



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**English**

**CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN ANITA DESAI'S *BYE, BYE- BLACK BIRD***

**KEY WORDS:**

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**Introduction**

Anita Desai was born on June 24, 1937, in the hill station of Mussoorie, Uttar Pradesh, India. She was one of four children: she had a brother and two sisters, all raised in what was a British colony in their youth. Desai's father D.N. Mazumdar was a Bengali engineer. Her mother, Toni Nimé, was German and met Mazumdar in Germany, then emigrated to India in the 1920s. Desai has said that it was exposure to her mother's European core that allowed her to experience India as both an insider, and an outsider. Although Desai was formally educated in English, she was raised speaking both Hindi and German in her home in Old Delhi. She attributes some of the diversity of her fictional characters to having lived among a mix of Hindu, Muslim, and Christian neighbors while growing up.

**Education**

Desai was educated at Queen Mary's School, Delhi, and then at Miranda House at the University of Delhi. At Miranda House she studied English literature, receiving her B.A. in 1957. Her studies helped to fuel her passion for writing, a compulsion that began at the age of seven. After working for a year in Max Muller Bhavan, Calcutta (now known as Kolkata), she married Ashwin Desai, a business executive, in 1958. Since then, she has lived in Kolkata, Mumbai (formerly known as Bombay), Chandigarh, Delhi, and Pune. She and her husband had four children: Rahul, Tani, Arjun, and Kiran.

Desai's writing came to be respected worldwide, and she became a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London and of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York, as well as a fellow of Girton College, Cambridge. Desai has taught writing at both Smith College and Mount Holyoke College in the United States. In 1993 she became a professor of writing at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

**Life as a writer**

Desai contributed to various prestigious literary publications, including the New York Times Book Review, London Magazine, Harper's Bazaar and Quest. Her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), was published when she was 26 years old. In 1965 she published her second novel, *Voices in the City*, which revealed Calcutta as seen by a group of aristocratic siblings, and she left India for the first time to visit England. While in Europe, Desai gathered material for her third novel, *Bye – Bye, Blackbird* (1971). She directed her focus inward, experimenting with both content and form. 1974 saw the release of her first attempt at juvenile literature, *The Peacock Garden*, and the next two years yielded another adult novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), followed by another juvenile venture titled *Cat on a Houseboat* (1976).

**True Measure of Success**

Desai, who lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts and teaches writing at MIT has been appointed to various literary offices. She was a member of the Advisory Board for English at Sahitya Akademi in New Delhi from 1975 to 1980, and a member of the National Academy of Letters, as well as becoming a Fellow for the Royal Society of Literature in England in 1978. She was appointed Honorary Fellow for the American Academy of Arts and Letters and has produced three well – liked children's books, an unusual feat for an Indian author of her caliber.

**Awards**

2014 Padma Bhushan, 2007 Sahitya Akademi Fellowship, 2003 Benson Medal of Royal Society of Literature, 2000 Alberto Moravia Prize for Literature (Italy), 1999 Booker Prize for Fiction, 1993 Neil Gunn Prize, 1984 Booker Prize for Fiction, 1983 Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, 1980 Booker Prize for Fiction, 1978 National Academy of Letters Award, 1978 Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize.

**CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS**

Cultural Encounters' is a concept which is often used in current public and academic discussions on the conditions of modern societies. The concept is often employed when trying to describe modern phenomena such as globalization, mass migration or the apparently increased importance and fascination of religious groups in secularized and/or traditional societies. From 2006 the concept of Cultural Encounters is central in the teaching of general history in Danish grammar schools, and it features prominently in learning plans and history courses. The concept is thus claimed to be of importance when explaining dynamic changes in history.

Cultural and East-West encounter of the individual is a persistent theme in Anita Desai's novels. The sensitive human being suffers from a sense of alienation who could reach the intensity of an existential malaise. Desai unfolds the existential traits of man in society. She analyses a man in action in order to reveal his hidden motives behind the reality of conscious mind. Her novel brings forth some bright prospect of her creativity. They leave an impression on the reader that Desai's arts moves from strength to strength, abounding in wit, humour and creative fecundity.

Cultural encounters can also be said to have taken place internally, that is inside civilisations. Here, cultural encounters can take the shape of clashes (or at least opposition) between groups in society, bringing problems like the relationship between individual and collective, or the marking of specific groups as 'other' to the fore. Categories such as language, behaviour, ethnicity, gender, social classes and power are central to this perspective.

A continuous development of the methodological and theoretical implications of the use of a concept like cultural encounters is important for the research in the history of pre-modern societies. New approaches do focus on dynamic interaction between 'the senders' and 'the receiver' of cultural input. Modern research in these areas often takes notice of the processes of change that influenced the dominant cultures as well. Much new research is also keenly aware of the historical and culturally determined positions that govern the whole enterprise of research itself. It is of paramount importance to this research programme to explore how these new insights from other research areas may benefit to research into the history of pre-modern societies.

A cultural encounter might result in culture shock, for example in a situation where you are immersed in another culture that is so different from yours that you find it hard to adapt. A cultural encounter could result in racism and bigotry if you simply seek confirmation of the superiority of your way of doing things. Learning from cultural encounters first requires learning to navigate them, and that requires mindfulness: continual observation, just as if you were learning the rules of a new video game. Another example would be to discover common reference points for people in another culture so that can refer to them when trying to communicate, rather than making everything about a narrow slice of your own life.

### CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN ANITA DESAI'S *BYE-BYE BLACK BIRD*

Anita Desai's novel *Bye, Bye Black Bird* (1971) is an authentic study of man-women relationship bedeviled by cultural encounters. Of all the novels of Desai this is the most intimately related to her own experience. She said in an interview "of all my novels *Bye, Bye Black Bird* is the most rooted and experienced and the least literary in derivation." Desai's novels seems pre-eminently a novel about East-West encounter and the traumas of cross-cultural adjustments, the anger, shame, and frustration of characters re-enact the colonial experience of both, the erstwhile oppressor and the oppressed, and their struggle to break through cultural situations brought about by the colonial political history.

In *Bye, Bye Black Bird* Adit is an Indian who lives in England. He reconciles to his stay in England even though he suffers humiliations ungrudgingly and he inwardly identifies himself with Indian. Apart from this he obviously longs for Indian friends activities, food, dress, music and culture. Sarah, his English wife, finds by hints and suggestions that she is not liked by her own countrymen for having married an Indian. Adit and Sarah love each other even though their language and culture continue to differ. Sarah cooks Indian curry without developing a taste for it while Adit has none for some British items of food. Sarah's cat doesn't please Adit. Sarah does not like Indian music nor can she understand and appreciate Indian jokes and conversations which Adit enjoys a great deal. Initially, Dev is misfit in England, discriminated everywhere; he can't get accustomed to the silence and emptiness of India and gradually gets disenchanted with England. The outbreak of India-Pakistan war becomes a turning point in his life and he decides to return back to India, while Dev who had difficulty in adjusting in England in the beginning, begins to settle down there for his higher education.

Sarah is different from other characters. She is almost in an exile in her own land but unlike others she never withdraws. The novelist herself says Sarah's loneliness is different from others heroines because she chooses it deliberately where as for her other characters its part of their nature. Sarah loves Adit an Indian immigrant. But she wants to hide her relationship from her own English people. Here we find that Sarah though in an advanced country, she is still weak and submissive. She expresses her love openly for Adit. Desai deals with the theme of displacement in her novel. The local of this novel is in London. The city has a strong impact on sensibilities of the main characters Dev, Adit and Sarah. Sarah lives a life of a cultural exile in her own country. She feels displaced in England by marrying an Indian in the sense she is victim of values, system culture. Sarah faces the problem of aloneness. Married to an Indian she tries her best to adjust the loose of identity in her own society.

Sarah tries her best to keep up her identity despite her Indian husband but is defeated. She finally decides to go to India with her husband. On the hand Adit betrays himself by adopting the citizenship of foreign country and marrying a foreigner but he too is finally defeated in his adventure. At last decides to return to his country. When Adit informs Sarah about his desire to go back to India, Sarah also agrees to go with him. Adit feels nostalgic for his motherhood. He feels he has been pretending all the time. Their lives in India have been so unreal. When the flat is almost empty after all that was to be sold and they were preparing themselves to go to India to transport her to a land where she would regain warmth and personality. In the new land if she was to come to life again, that would be a different and perhaps a better life. She must say good-bye to her English self.

At the end of the novel Sarah is seen leaving her own country, its own culture for the sake of Adit and thus her own self by accompanying him to India. It is aptly seen thus:

"Sarah leaned out – one arm waving, briefly, slowly, in doubt or unwillingness, she herself could not say. She called out a subdued good-bye to the little dark knot on the platform, waving. The last she saw of it was Bella's bright head in the mist, like a saucy merrigold in the city window box, last symbol of London's cockney

staunches that she was loosing now, had losy already." (*Bye, Bye-Black Bird*-222)

### CONCLUSION

The above study of the novel shows that even though socially Sarah is not very happy because of racial prejudice and alienation from her people yet as a wife she very sensibly takes care of things. Most of Anita Desai's couples don't pull well in marriage but happily here we have a warm understanding wife that is Sarah. Her social being may not be satisfied and contented. We have all out praise for this alien woman who understands her husband, his family and country which she would accept, once in India. Anita Desai very brilliantly has brought to focus the cultural encounters and self alienation of these three characters in *Bye-Bye Black Bird*. The uprooted individuals Adit, Dev and Sarah have constant identity crises and suffer from exile, cultural and social encounters throughout the novel. This paper has tried to present the growth of the Exile Literature from its humble beginnings to its status in the present day with special reference to Anita Desai's novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. This is only a beginning but not the end in that this paper hopes to create many more interested in the study of cultural encounters and Exile Literature.

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