

# Elements of Multiculturalism and Their Impact Presented in Anita Desai's Novel 'Bye-Bye Blackbird'

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## Abstract

The culture of any person is one of the initial elements which he or she receives when they born. A person can accept the culture which is passed down to him from his ancestors or can find solace in another culture, it should be entirely an individual's choice. Due to increasing globalization and rapid pace of development, today no country has a 'pure culture'. In today's rapidly developing world traveling has become quite convenient for anyone. Not only rich and high-class people but anyone can travel anywhere they want to either by road, air or water transports. Due to open access to any part of the earth people belonging to various ethnic groups travel to different countries and along with them carry their culture too. Better transportation facilities and elevation in mass media have made people aware of varied cultural and ethical groups existing on the earth. First during the ancient period, as kings used to conquer various lands to establish themselves as mighty ruler, they would marry queens of various nations and they would initiate cultural hybridization on their conquered lands. Then in late the twentieth century and twenty-first century people started traveling to different nations for better education, job opportunities, and a better, progressive life. Sometimes they would even travel just for their fun or intrigue for various cultures and unique things. This leads to 'Multiculturalism and Cultural Hybridization'. In my research article, I have discussed how diaspora groups lead to multiculturalism and it affects the host countries as well as the diaspora groups. To discuss this topic I have chosen Anita Desai's novel 'Bye- Bye Blackbird' where she has also brilliantly presented to her readers that how a culturally isolated person gets drifted into personal isolation.

Keywords-Multiculturalism, cultural hybridization, intercultural, diaspora, racial discrimination, and psychological trauma.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the term ‘Diaspora’ has become very popular, in literature, art, and even in our language, we simply use this term but what impacts does it have on a country, on its people, we never think about these topics. The word diaspora is originated from the ancient Greek word ‘dia speiro’ which means “to scattered”.Diaspora refers to the people, who belong to the same ethnic or religious group, those whose origin is from the same place or land but had migrated to different locations. The concept of diaspora has a long history. It has been used to refer to the Greeks in the Hellenic world and the Jews after the destruction of Jerusalem in the early 6th century BCE and in the 1950s- 1960s it was used to refer African Diaspora group. In this article, we will read about the impacts of diaspora groups on their host nation and the impact of their host nation on them in context with Anita Desai’s Bye-Bye Blackbird.

## II. CULTURAL IMPACT

When we talk about the culture of a particular group of people it not only depicts their food or religion many other things are included when we discuss a particular culture. Culture means a code of conduct which one should follow throughout his life. These are correct ways of leading one’s life and these are passed down from generation to generation. The culture of a society includes- behavior, faith/ religion, art/ drama/ music, attitude, cuisine, language, beliefs, customs, clothes, and rituals. When an ethnic group disperses, they are not alone to migrate but along with them, they also introduce their culture to the host land.

Culture is something which a person receives as soon as he or she is born so being entirely segregated from it is impossible. No matter in which country one resides he or she can never ignore their culture. Culture is the environment,

teachings, and code of conduct among which one is born and brought up. They help in shaping an individual’s personality, mentality, and life. A person’s ideology, persona, an individual himself reflections of his culture, his upbringing. The culture of a person also affects his moral and ethical values.

As the ethnic groups migrate and settle down in different lands, along with them, their culture also settles down in the new land. Now, these diaspora groups begin to live their lives and expand their population in the new land. This leads to people of the host country being introduced to the new culture that has come into their nation. Similarly, diaspora groups get to know about a new culture of the nation to which they have migrated to. Now different cultures learn from each other, blend together so that they all can live together on the same land. This is what we call ‘Intercultural’. Here one culture affects another culture. While knowing and understanding different culture’s principles and teachings, people start accepting them in their lives and begin some modification in their own native culture. Various cultures learn, experience, and accept something new from one another culture. ‘Multiculturalism’ means that various cultures, races, and ethnic groups are living together on the same land. They are minority groups that are acknowledged for being quite different from the dominant ethnic group.

After 1960s, England started inviting people from other countries. England needed less educated and sturdily built workers, who would work and help England to prosper. At that time England was ‘the land of opportunities’ so, people from developing or underdeveloped countries would come to England for better opportunities and a good lifestyle. Moreover, inviting more diaspora groups into their land gave them a good political weapon of ruling people from various corners of the world. This was how England adopted ‘Multiculturalism’. But later, this started causing problems for both

Britishers as well as for the emigrates. Diaspora groups along with themselves brought their culture too to England. Britishers felt that these foreigners are invading their land and destroying their native culture. Thus, these Britishers started feeling that these various diaspora groups are not part of their society and, started ill-treating them. Moreover, they even believed that they were superior to any other ethnic group as England was superpower amongst all countries.

### III. ELEMENTS OF MULTICULTURALISM AND THEIR IMPACT IN ANITA DESAI' S NOVEL 'BYE- BYE BLACKBIRD'

In Anita Desai's 'Bye-Bye Blackbird', we can observe significant elements of multiculturalism, cultural hybridization, and their effects on society. This novel is set in 1960s, London, depicting the timeline of India independence and the ugly history of the Partition of India. During those years, many Asians like- Indians, Pakistanis, Chinese and Africans, etc migrated and settled in England. These various diaspora groups settled in other nations to lead a better life. In this novel, our main protagonists are the example of cultural hybridization. Sarah, an English woman is married to our protagonist Adit, a Bengali, Indian man. Their marriage was a fusion of Eastern and Western culture. Their future children, family is a good example of Cultural Hybridization.

Their marriage seems to be a perfect one a perfect combination of understanding and respect, along with some compromise too. Adit, a person who from the starting of the novel exhibited his love for England and his dislike for India. He lived the way an English man would live. Whereas Sarah has always shown her intrigue towards India and its culture. Throughout the novel, her love for India is depicted. Both partners respects the culture of one other. But there are problems in their lives as an individual personalities as well as a married couple. Adit no matter how much he tries to assimilate into

the English society, for them he would always be a stranger, an alien. In his job he has no progress as Non- Whites are not given any promotions and opportunities. Wherever he goes he always faced humiliation like publicly being called "wog", always facing the cold demeanour of his in-laws, and many more. Over time he has learned to turn deaf ear to all these insults. He keeps on striving and pressurize himself to become a part of English culture so that he doesn't feel alienated in the foreign country. Anita Desai through her novel has beautiful depicted the plight of Indian emigrates in the foreign land. Through her characters- Dev and Adit she depicts how Indian emigrates with lots of hope and rosy dreams in their hearts leave their native land and come to a foreign land. Then how all their dreams and aspirations are crushed down due to their hellish experience in the strange land.

Sarah has broken the conventions of her society by marrying an Indian, a man from an inferior society. She feels isolated from her own land, amongst her own people due to her 'intermarriage'. Her friends always publicly ask about her personal life in a mocking manner, school children used to call her 'miss curry, curry' and there are other instances that clearly tells us that due to her intermarriage with an Indian, she is forced to choose the loneliest path in her life. After marriage, she did not fit in her social circle and as she tries to be a part of Adit's social circle, she is unable to understand their jokes or their conversations. Though Adit and Sarah seem to work out their marriage successfully still there is some kind of emptiness in their relationship. Maybe due to the contrasting views both exhibited regarding India at the starting of the novel or their cultural difference or due to their intermarriage and the problems they had to face in the British society related to their marriage.

When Adit decided to end living a fake life and return to India, Sarah decides to go along with him. Even though at that time India was not financial, political, and economically stable. Even after

people's warnings not to go to India during such conditions Sarah decides to go along with Adit putting her as well as her child's future at risk. She might have thought that the existential crisis she is suffering in London from her marriage might dissolve forever if she lives in India. But while going to India she remembers her English culture about which in most of the novel she was never excited. Now at the time of departure, she sadly misses her culture. She compares herself to Alice in 'Alice in the Wonderland' because like Alice she is uncertain about the new world, her new life and her, and her baby's future. Thus, Desai has used such lines- "Sarah, beside him, wrapped in the customary drabness of her old mackintosh, her face green-tinted with morning sickness and the prospect of travel in this condition, felt herself, on the other hand, fading, fading — like a creature in Alice in Wonderland kind, in a dream world that bordered on nightmare".

Whereas for Dev all the rosy picture that English literature has painted in his mind was washed off once the reality struck him. After facing humiliation and suffer racial discrimination, he realised the pitiful condition of Indian diasporas in England.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

How does an infant recognizes its surroundings or things that belong to him? Through its sense organs. People who sound and smell similar and look familiar, a person will surely feel more connected to them. When people from different countries and cultures come to the host, native people of that host country are not able to connect themselves with this new addition. For them, these diasporas are like aliens who have come to their land. Similar is the case with diasporas who feel they are living amongst the aliens on a strange land.

Multiculturalism helps people of various cultures all across the globe come together and understand each other's culture, ideologies, and country. But multiculturalism in a country can be successful only when people from various cultures are ready to respect other cultures and customs especially the people of the host country. Whether a person is in relation or in a nation wherever he or she gets respect, things can work out in a better way. As it is said that respect comes in two unvarying steps- 'giving it and receiving it'. God has created all the creatures with equal love and care, therefore, every living creature on the earth irrespective of his caste, creed, gender, age or colour deserves respect. This is one of the themes Desai has highlighted in her novel 'Bye-Bye Blackbird'.

For Britishers, Indian emigrants are like black coloured birds who are freely coming and comfortably living in their homeland and polluting it. Britishers do not want to share their resources and home with Indian diasporas. Britishers are unable to accept Indians as a part of their society that's why they ill-treated and discriminated against not only Indian diasporas but also other diasporas like Africans with a hope they can finally say 'Goodbye' to these blackbirds. Anita Desai presents how due to different colours and cultures one living being becoming hostile to another living being and thus, simply kills the principles of humanity. Through her character's psychological and emotional trauma we can feel the pain and the sufferings of the Indian emigrants of the 1960s.

#### References

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