
IMPACT ON TRANSCULTURALISM IN ANITA DESAI'S *BYE-BYE BLACKBIRD*

M. P. Surekaa,
Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
Hindusthan College of Arts and Science,
Coimbatore

Abstract

Desai was born Anita Mazumdar in Mussoorie, India to a German mother and a Bengali father. Her first language was German, but she also spoke Bengali, Urdu, Hindi and she learned English in school, which later became her writing language of choice. The post-colonial phase of the Indian Diaspora differs from the earlier forms of migrations. The word "diaspora" is derived from the Greek verb superior (to sow) and the preposition dia(over). When applied to humans, the ancient Greek thought of diaspora as migration and colonization. Professional migrations into the US, UK, Europe, and Australia are common and this novel comes under the Professional Diaspora. He is annoyed at the treatment meted out to him. This makes him unhappy. Sarah is torn between two cultures; she tries her best not to confront embarrassing situations in her family and within her community. Sarah retains her mannerisms, but she is unable to cope with Adit's demands always. She understands that she has to adjust to the situations. When Adit confides his longing to return back to his motherland with her, she almost readily agrees. At the same time, the thought of being 'uprooted' creates fears that are new. She thinks, "There was the baby. There was the voyage. The uprooting"(BBB 209). She is a victim of her own decisions. She is bold enough to face any situation in life, in spite of the gnawing fears in her mind.

Keywords: language, Professional migrations, situations, .etc

Desai was born Anita Mazumdar in Mussoorie, India to a German mother and a Bengali father. Her first language was German, but she also spoke Bengali, Urdu, Hindi and she learned English in school, which later became her writing language of choice. She received a BA in English literature at the University of Delhi in 1957 and has moved several times, she is currently residing in the United States. Desai was shortlisted for the Booker Prize three times, and according to this criterion her most famous novels are *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984), *Fasting, Feasting*(1999). *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971). *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), and her

other notable works are *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *The Village by the Sea*(1982), *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1989). *The Zig-Zag Way* (2004), *The Artist of Disappearance* (2011).

The topics Desai presents in her numerous works that span the course of an amazing half a century is very different, but also very related to all her novels echo the difficulties of people who are caught between two cultures, as she herself may have felt to have been in her own family, unable to decide which side to incline towards. In her novel from 1971, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Anita Desai describes an episode of the “acclimatization” of two men from India in the postcolonial London of the 1960s.

The post-colonial phase of the Indian Diaspora differs from the earlier forms of migrations. The word “diaspora” is derived from the Greek verb superior (to sow) and the preposition dia(over). When applied to humans, the ancient Greek thought of diaspora as migration and colonization. Professional migrations into the US, UK, Europe, and Australia are common and this novel comes under the Professional Diaspora. *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, written on the Indian diaspora, revolves around two friends, Dev and Adit, in London. Adit has been in London for quite some time now and is married to Sarah, an English woman. Dev is in England in search of a degree and subsequent employment. Adit was disappointed with his job in India. Emigrants, especially Asians are looked down as the other in England. Spineless imperialist lover....You would sell your soul, and your passport too, for a glimpse, at two shillings, of some draughty old stately home”(BBB16).

Down, down and farther down – like Alice falling, falling down the rabbit hole, like a Kafka stranger wandering through the dark labyrinth of a prison. (BBB 57- 58)

He is annoyed at the treatment meted out to him. This makes him unhappy. He says, “My mother-in-law hates and despises me. Therefore I am angry. I am hurt (BBB176). Adit develops such a hatred for England that he suspects everything English to be insulting and depressing. He loses control of himself:

...the eternal immigrants who can never accept their new home and continue to walk the streets like strangers in enemy territory, frozen, listless, but dutifully trying to be busy, unobtrusive and, however superficially, to belong (BBB 182).

Formulations of experiences of misunderstood frustrations are the outcome of issues of diaspora communities. The question of settling is a question to any diaspora unless one associates oneself with any of the two lands. The Postcolonial critic Homi.K.Bhabha calls displacement or dislocation which creates a position of life ‘in-between’ or ‘living on the border’ which Bhabha discusses in his theory, *The Location of Culture*. The displacement also gives rise

to the concept of double consciousness and unhomeliness which are the major features of the diasporic situation.

Double consciousness and unhomeliness are the two features of postcolonial diasporas. Double consciousness or unstable sense of the self is the result of forced migration colonialism frequently caused [...] that results not merely from some individual psychological disorder but from the trauma of the cultural displacement within which in which one line is referred to by Homi.K.Bhabha and others as unhomeliness. (Kulkarni165)

Adit realizes that he has to escape from England “and he began to tell Sarah of this nostalgia that had become an illness, an ache” (BBB 183). Under the pretext of the war between India and Pakistan, Adit resolves to return back to his homeland. To argue that trans-culturalism is characterized by cultural fluidity and the dynamics of cultural change from which Jeff Lewis’s salient points to be the major characteristics of trans-culturalism. According to Jeff’s view,

Sarah is torn between two cultures, she tries her best not to confront embarrassing situations in her family and within her community. Sarah retains her mannerisms, but she is unable to cope with Adit’s demands always. She understands that she has to adjust to the situations. At the same time, the thought of being ‘uprooted’ creates fears that are new. She thinks, “There was the baby. There was the voyage. The uprooting”(BBB 209). She is a victim of her own decisions. She is bold enough to face any situation in life, in spite of the gnawing fears in her mind.

At the end of the novel, Dev has decided to stay in England and reap a rich harvest. Though it is Dev who blames the English and Adit, it is he who finally succeeds in firmly establishing his „roots“ in England. He resolves to teach English a lesson for the abuse that has to be borne. Thus, Diasporic vision is discussed from the individual viewpoint and then magnified globally.

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