrewdly Sarah handles her responsibilities as a wife. While most of Anita Desai's couples struggle in their marriages, and are fortunate to have a kind and understanding wife in Sarah. She might not be pleased and satisfied as a social creature. Once in India, we would all like to commend this foreign woman for understanding her husband, his family, and his nation. In *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Anita Desai has masterfully highlighted the isolation and self-alienation of these three characters. Throughout the novel, the uprooted characters Adit, Dev, and Sarah experience exile, and cultural and social alienation, and they are plagued by ongoing identity crises. With particular reference to Anita Desai's novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, this essay has attempted to illustrate the development of exile literature from its modest beginnings to its current position. Since this paper aims to produce many more, this is just the beginning. Interested in studying literature from exiles.

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