



A Psychological Conflict in Anita Desai's *Bye Bye the Black Bird*

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Abstract:

*The entire Post Independence fiction does not radically depart from the idealistic social strains but consciously focuses at the residuals of issues which shift from society to psyche. And it is the psyche that comes under smart focus. The first group of the novelists includes Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Bhabani Bhattacharya. These novelists reveal the social, economic and political realities of India, especially the gross realities of caste and class conflicts, exploitation and the proverbial Indian poverty. The second group of writers includes Kamla Markandaya, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, Arun Joshi and Anita Desai voice forth the human predicament-vis-à-vis the negative social forces that subvert man's progress. Of all the novelists of the Post-Independence period, Anita Desai occupies a unique position as a writer. She mainly illustrates the internal drama of human life in her fiction, and concentrates on its basic facts. The main forte of Desai's fiction is the exploration of the main currents and undercurrents of human psyche. She is more concerned with the portrayal of inner reality than the outer life. Her sharp awareness of the inner reality and the massing of details is expressed in a manner that the interior self of the characters is revealed in all its prominent shades. Her protagonists are not average. In this paper I have described such sensitive souls as, sweet Sarah in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*.*

Keywords: *Consciousness Fear Psychosis, Existentialism, Psychic Turmoil, Matrimonial Silence, Psychology*

1. Introduction

The Indian writing in English, with the background of more than a century, has passed through various stages giving priorities to different perspectives at different times. Till lately, the landscape of Indian fiction remained laden with the themes of freedom struggle and its after effects. But with the coming up of new writers like Anita Desai, a new direction and a new vista has been opened up.

Bye Bye blackbird deals with a group of Indian immigrants in London and their complex emotional relationships. In this novel, internal and external conflict presented by the three protagonists, Dev, Adit and his wife Sarah. The main part of the novel covered by the external conflicts of the main protagonists and the internal conflict in the mind of the character presented in the form of their psychological dilemma. Anita Desai presents the current problem of adjustment faced by conflict between black Indian immigrants and white Englishmen. The novelist presents this conflict presenting three major characters and explores the effect of racial malice and hatred on their sensibility. These three protagonists face the dilemma of finding their identity because their background is rooted in different classes of society divided by birth and sense of social placement, they find themselves in an alien atmosphere, where it is not easy for an individual to adjust.

Anita Desai presents the commendable success, the confusions and conflicts of isolated character, Dev, who feels isolated in London from both Indian and Englishmen due to their attitudes. He finds himself

totally conflict in England due to his inability to reconcile with English norms and conventions and find it difficult to adjust with them who insult him as black Indian immigrants. The external conflict as the treatment to Indian people as migrated and belong to low race from the Eastern part supposing they are dependent and have no rights to walk freely in England with the superior social status. This inferior treatment of Englishmen leads Dev to alien in strange country. The self consciousness that leads him to a self crisis around the whole novel covers the conflicting situations. He experiences a lack of sympathy and warmth among Britishers who cannot recognize even their neighbours and live like strangers to one another. The external conflict between him and Englishmen leads the psychological condition in the novel.

Another conflicting situation of Dev in the novel is the humiliating treatment accorded to immigrant in England, while travelling in a Bus. He feels humiliated while buying ticket for seats as conductor's way of treatment to give the ticket to him. The external landscape becomes the internal climate of these characters trapped in an psychological despair. There is a gap between his real self and imagined self that increase his psychological agony in an alien country. His inner conflict in the mind, as his acceptance and rejection is presented in the novel. It renders him emotionally and intellectually tortured person. London makes him aware of his otherness, that he does not belong to the world that he takes to be the source of his consciousness. His suffering emanates from this conflict between experience and mental perception and suffers because he keeps on oscillating between his choices. He lives in uncertainty, denied, rejected, and finally develops a schizophrenic attitude towards England. However, in the final part of the novel, he loses his self-control and is slowly drawn into London life. He makes adjustment with the conflicting situation and finally realizing his shortcoming, he decided to stay there. Through these characters, Anita Desai explores the psychological theme of maladjustment, isolation and alienation.

Adit Sen, has confronted with the conflict condition in the novel. Like Dev, he becomes aware of his otherness after his visit to his in-laws and leaves England as a patriotic India. Dr. G.D. Barke has rightly said: 'Adit though lives and admires England, loves everything that is English appreciates her history and poetry, feels the thrill about Nelson's battles, Waterloo, about Churchill all, and yet all this break like a soap bubble at the first touch of reality. He must have not loves England less but then he loved India more.'¹

He is a young man from India who resides in England with his British wife, Sarah. There is also element of conflict of values. In India. He does not find a job in spite of a degree from British University and comes London and settled there getting a job as a travel agent and has been gradually satisfied with life. Adit experiences some conflicts with Englishmen in England, as he is humiliated by calling him 'wog' and always pretends not to hear it. On the surface level, he declares that he longs for Indian things like music, food and friends. The conflict between his own Indian culture and alien British culture affects him in his life. After marriage with Sarah, he has to face many difficulties in his own life. Like many other immigrants, he stayed in his disillusionment with an alien culture. In addition, he tries to find reconciliation. He finally realized that, he is an Indian and can never breathe the English air freely down on him at his in-law's house. This longing suddenly grows intense during his visit to Sarah's parents' house and Adit, from then onwards, feel stifled and starved in the alien land. He makes up his mind to leave for India to lead a real life of all pretences. Adit sings:

2. O'England's green and grisly land, I love You and only a babe can (Bye bye,130)

Sarah is victim of the conflicting situations in her own country. Like Maya, Monisha and Sita she does not lose her hope in her married life as she accepted the practical real life of the absurd world. She exercises her choice of freedom and marries with an Indian immigrant, Adit Sen, but like a true psychological character, she faces the conflicting situations in the novel. The most of her life span which is covered by external conflicts in the form of external western culture. Adit's conventional

attitude, her parents restlessness and social set-up in England. The conflict between Sarah and Adit surfaced as their marriage becomes materialize, as both of them belong to different cultural backgrounds. Their different subjective attitudes, social background and perceptions make them scattered in their marital life and numerous adjustments, which a married couple is compelled to make or fails to do so. She is not able to cook Indian food to the entire satisfaction of her husband most of the time. And, both of them have difficulty in adjusting to each other's problems. After marriage, her reserve turns into aloofness losing her zeal to participate in living and becomes apathetic. She feels that her life is an empty and in effectual one. Meenakshi Mukherjee is of the view that: 'She is displaced in her own country and her identity crisis will never be solved even if she goes back to England.'²

Therefore, she left with stark which led her towards her psyche. Her conflicting situation increased due to her immersion in a strange culture and causes a breakdown in communication, misreading of reality and inability to cope. She feels depressed because she cannot fully involve herself in her husband's culture nor can she adapt herself to his society.

To sum up, Anita Desai in the novel *Bye Bye Blackbird* is highly concerned with the psychological theme of alienation and isolation. It results from psychological issues such as adjustment in a new world of discrimination, estrangement, racial, hatred and homesickness. She points out the effect of heterogeneous culture on the sentiments of the three characters, Dev, Adit and Sarah in this novel. When the novel begins, Dev has just arrived in London from Calcutta to study Economics. He was staying with his school friend, Adit Sen, who has been in England for several years and settled there with his English wife, Sarah. Soon he is humiliated as an immigrant, faces psychological predicament and finally, confused either to leave England or to prolong his sojourn there. It seems that he finds his existence unstable. Insecure and tortured emotionally and intellectually. Anita Desai records the absurdity of Dev's existence in England and its drab superficiality in the first part of the novel. She established her view about another protagonist, Adit whose love for England is superficial. After his engagement with Sarah, he goes back to India in the hope of settling there, but lack of better financial prospects drives him back to England. In spite of his professed love of England, he is an Indian at heart and plans to go to Calcutta and visit his parents but that remained temporary. He hatred the London love and his sense of alienation intensify his homesickness. This contradictory view between Adit and Sarah reveals the dilemma. Sarah, English wife of Adit, married with a hope of filling the hollowness of her life with the exotic and romantic world of her husband.

At last, we can say that *Bye-Bye Blackbird* deals with the theme of psychological conflict with encountered by the Indian immigrants in England on account of their inability to adjust with the atmosphere and situations alien to them. The novelist analysis this existential predicament by delineating realistically the situations of three major characters Dev, Adit and Sarah, who fails to come under the terms of reality and consequently feel rootless and utterly cut off from the people around them and also from their own selves.

References

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