



Expel And Cultral Isolation In Bye, Bye, Blackbird

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ABSTRACT

'Bye, Bye, Blackbird' makes a heroic, although unsuccessful attempt to present the gamut of emotions of Indian immigrants in England. All the Indian "types" are present-the Madras, the Bengali, and the Punjabi. The inevitable Swami selling yoga, the third rate musician and his woman with the inevitable pan-box. There are also the expected English characters- the Millers and the Roscommon with their unconcealed dislike for the Asian immigrants, the sentimental English woman, Mrs. Moffitt whose ambition is to start an Indian Club and arrange weekly get-togethers where the 'spiritual' Indians may 'spiritualize the materialistic English.' Mrs. Desai brings something new to the Indo- Anglican novel. Instead of portraying characters in terms of the environment, or defining an individual in terms of his social or caste functions, Mrs. Desai creates character and the milieu is significant only in so far as it enables the reader to value the character. Additionally, the precise artist that she is Mrs. Desai presents each character as an unsettled mystery. In addition to all these characters there is the English woman with an Indian husband. Two of the three main characters are very talkative Dev and Adit Sen. They talk and talk and talk. There is a great deal of argument, attitudinizing, mouthing of hatred for England, expressions of love for England. Then have pages of depictions of English life- of the life in the metropolitan and the life in the countryside. In spite of all the lavishness of its local details, the novel does not make any clear impression on the mind of the reader. Mrs. Desai's forte- her uncanny ability to probe into the minds and hearts of her characters, both major and minor is missing in this work. The three main characters, Dev, Adit and Sarah occupy a lot of space, or her pages in the novel. They are shown talking, brooding and occasionally 'doing'. But they remain vague and unconvincing.

KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION:

From the pre-independence period to this date the Indo-English fiction has come to an extensive way in terms of the thematic growth and delineation of characters. Writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Khuswant Singh, Shahi Deshpande, Nayantara Sehgal, and Nanohar Malgonkar have treated in their novels racio-political problems like oppression and exploitation of the inferior class, unawareness and fallacy, opinionated crisis and national calamity etc.. There themes had become exhausted and became stale. Mrs. Desai brings something new to the Indo- Anglican novel. Instead of portraying characters in terms of the environment, or defining an individual in terms of his social or caste functions, Mrs. Desai creates character and the environment is important only in so far as it enables the reader to understand the character. Moreover the true artist that she is Mrs. Desai presents each individual as an unsolved mystery.

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fiction. Her contemporary women writers are preoccupied with socio-political themes of the East-West encounter; Anita Desai probes, chiefly, the deep recesses of the tumultuous psyche of her protagonists. She finds the causes of their sufferings sometimes in their improper childhood and sometimes in their encounter with the world outside. Unlike many of the other Indians writing in English Mrs. Desai is not interested in merely telling a story. Her technique is not that of a mere narrator who subordinates character to the main business of telling the story. She is more interested in her characters and the story is of secondary importance. This makes her work something very unusual in Indo-Anglian fiction. It gives to the Indo- Anglican novel a poetic depth, a psychological sophistication which were lacking. Most of the other Indo- Anglican novelists are not interested in their characters. Too often, they present an outsider's view of human nature.

Since the novel is about Indians living in England, the author makes a very valiant attempt to create the English environment. The rich visual imagination of Mrs. Desai is once again at its best. The creation of the physical environment is very necessary for the success of the novel since the Indian characters define themselves in terms of their reaction against the alien environment. Urban England represented by Portobello Road, and rural England, idyllic and romantic, are pictured with all the loving care for detail that one comes to expect from the pen of Mrs. Desai. London with its overflowing crowds and bazaars is beautifully described:

With its open-air booths, its leisurely and loud brass bands, Portobello Road has the air of an Indian Bazaar though not its appearance, and Dev, accustomed as he is to the Indian traders, and Dev accustomed as he is to the Indian trader's obsession with the newest, the 'novelties' in plastic and tin and the nylon, wanders glaze-eyed at the profuse manifestation of the young people's obsession with the past- the collections in crowded bow-windows----- as long as they kept their grand mother's silver polished and their grandfather's pistol safe from the rust, the world will continue to be as cosy and secure as it is at present.

Rural England is presented in a more idyllic fashion. The failure of the novel is due to the fact that while Mrs. Desai is moderately unsuccess-

Anita Desai, the most leading women writers of the Indo-English

ful in creating the English environment, her characters are wooden.

All the characters take on the air of unreal, unrealized caricatures. It is an odd mixture of the expected Anglo-Saxon and Indian types. We have the temperamental Indians behaving the way the orientals are supposed to behave. The race-conscious whites conform to the immigrant's idea of how the English behave. The swami, the musician, the stale jokes about Indians' punctuality, the very tedious joke about the 'blond landlady's daughter, I mean the land lady's blonde daughter' are too dreary to deserve any further mention.

It can be argued, in defense of Mrs. Desai's puppets, that the English and the Indian immigrants do not see each other, and that they only see what they want to see – stereotypes of each other, coloured by prejudice, conditioned by false notions of oriental and occidental characteristics – and that they naturally fail to see the human being behind the stereotype. Unfortunately the character is lost in the stereotype. The characters are unreal, the conflicts are rather theatrical, and the clashes and the crises in the novel leave one unmoved. The feeling of the immigrants that they are racially discriminated against is never very convincingly conveyed. Dev's incoherent anger at the pedlar who refused to tell him the price of the Russian icon – disdainfully, the pedlar tells Dev, "It is too much for you!" – the frequent quarrels between Dev and Aditi sound comic rather than dramatic. The three major characters, Dev, Aditi and Sarah, behave in too predictable a manner. One would have thought that the marriage of an English girl with an Indian immigrant would be an excellent subject for a novel. But there is a very brief reference in the book to the initial gathering between Sarah and Aditi. There is no real attempt made to explain the irresistible passion that impelled an English woman to marry an Indian and brave the scorn of English society. The loneliness of Sarah is made dramatic – more interesting than the tension between her and Aditi. Aditi's sudden decision to return to India, Dev's changing attitudes towards England, the tension and the hatreds, are faithfully 'described'. The immigrants behave like temperamental children, loud, noisy, boisterous, quarrelsome, lacking in delicacy, and deficient in love of privacy. Similarly the English characters, the sentimental Emma Moffitt, the unforgiving Mrs. Roscommon, the spiteful Mrs. Miller move like puppets and react like puppets. In spite of the challenging quality of the theme the novel fails in moving the readers.

The modern fiction of Indo-English writers, basically written by women writers, is dealing with the themes like identity, terror of existence, wavering meta-physical world which are the by-products of the advancements of Indian society as of the loopholes of Indian tradition and customs.

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