



# Reflection Of Cultural Identity In Desai's Bye- Bye Black Bird

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## Abstract

Anita Desai was born on 24 June 1937. She is an Indian novelist. She has been shortlisted for the **Booker Price** three times. She received the **Sahitya Akademi Award** in 1978 for her novel *Fire on the mountain*. The term cultural identity is related to the identity or feeling of belonging to a group. It has the aspects a person's self-conception and self-perception. The reflection of nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture which forms the cultural identity. Anita Desai's novel *Bye-Bye Black Bird* (1971) is an instance of the reflection of cultural identity through cultural encounters. The story revolves around two friends Dev, and Adit in London. Adit lives for a longer period in London and married an English woman, Sarah. The alienated Sarah looks for the cultural identity of self in her own land but unlike others, she never withdraws. Desai depicts Sarah's loneliness is different from other heroines because she chooses it deliberately whereas for her other characters its part of their nature.

## Introduction

The question of cultural identity explores the different perspectives and dimensions related to the approaches to look at the divisions in cultures with uncommon social beliefs and values. Culture is dynamic and it changes with the social needs. It can also be used to describe our way of life and the values, beliefs, and attitudes that we use in everyday life. The cultural aspects focus on artistic values and religion too in one and another way in various ways depending on the circumstances.

In the present era, the form of cultural identity has drastically changed and it has emerged as the evaluation of the various conditions such as life-style, issues of gender identity, national identity, language, religion, race, beliefs, ethnicity and aesthetics. The novelists like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Mulk-Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Manohar Malgoankar, Kamla Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sehgal, Nirad C. Choudhuri represented the innermost thoughts of the human psyche to pose the question of cultural identity through social and psychological burdens. The encounters between east and west got the new paradigms in finding out the clashes in cultural identity. The novelists like V.S. Naipaul, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Salman Rushdie rested their fame by reflection of Otherness which is related to the identity issues.

## Desai's reflects the search for the identity

Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971) reflects the search for the identity of the characters on the Western soil that penetrates into the encounter with the cultural clash of East and West. The cultural issues later pose the cultural identity of the Indians who move out into foreign shores. The story of two well-educated, Bengali immigrants Adit and Dev raises the cultural issues once they decide to incorporate with English manners and values. When people immigrate to a new locality, they often face the changes in the new environment; it causes the persistent issues to adjust with the new cultural beliefs and practices. The changes in cultural practice may lead anxiety, confusion, distress, frustration in the form of cultural encounters.

The novel reflects the arrival of Dev in England as a Bengali student for seeking an admission in London School of Economics. He desires to get a job after completion of his studies. When he fails to find a job in England, he feels that because of his Indian background he is being rejected. He says; "We simply must have a catholic, or at least a High-church man. Its public relations...I'm afraid it wouldn't do to have a Hindu gentleman in this job". (Desai, 1985:108) He struggles a lot to cope up with the different religious poles which are marked by the different cultural trends. The writer focuses on Dev, we find him a completely disillusioned man. The disillusion is the part of the issues pertaining to the search of the cultural identity. Desai describes the first morning of Dev in England as he is "pulled out his watch from under his pillow he was disgusted to find it was barely five O' clock. He wondered if it had died in the night of inability to acclimatize itself." (Desai, 1985:5)

## Dev convinces to accept the British culture

Dev's London host Adit Sen, considers himself equal to the British people. His influences the new Indian immigrants and convinces them to accept the British cultural. It makes the ground fertile for the issues of cultural identity. The affection for Indian cultural leads Dev to visit the Victoria Albert Museum. On the other hand, Adit as an alienated from the roots of Indian culture shows no interest to see the collection of Indian Moghul and Rajasthan miniatures. The cultural quest of Dev is described as the narrator says; "He was determined to seek, discover and win the

England of his dreams and reading, the England he had quickly seen was the most poetic, the most innocent and enduring of England, in a secret campaign. At the end, he believed he did. (Desai, 1985:168)

Dev's impression about the country like England is the better place for green future for the Indian immigrants proves an illusion that is transformed in many ways through the married life of Adit and Sarah. They do not unite with each other in a cultural sense as they celebrate the festivals and religious ceremonies without paying much cognizance towards their heritage. Sarah is found trapped in English social bond, it makes her to feel superior, but at one juncture she finds uprooted from her own culture. A sense of insecurity and separation is an instance of the crisis to cope with the two different cultural identities. The narrator says; "Sarah feels the two selves in her, the English self and the Indian one are only, frauds; each had large shadowed elements of charade about it. (Desai, 1985:34) Being pathetic, Sarah fails to adjust with Indian ethos. Her dilemma to be an Indian wife or an English woman is an instance of the crisis in cultural identity as she cannot hold both the positions at a time. It makes a sense of superiority versus inferiority.

Dev's attempt to adjust with the silence and emptiness of London, keeps him alienated from the Western culture. The environment in England makes him to realize that there is nothing common in England and Indian life-style. The streets, houses, flats and museums make him restless as he comments that "the English habit of keeping all the doors and windows tightly shut." (Desai, 1985:63) It makes him alienated and it poses the question of identity where he could find a solace to his mind being lived among Indians with good rapport. The inability to reconcile with his Indian identity puts him into the dilemma whether to reconsider his idea of obtaining an education in London school of Economics or go back to India.

## **Different perspectives of Dev and Adit**

Adit is portrayed quite contrast to Dev; He enjoys the life-style of English people though he finds the shortcomings of them. He considers that the behaviour of English people is better than the Indian people, like a colonized Indian, he believes materialistically that the Indian life-style never attracts him more by saying that the trains, buses and the beggars in India give him the feelings of boredom. The narrator says that Adit enjoys the life in England because of "the nice warm pubs and picks up a glass of Guinness and eye the girls and be happy again." (Desai, 1985:49) It is ultimately the question of the cultural identity of Dev and Adit in different perspectives.

Dev doesn't like the life-style and manners of England; but his stay there for a while deepens his inclination to the country. Sarah outlines a proper rapport to extend human relationship, she proves herself as an Indian Wife rather than an English woman. Adit loves England and Dev loves India; but Sarah swings in between her natural steepness and willing adoption. She gladly quits all her claims for persistence in England and was ready to leave England for India with her husband.

Though she has to confront problems during the long way fare from England to India because of her pregnancy she embraces limping thought as Adit's wife. She marries him with expectations to share the best of mind and spirit; but she gives up her womanly desires and like a traditional Indian wife admits her destiny. She leaves her country for the sake of her husband and motherhood.

Desai allows her character to groom independently and looks at the inner feelings. The change in psyche justifies the scenic beauty with removal of all doubts and confusion to form an idealistic cultural identity. She reflects a serious intellectual evaluation of the characters rather than an object of mere amusement. The psychological concerns of her characters find the dimensions of maturity. She examines a man in action in order to reveal the conscious mind in formation of cultural identity with great intensions to reveal the realities.

## Conclusion

This novel shows displacement, alienation and lack of adjustment faced by Indian immigrants in England. Alienation is the process where people become foreign to the world they are living in. The concept of alienation is deeply rooted in all the great religions and social and political theories of the civilized age. The post-modernist world has reflected the emergence of associative and cultural studies as the major thrust areas of academic exploration. Anita Desai has deeply and objectively studied Indian married couples.

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