



**DIASPORIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN ANITA DESAI'S NOVEL
BYE-BYE BLACKBIRD**



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ABSTRACT : *The present paper is intended to deal with Indian Diaspora Literature. The ancient human migrations, the medieval resettlements of warring groups and the modern globalization are the different phases of human quest for the creation of new civilization and also their need for progress and development. Such human movements have generated the concept of Diaspora which means human settlements away from their original home land. Thus Diaspora signals an engagement with a matrix of diversity of cultures, languages, histories, people, places, and times. The literature of the Indian Diaspora comprises an important part of the burgeoning field of Anglophone postcolonial literature. The*

focus of English literature has invariably shifted to the postcolonial, cultural, subaltern and diasporic studies. Diasporic literature is a veritable storehouse of numerous cultural perspectives and multiple trends. Despite tremendous diversity and divergence, this literature is characterized by certain "colonial consciousness" enabling the writers to assert their national identity and to give befitting expressions to the subversive impact of colonization. The writers living abroad live on the margins of two societies and they are shaping cultural theory nowadays. The diasporic writing is governed by an urge to relocate, reconstitute, re-examine and re-establish the cultural identity.

KEYWORDS : *Diaspora, literature, post colonialism, globalization, diversity.*

RESEARCH PAPER

Anita Desai gifted with sensitive observation, penetrating analysis, and skill to paint with words, marks the advent of a new and mature phase in Indian English fiction, being a trend setter. She is one of the serious yet appealing novelists on the Indian English firmament. Born (24 June 1937-) of a German mother (Toni Nime) and Bengali father (D. H. Majumdar). settled in the US, having cross cultural background and first hand experiences as an outsider or marginalised in another dominant society, account for the unmistakable stamp of authenticity in Anita Desai's fiction. Her parentage, her upbringing and immigrant experiences have contributed to her cosmopolitan outlook and sympathetic attitude and understanding of the pained predicament of the immigrants. She is recognized as one of the noticeable voices among Indian writers in English, her consistent involvement in the field of fiction has won her wide critical acclaim in India and abroad. The recipient of Sahitya Akademy Award for *Fire on the Mountain* in 1978. the winner of the Royal Society of Literature's Winifried Holthy Memorial Prize, nominee for the Booker Prize, got the coveted Padama Shri in January 1989. Anita Desai has proved herself to be a "consummate creative artist, she shows tremendous potential and vitality. In her writings she not only offers an expose of human life in its shocking shallowness or outward shout, but also provides, down deep, a philosophical problem or basis to sustain our life, her earnest endeavour is to hold a mirror to life ... in the process to untravel the mystery of human existence.

Diasporic Literature is a very vast concept and an umbrella term that includes in it all those literary works written by the authors outside their native country, but these works are associated with native culture and background. In this wide context, all those writers can be regarded as diasporic writers, who write outside their country but remained related to their homeland through their works. Diasporic literature has its roots in the sense of loss and alienation, which emerged as a result of migration and expatriation.

Generally, diasporic literature deals with alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, quest of identity. It also addresses issues related to amalgamation or disintegration of cultures. It reflects the immigrant experience that comes out of the immigrant settlement.

The immigrants, whatever their reason for migration be, financial, social, political, no matter whether they migrated for trade and commerce, as religious preachers, as labourers, convicts, soldiers, as expatriates or refugees, exiles (forced or voluntary), or as guest workers in search of

better life and opportunities have shared some common things as well as differences which are based on their conditions of migration and period of stay in the adopted land. Mostly the migrants suffer from the pain of being far off from their homes, the memories of their motherland, the anguish of leaving behind everything familiar agonizes the minds of migrants.

The diasporic Indians too, do not break their relationship with the ancestral land. There is a search for continuity and 'ancestral impulse', an effort to look for their roots. Settlement in alien land makes them experience dislocation. Dislocation can be considered as a break with the old identity. They experience the sense of loneliness in an alien land feel as they face non-acceptance by the host society and also experience ethnic discrimination.

The immigrants attempt to assimilate, adapt and amalgamate with the society of their host country. Their attempts of adaptation and adjustment are not without their concern to maintain their original culture and identity. The marginal groups try to guard themselves against the dominant host group. The most important means used for insulation is the continuation of the cultural practices and social traditions. The first generation immigrants are always concerned with keeping the social, cultural baggage which consists of among other things their religion, language, music, art, dress, cuisine, etc. intact. Conscious attempts are made by the diasporic communities to pass their traditions to the future generation. Jaywanti Dimiri has analyzed these dilemmas of the second generation diaspora very appropriately as she comments;

Expatriate experience is problematic for the second generation immigrants of the third world for specific reasons. Born and brought up on foreign soil expatriation for this neo-class of immigrants hangs the background as an imaginary reality, free from the stigma of nostalgia and the popular symptoms of angst, loneliness existential rootlessness or homelessness, their predicament is in many ways worse than that of their predecessors. Despite their assimilation and acculturation they cannot escape from being victimized and ostracized. (Dimiri, 2000:28-33) ¹

In today's literary field, it is accepted by all that diasporic or expatriate writers are those writers who have preferred to settle in countries other than home country, distinguishing them from "Desi" or "rooted" counterparts. It should be noted that while early expatriate writing were generally those of a tourist on a short period away from home. Many of the present days expatriate have chosen to settle abroad. However, the present days writing by expatriate writers, the backdrop and inspiration is always derived from the homeland.

As the expatriate writer experiences cultural, geographical and emotional displacement, there emerges a diasporic sensibility that mirrors the plural identity of the writer. Their writing is characterized by a pluralistic vision. There is a constant shifting between two worlds, voyaging back and forth between two locales. The writer few times visualizes his or her home country as a place of violence, poverty, corruption and sometimes it is romanticized. We also see that in the floating world, aggressive forces pushing him or her from all sides longing to hang on to old tradition, customs and ways but caught in the world he ultimately calls his own way not be the one he desired for, nor the one he left behind, but an uncertain land which he must merge now. This pendulum movement is found in most expatriate writing with the writer caught between the past and the present.

Memories always remain a significant factor in expatriate writing. The memories evoked are of by past times, place and people as they were when the writer experienced them, as they are now, at this point of time they may immensely altered. Besides, these memories are now colored by imagination and nostalgia. In the fictional world of these writers, different worlds are negotiating each other, real world and the imaginary.

In the study of diaspora literature 'Displacement' or 'Dislocation' is important notion that is used not only to express the physical movement of an individual from one place to the other but it also shows how with the movement of a person the aggregate of a whole nation, to which he or she belonged, carried with them. Dislocation leads to cross-cultural encounters that have always affected the lives of immigrants and there is constantly the possibility of rejection, confusion and tension when people from different cultures intermingle. This interaction portrays the immigrants caught in flight between boundaries, an astonishingly complicated web of memories, relationship and images. The migrants in the foreign culture lie in soft bond memory of the motherland.

The expatriate novelist's works investigate the cultural displacement and its impact. The uprooted immigrants face varied situations, problems of rejection and acceptance. If accepted, the problem would be an adjustment, coping with the anxiety, monotony, disappointment, isolation and finally they face failure and rejection.

The works of expatriate writers depict the effect of cultural uprootedness and the never-ending experiences of which social rejection is central. Social rejection is when a group of people decides, to reject one or more persons from participation in their group. Social rejection can be of many different ways. Sometimes people out rightly reject someone by telling them they are not

wanted. Sometimes, there is a potentially more cruel rejection that is not easy to accept in human beings, and there is always a natural sentiment of the need for acceptance in groups

In loneliness, a psychological state, an immigrant experiences a strong sense of emptiness and loneliness. Loneliness is more than a sense of having company of another person. It is a feeling of being detached, disconnected, and/or cut off from other people so that it feels difficult or even often feel empty or depressed inside. Feelings of estrangement or isolation from the world are common amongst those are lonely.

There has been a great change in the concept of diaspora because of demographic changes and progress in communication technology during the last two decades. Fastest mode of communication, social networking sites have their impact on the experience of exile. A post-1965 migrating generation thinks India very differently than a post-1980s and posts 2000s generation. Class and gender also play an important role in the shaping of not just the diaspora but also diaspora's interface with cultures. A major theme of in diasporic writing is their occupation of liminal space. In fact, diasporic writing is doubly liminal space. This writing remains an outsider looking in at the new culture, but it is also an outsider to the homeland, looking in at a past of space that has altered in their absence.

It is interesting to note that the history of Indian diasporic writing is as old as the diaspora itself. The first Indian writing in English is attributed to Dean Mohamed, who was born in Patna, India. His book *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* was published in 1794. It predates by about forty years the first English text written by an Indian residing in India. Kylas Chunder Dutt's 'Imaginary History' A Journal of Forty-Eight hour of the year 1945 published in 1835. The first Indian English novel, Bankimchandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife*, was to be published much later in 1864. It proves that the contribution of the Indian Diaspora to Indian English writing is not new.

Portrayal of the various issues generated by the experience of miagrancy and Diaspora, such as displacement, alienation, rootlessness, fragmentation, racial discrimination, marginalization, crisis in identity, cultural confrontation and many others are largely portrayed in contemporary Indian Writing in English.

The late twentieth century has witnessed the emergence of transnational community better know it as Diaspora. The word 'Diaspora' has been taken from the Greek word 'dia' and 'sperio' which literally means "to disperse". The word 'Diaspora' usually refers to Jews living in different parts of the world after their displacement from their own land, more recently after their mass killing

in Germany by Nazis. But Diaspora originally refers to the journey of Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt described in the second book of *The Bible*. The word Diaspora originally applied to the Jewish migration from their homeland is now associated with a metaphoric title for expatriates, exiles, immigrants, refugees, emigrants, homeless individuals, rootless persona, etc. Today the concept of Diaspora is related to expatriate minority communities who are spread all over the globe either by force or choice. Vijay Mishra views:

... 'homeland' figures prominently in the psychic imaginary of diasporas...diasporic epistemology locates itself in the realm of hybrid, in the domain of cross-cultural and contaminated social and cultural regimes.... The act of displacement makes diasporic subjects travelers on the move; their homeland is a series of objects, fragments of narratives that they keep in their heads or in their suitcases. ("The Diasporic Imaginary," 421-47) ²

Indian women Diaspora has emerged as a significant voice on the global scene, they are powerfully fictionalizing the experiences of Indian Diaspora, whereas most of the writers are apparently well settled and are assimilated into the mainstream, in their writings on the contrary, they prefer to write about India and thus Indian consciousness is getting new paradigms enrooted. Indian women writers such as Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, by dint of their flair for creativity, have made landmark contribution to literature and are fountains of inspiration to the subsequent generation of creative writers. The names Anita Desai and Kiran

Desai occupy a unique place in the Diaspora writing for having caught the imagination of readers in an impressive way.

Bye-Bye Blackbird is ostensibly concerned with the predicament of Indian immigrants in England, taking into account the cultural dilemmas and displacements of the immigrants and the disappointments and agonies that ensue. The feeling of "in between's." belonging to "nowhere." cultural alienation, and racial discrimination are the lot of immigrants who desire to make "little hidia" out of London. The nostalgic longing of the colonized for his second home, who keeps wavering between the two choices, to live or not to live in England, gives way to rootlessness, homelessness, disillusionment and frustration. *Bye-Bye Blackbird* delineates "the assimilation and accommodation of the immigrants in a world which is tempting and appalling at the same time. It basically deals with the self awareness of the educated Indian immigrants, who

keep hovering between "the acceptance and rejection of a world they have been educated to admire and love.... The dull and drab superficialities of Indian immigrants' existence in England come alive in Anita Desai's work" (Sharma. R. S. "Alienation. Accommodation and Locale in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*."). Desai explores the problem of immigrant birds, Dev and Adit, who are trapped in an alien world where the English and the Indian immigrants do not see one another and they only see what they want to see the stereotypes only. Coloured by bias, circumstanced by false perspectives of oriental and occidental characteristics, they instinctively fail to see the human being behind the stereotype. The immigrants caught in the "double net" (141) are unwanted and insulted as "wogs" more often. The romantic oriental in love with west finally realizes that to achieve the real self he must have "real life" (204) back home. *Bye-Bye Blackbird* is a circular soul searching journey for a perfect life. *Bye-Bye Blackbird* also deals with the treatment of the psychic tumult of self-afflicted characters. The three characters face the dilemma of finding their identity and home because their background is rooted in the class society with group division by birth, and from a definite sense of social placement they are placed in an alien culture encompassing an individual and not a group. Gradually the attitude of the characters change, an English hater. Dev. stays back in London and the English lover. Adit realizing the hollowness of life in London, decides to leave London for good. K. R. S. Iyengar rightly considers that;

Desai "vividly projects the prison physical and psychological in which the coloured immigrant in Britain is caught between both the difficulties of adjustment there and those of return to India" (*Indian Writing in English* 470) ³.

Bye-Bye Blackbird explores the immigrant experience from an intellectual point of view. The problems of alienation, immigration and expatriation can be best understood in the light of two related terms - "exile" and "home." It is the mother country, native soil and security that constitute one's self Exile is enforced or regretted absence from one's country or home. Postcolonial India has witnessed the migration of educated Indians to the lucrative abundance of the West. Desai depicts the gnawing sense of immigration sensibility in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* through three different characters - Dev, Adit and Sarah - Sarah is an English lady married to Adit Sen, an Indian immigrant. By marrying an Indian immigrant Sarah faces cultural crisis that Krishnamoorthy Aithal rightly explains:

Anita Desai's novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* deals with the theme of East-West encounter. The novel covers numerous aspects of his encounter between the British and the England, including the marriage. ("The Ballad of East and West Updated." 101)⁴

The theme of immigration and consequent alienation of the self has been a thematic preoccupation from V. S. Naipual. Kamala Markandaya and Bharati Mukherjee who are chiefly concerned with cross-cultural and racist encounter at the socio-cultural plane. Seldom do they deeply and punctiliously probe into the psyche of the characters like Anita Desai. And this differentiates her from others and transforms it into a living art. It is neither the concern of an absurdist nor the enigma faced by an existentialist but the simple, homely rendering of emotional beings that face abnormal situations in living and partly living every moment of life in an alien soil in a strangely fascinating way. The predicament of the tragic isolation of the individual, the consequent sense of absurdity of human life and the very reality of human existence powerfully comes forth in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*.

The research attempts at capturing the yearnings, anxieties, enigmas, aspirations and never ending quest of the immigrants which led to new subjectivities or "hybridizations" in context of Anita Desai and Kiran Desai's analogies, perceptions, negotiations and solutions.

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