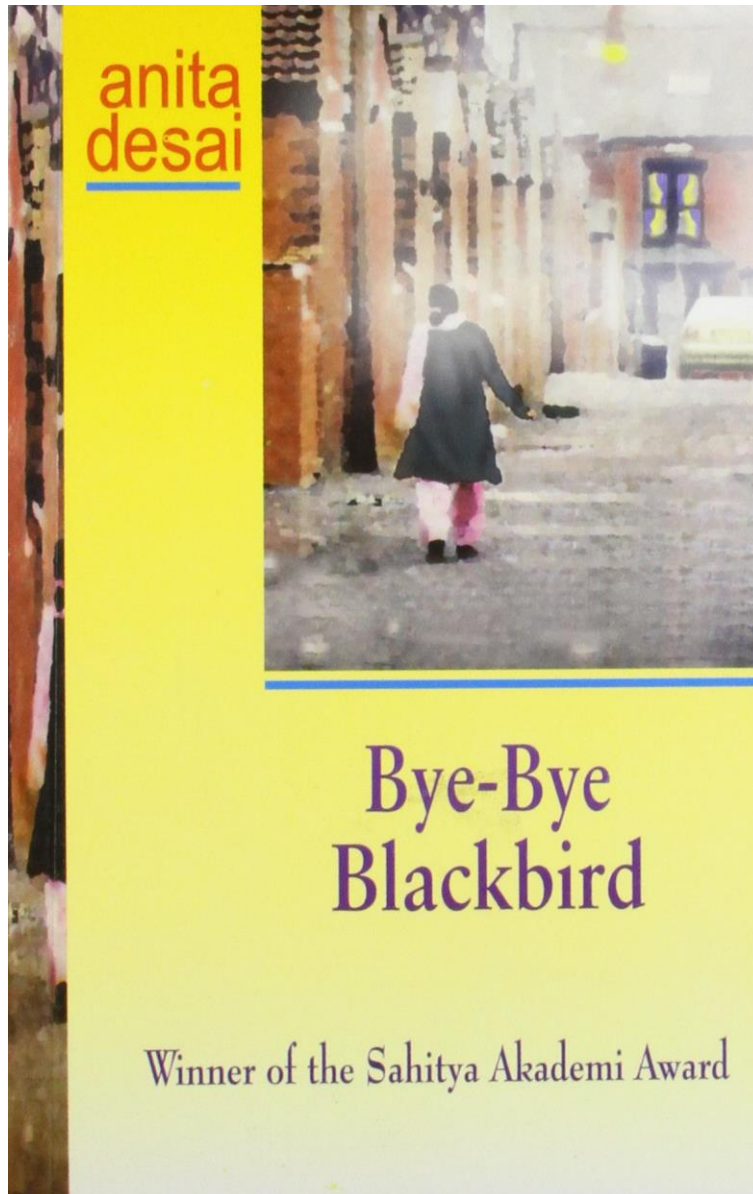


Exile and Cultural Alienation in Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird*
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Abstract

The word “Exile” is to cover a range of displaced existence. The word “Exile” has negative connotation but if a self-exile of a Byron is considered, then the response to that word becomes ambivalent. Exile literature shows some sense and part of Diasporic Indian

writing. The dilemma of the immigrants in Exile literature by focusing upon its attraction, repulsion and their exploitation by the vested interests. Indian Diasporic literature novelists Anita Desai has chartered, the crisis disturbing the sensitive soul of immigrants. This essay also attempts to highlight, through an real study of the novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. Desai clearly explained the problems and troubles of Exile and the Diasporic individuals caught in the crisis of the changing society. Through her master style, the essay tries to capture the confusions and the conflicts of the Exile and shows how her novel pictures the view of Exile literature and Indian Diasporic literature. This paper is to serve as an introduction and encouragement to the study of Exile literature.

Introduction

The exile and cultural alienation is the most dominating theme in Anita Desai. It is common in the 20th century. Exile and cultural alienation has become a universal phenomenon. Anita Desai gives a graphic picture of the exile and cultural alienation of uprooted individuals in the novel. Desai reads the minds and understands the fact that they are suffering from alienation. Her characters in *Bye - Bye Black Bird* becomes victims of themes. Desai portrays the ontological insecurity, alternation and anguish of uprooted individuals in her novels. Her alienation of this problem is prevalent in most of her works. She remarks her condition as.

“This has brought two separate stands into my life. My roots are divided because of the Indian soil on which I grew and European culture which I inherited from my mother”. (Desai, Anita. The Book I Enjoyed writing most. *Contemporary Indian Literature, XIII, 1973, 24*).

Anita Desai’s preoccupation as a novelist has been the exile alienation of characters.

Each of her novels presents one or two memorable characters. In the portrayal of character, she primarily interested in the projection of female protagonist living in separate, closed, sequestered worlds of existential problem and passions, love and hates. Unlike most of Indo - English novelists, Anita Desai does something unique by portraying each of her individual as an unsolved mystery. Her concerns of character alienation enables her to offer an unexpected glimpse into the deeper psychic state of her protagonists.

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”. (R. S. Sharma, Alienation, Accommodation and the Local in Anita Desai’s *Bye Bye Blackbird*. *The Literary Criterion, 1979, 14/4*).

Bye Bye Black Bird

The novel *Bye Bye Black Bird*, there is an authentic study of human relationship bedeviled by exile and cultural encounters. The focus of *Bye Bye Black Bird* is on Dev who comes to London to pursue his studies. As the plot develop, one can find him turning into a completely disillusioned man. He feels alienated in London from both Indians and

English men. There is a lack of sympathy men, who do not, recognize their neighbor and behaves with them like strangers. The silence and hollowness London disturb Dev and makes him uneasy and alienated. He finds himself insulated and isolated. He realize that the immigrants rush to the west and in the process miss badly their own mother land. He feels extremely suffocated in the Tube station and consider himself, “like a kafka stranger wandering through the dark labyrinth at a prison”

Dev’s contact begins from Adit who has settled in London with an English wife. He is confronted with the major problems as Dev moves out in search of job. He finds it difficult to adjust with silence and emptiness of it - the house and blocks of flats, streets and crescents - all. He never wants to live in a country where he is insulted and unwanted. He calls Adit, his friend a boot - licking today and a “spineless imperialist - lover”. Searching for an identity in an alien culture, Dev feels lost and suffers from alienation. Dev become a victim of alienation as his conception and perception are at variance with the experience he gets. He compares and relates everything to India. He goes through different phases of the bewildered alien, the charmed observer, the outraged outsider and thrilled sightseer all at once in succession.

Final Decision

Dev takes his final decision not to return to India and not to lead the way of the masses there. He slowly and steadily adapts himself to the new environment. His friend Adit Sen, a young man from India lives in England with his English wife. After coming to England Adit worked as a teacher, and finally accepted a little job at Blue skies. He is happy with his job. He feels now a sense of cultural affinity. At times Adit even groans:

“O England’s green and grisly land, I love you and only a Babu khan”

The last part of the novel changes the scenario. He secretly longs for Indian food, music and friends. A sudden clamor was aroused in him, like a child’s tantrum, to see again an Indian sunset. Even on out spread hair about Sarah’s shoulders he could see the Indian landscape. When he thinks about India, the images of food, dress and music are predominant in his mind. Adit feels himself as a stranger in England and realize alienated from English people. He frankly admits to be “stranger, a non - be longer” in England. He takes a boat back to India with his wife.

Marrying an English Girl

The theme in the novel is the Adit marries an English girl name Sarah and by doing so he incurs the anger of the white society. By marrying a brown Asian she has broken the social code of England hence she is always subject to taunts and jibes of not only her colleagues but even of young pupils of the school, where she works as a clerk. She always avoids any questions regarding her husband and family life but her peeks take a perverse delight in asking such questions. Julia who is a teacher in her school comes out with typical British superciliousness.

She was still breathing hard at having so narrowly escaped having to answer personal questions. It would have wrecked her for the whole day to have to discuss Adit with Julia, with Miss Pimm, in this sane, chalk dusted, workday office. She was willing to listen for hours to Miss Pimm's diagnosis of her aches and pains... But to display her letters from India, to discuss her Indian husband, would have forced her to parade like an impostor, to make claims to a life, an identity that she did not herself feel to be her own, although they would have been more than ready to believe her... She had stammered out her replies, too unhappy even to accuse them of tactlessness or inquisitiveness and, for her pains, had heard Julia sniff, as she left the room, "if she's ashamed of having an Indian husband, why did she go and marry him?" (Bye 4)

What of grown-ups, even the young ones emulating the elders, taunt her. Her pupils ignore her and taunt. As she dated through their throng, they pretended not to notice her at all, but once she came across the road, she heard them scream, "Hurray, Hurray, Mrs. Scurry". And "Where's the fire, pussy cat?" She undergoes at her work place at the hands of her colleagues and pupil. The strains of interracial marriage are so much on her that they affect her day - to - day life.

In spite of all her precaution she cannot escape the fake which is made part of her life. The tension between pretension and actuality, appearance and reality is always there which tells upon her. She does not know where she belongs and she is fed up with putting on faces. She wants genuineness and that would come only when she leaves England for good at the end of the novel. In England she is not in peace. Her alienation has been described more than once in the novel which makes her lonely, the question always nagging her who she is. After marriage Sarah faces alienation crisis.

Sarah's Identity Crisis

A clear description of Sarah's identity crisis is to be found in later authorial comment in the novel. If a girl marries in a same culture it is easier for her to adjust in her new home and people. But inter-racial and intercultural marriage causes adjustment problem which are not easy to overcome. In Sarah's case the problem becomes more complicated for her to married a person whose race ruled over by her own. The "Progress" and "Modernity" old prejudice die hard. Sarah s homeless in her native country which is biggest irony. The question continues to haunt her: who was she?

Sarah's problem is human. She wants to be real person whether English or Indian. She is fed up with sitting in the fence. She tries her best to remain a sincere wife seeing that her marital life is not destroyed. Her husband too playing charade although not as consciously as she. But he also realize falsity of his existence in England and Sarah also known it well. After 1965, Indo - Pak war Adit is in the process of making a decision to leave England for good, he is very edge and unstable and this is the time when he needs a co operative understanding wife, and Sarah does well as a wife. Off all the wives in Anita Desai's novel she is the best in understanding and supports her husband. In the circumstance mentioned above she knows how to handle her husband:

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.

Feeling of Alienation

Sarah, the English wife of Adit Sen has the same feeling of alienation as her husband. She lives in a dual world, the two social worlds that do not meet the two incompatible cultures that split her. She gets herself alienated from her society through her marriage. She remains an outsider in the Indian community because she is English. She does not belong anywhere. She is not a physically uprooted person. Yet her condition is precarious.

Sarah's dilemma is not that of finding new roots but it is that of uprootedness and hence deeper. She finds herself an alien and a stranger. At the time of her departure, Sarah is sad to leave her place, "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.

Conclusion

The study of novel shows that even though socially Sarah is not very happy because of racial prejudice and alienation from her people yet as a wife very sensibly takes care of things. Most of Anita Desai's couples don't pull well in marriage. Her social being may not be satisfied. This alien women who understands her husband, his family and country which she would accept, once in India. Anita Desai very brilliantly has brought to focus the exile and self - alienation of these three characters in *Bye - Bye black Bird*. The uprooted individuals Adit, Dev and Sarah have constant identity crisis and suffer from exile, culture and social alienation throughout the novel.

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