

Exploration of Indian Sensibility in Anita Desai's Novel "Bye-Bye Blackbird"

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Abstract

The question "Who am I?" is one of the most significant characteristics of Diaspora writing. It refers to how we perceive ourselves as both unique individual and as members of a social community. It also alludes to our perception of how others might classify and see us. Every social group that one acquires from their family, their community, and their culture influenced them through the entire lives. Writings by Indians living abroad or in India reflect the author's cultural, sociopolitical, and religious background as well as their sense of identity as Indians. When people carry the weight of their homeland to the chosen settled area, it shapes their emotional psyche. The current paper is an earnest attempt to examine the modern Indian sensibility in foreign setting in Anita Desai's novel "Bye-Bye Blackbird". It depicts immigrant life and how they view their native India and the country where they settled, England. It is characterized by Sarah's internal battle between Adit's Indianness and her own Western self.

Keywords : Anita Desai, Sensibility, Indianness, Consciousness

INTRODUCTION

There are numerous mansions in the fictional house. The era of post-colonialism ushered in a historical period marked by issues of cultural dislocation, cultural prejudice, and alienation, as well as a yearning to find some sort of shelter. The fact that the Indian diaspora inhabit numerous geographical areas is implied when we refer to them as transnational. In one way or another people who have left their home countries attempt to stay connected to them by the history, customs, and religious edifices they have built there. Gazing within, they refuse to let go of the baggage they brought with them when they departed from their homeland. Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee, were all born in India and became permanent residents of foreign countries. Their writings in English aim to reflect the Indian ethos to the world at large as well as to take account of oneself. Among the most significant writers in India today is thought to be Anita Desai. Her portrayals of India and its people across several historical eras are well recognized, but she is also well-known for her literary depictions of loneliness, isolation, family issues, immigration, and women's status. She

is a woman writer who believes that action, experience and accomplishment are less important than thought, emotion and sensation.

The sensibility is comprised of irony, belief in a secular muse, alienation, and antagonism to idealism and romanticism. As Collins puts, “Sensibility means the ability to experience deep feelings. Someone’s sensibility is their tendency to be influenced or offended by things” (Collins 2016). Indian society in the postmodern era becomes multicultural and pluralistic. Regarding diaspora literature, Anita Desai's portrayals of the common person struggling alone in both their own country and their adoptive one are particularly noteworthy.

Although the subjects covered by Desai's voluminous works, which span an incredible fifty years, are very different, they are also very similar. Her novels all deal with the challenges faced by individuals torn between two cultures, just as she may have felt in her own family, unable to choose which side to support. The novel "Bye-Bye Blackbird" by Anita Desai resonates with an Indian culture and way of life. By capturing the nation's economic, religious, cultural, social, political, and geographic environment, the pages of India are brought to life. It depicts the way of life of immigrants and their perspectives on both their adopted nation of England and their native India. It also highlights the psychological and physical issues that Indian immigrants faced, as well as their struggles assimilating into English society. Adit, Sarah, and Dev, who just moved to London, are the three main protagonists in the novel. The novel is organized into three sections: "Arrival," "Discovery and Recognition," and "Departure". Adit, for example, is a prime example of how these hybridized forms emerge; on the one hand, he practically believes himself to be English, but on the other, he cannot give up his Indian friends, Indian food, Indian songs, or Indian music. Adit and Sarah, who had a terrible experience in England, are more drawn to India, which portrays their true problem of trying to make a life for themselves in a foreign country. Despite having some type of animosity towards England, Dev eventually learned to embrace it as his home.

Indian author Anita Desai writes in a true, unique style that goes beyond being accurate and skilled. In terms of topics, perspectives, and preoccupations, it becomes increasingly Indian. It was written in a language that has Indian influences. One nationalist critic, Anthony D. Smith, claims that religion and culture are markers of identity. The protagonists in this book repeatedly attempt to identify their Indian identity by adhering to Indian traditions and customs.

Adit is undoubtedly a huge fan of England throughout the novel, but he also expresses a strong love to and affinity for his native country when he says-“ When I have a whole month of leave saved up, I'll go. My mother will cook hilsa fish wrapped in banana leaves for me. My sisters

will dress Sarah in saris and gold ornaments. I'll lie in bed till every morning and sit up half the night listening to the shehnai and sitar” (Desai 51-52).

Even though Dev is an immigrant, he finds it very difficult to adapt to the atmosphere in London, and he will face many challenges in doing so. He quickly grows tired of the emptiness and silence that pervaded London—something that is not typical of India. He says: “ ‘Now if this were India,’ he explodes one dull day, standing at the window, I would by now have known all my neighbours __even if I had never spoken to them. I'd know their taste in music by the sound of their radios. I'd know the age of their child by the sound of its howling. I'd know if the older children were studying for the exams by the sound of lessons being recited...” (Desai 60).

Indianness is evident in the accurate depiction of the characters' attire, eating habits, and even hairstyles. Desiring Indian food is a constant companion of Adit's and other immigrants' stay in London. Conversations on Indian food's sensitive nature are common. Adit even brags about how well his wife Sarah can prepare Indian cuisine. Sarah has learned how to cook from him, he claims. Sarah is even capable of making Charchari, he continues. He remembers- “ ‘Oh yes. Poppysseed. I get poppysseed in that shop off Tottenham Court Road and we grind it and put that in. It makes authentic Charchari. And last Christmas I told her, you can have your plum pudding but my idea of a proper party pudding is good, rich carrot halwa. I made five pounds of it’ ” (Desai 18). Indian cuisine is Adit's favorite. Even during Christmas, he sells Indian halwa. This demonstrates unequivocally that English taste does not satisfy his craving for Indian food. One sign of his indianness is his love of Indian cuisine.

The India that they are picturing is reflected in the language they speak. Hindi and English words are frequently confused by them. The terminology they use frequently are wallah, puja, paji, yar, budhi, etc. Indian social relations are evidenced by the widespread use of yar between themselves. Since England is infatuated with India, they are psychologically closer than they would be in India. The immigrants all have India as a common denominator. The immigrants have psychologically come together at this stage. The Indianness ethos is all that separates one's love for their homeland.

The majority of the novel is devoted to Dev and Adit's conversations. Adit is frequently criticized by Dev for publicly embracing English and abandoning his Indian way of life. However, Adit critiques the flaws in the Indian way of life. Although their opinions about their own country appear to be at odds, Adit is constantly unconsciously motivated by his love for India.

Consciousness has a significant role in defining the author's Indianness in addition to sensibility. The quality of being cognizant of one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors is known as

consciousness. It can also refer to the entirety of an individual's or group's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. Together with a collective awareness or sense of a people, such a collection of ideas pertaining to a specific field make up consciousness. Adit goes to the village home of his mother-in-law. He is completely changed by that visit. This is when his passion for India blossoms. He believes that England is not where he belongs. He feels like "...the eternal immigrants who can never accept their new home and continue to walk the streets like strangers in enemy territory..."(Desai 187).

Adit's innate affection for India is the reason behind her last return to the country. The reason for Adit and Sarah's decision to go back to India starts to puzzle Dev. Adit adores the English way of life and countryside. Marrying Sarah, he is infatuated with English ladies. He talks with Dev, whom he is sheltering in his home, and it is clear that he loves England. It is anticipated he will finally return to India. It's unlikely that Adit, who is content in England, will go back to India. However, Adit and Sarah make their way back to India. According to Dev, the reason behind their return to India was the conflict between India and Pakistan. However, there is a love-hate relationship between the adoptive nation and the birth country. Adit admits to Sarah that he doesn't think his existence in London is real. He says- "I can't live here any more. Our lives here—they've been so unreal, don't you feel it? Little India in London. All our records and lamb curries and sing-songs, it's all so unreal. It has no reality at all, we just pretend all the time. I'm twenty seven now. I've got to go home and start living a real life" (Desai 210).

CONCLUSION

It becomes clear through the narrative that Adit has been unhappily living in the background, and Dev suddenly begins to find England to be quite alluring. He ultimately chooses to stay and make England his permanent home. The two men in Desai's story also demonstrate that despite their complete lack of financial hardship, they do not interact with friends who are English-born and do not take advantage of Britain's social life or all that it has to offer during this prosperous period. They spend most of the story alone, either visiting family or catching up with their Indian acquaintances. It is a metamorphosis of the sensibility of a person stranded in a foreign land, forever yearning for his roots, culture, language, religion, and past while exhibiting a persistent sense of displacement. Despite this, Desai uses stylistic devices like flashback, stream of consciousness, internal monologue, fantasy, and symbolism to successfully transcend the limitations of her modern social and political reality. In addition to advancing the action, she regularly employs memory as a literary device to delve into the characters' hidden selves. With the novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Desai effectively illustrates the struggles faced by Indian immigrants in London as well as their attitudes toward both their adopted country and their place of origin.

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