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Love - Hate Relationship of the Expatriates in Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird*

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Abstract— This paper explores the intricate socio-psychological landscape of expatriation as depicted in Anita Desai's seminal novel, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. Moving beyond the traditional narratives of migration, Desai delves into the subconscious "nausea" and deep-seated nostalgia that define the immigrant experience in 20th-century London. The study focuses on the antithetical psychological trajectories of the two primary protagonists, Adit and Dev, who embody a complex love-hate relationship with their adopted land.

While Adit begins as a "romantic Oriental" enamoured by British culture and dismissive of his Indian roots, his journey concludes with a rejection of his "English self" in favour of a "real life" (204) in India. Conversely, Dev—initially a fierce critic of British imperialism and social prejudice—undergoes a gradual seduction by the aesthetic and economic allure of London, eventually choosing to stay. Through a meticulous analysis of their shifting perspectives, racial encounters, and the marginalised experiences of characters like Sarah, this paper examines the "schizophrenic" predicament of the alien soul. Ultimately, the research illustrates how Desai utilises a circular narrative to reflect the volatile struggle for identity, belonging, and emotional emancipation in a post-colonial world.

Keywords— Expatriate Psyche, Cultural Schizophrenia, Post-colonial Identity, Nostalgia, Anita Desai, Racial Discrimination, Alienation, Hybridity, Social Predicament, Immigrant Experience

Expatriation and the problems and complexities prevalent in the lives of these expatriates have emerged as a major theme in the novels of 20th-century authors, crossing the barriers of caste, creed, and nationality. Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Forster, Bharati Mukherjee, Toni Morrison, and Farhana Sheikh have articulated the complexities of the lives of immigrants. Another author in this series is Anita Desai, who dives deep into the expatriates' unconscious and subconscious psyche, revealing their nausea, nostalgia, and longing for their native land. Her depiction of characters and situations is not one-sided, and her protagonists seem to be cherishing a strange love-hate relationship with the land of their adoption. With great precision and brilliance, Adit, the chief protagonist is weighing the merits and demerits of this foreign land, but at the close of the novel he comes up with a conclusion when his English self was receiving and fading and dying that to achieve their real self and to have a "real life" (204) he must go to India, his native place.

Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* depicts the circular journey of a soul searching for a perfect life, as she feels that all these immigrants are prone to schizophrenia and the predicament of living or not living in England.

Bernard Bereonzi's views that "the best literature and especially fiction is full of contradictions" find great support in the depiction of Adit and Dev's characters in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. Adit is the chief protagonist in the fiction who has been settled in London, the "land of opportunities" (19). He is all praise for London, "being a romantic Oriental in love with the cynical West". While Dev is his friend who has come to England and still cherishes hatred for Britain and Britishers who invaded, suppressed and trampled his country, ironically, at the close of the fiction, Adit leaves England for good, and Dev remains behind. The plot of the novel is tightly knitted, and the story takes some very beautiful and unpredictable twists and turns, and at times, the highly imaginative or sensitive readers find themselves amidst the Londoners, facing the humiliation of their taunts while enjoying the fresh morning air of the countryside as well. It is the Prodigy of her description that the reader is able to empathies himself with the characters.

Adit, the hero in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, was born in the middle class, and he came to England to enjoy the freedom. There, he fell in love with an English girl, Sarah, and got married to her. Adit was attending a party, where Sarah had also been invited, and then it was "her shyness and rectitude that brought out the protective in Adit, whereas all the other guests and the hostess had only made him feel uncertain and possibly even humiliated" (73). It was love at first sight, and in the very first meeting itself, he expresses his love to her, complementing "you are like the Bengali girl, Bengali women are like that reserved quite. Maybe you were one in your previous life". (73) Though apparently, it seems to be his fondness for Indianism in her, but actually, it is just the opposite of it. As he comments:

These English wives are quite manageable really, you know, Not as fierce as they look very quit and hard working as long as you treat them right and roar at them regularly once or twice a week (29).



This is also a part of Adit's fascination for this foreign land to whom everything about London is fascinating and captivating who expresses unreservedly "I love England. I admire England. I can appreciate her history and poetry as much as any Englishmen". (164) He has moulded and transformed himself entirely up to the expectation of England, he has fully adopted the life style of Britishers. Time and again, he keeps comparing England with his own native land, and openly criticizes India for its traditionality and backwardness. Truly, his experience in India were not very pleasant and he portrays its heart-rending gloomy picture to others as he tells them that during his visit to India he "Only notice the laziness of the clerks and the unpunctuality of the buses and trains and the beggars and the flies and the stench and the boredom of it" (49). When Dev declared that he had come to England to make the right approaches, he at once retorts hatefully and sarcastically "do you think you can get into an English college by sending the principal a basket of mangoes" (8). The aforesaid statement is a testimony of Adit's feelings for his own country, which may be appropriate at that particular instant but at times it goes beyond the limits of tolerance:

Nothing ever goes right at home there is famine or flood, there is brought or epidemic, always. Here the rain falls so softly and evenly, never too much and never too short. The sun is mild. The earth is fertile. The rivers are full. The birds are plump. The beasts are fat. Everything so wealthy, so luxuriant so fortunate. (129)

When Dev feels disgusted to see a couple hugging each other under a lamp-post and remarks about the obscenity of these people as, "a bunch of exhibitions" (66), who flaunt themselves to catch the attention of people and retorts disdainfully whether he could imagine an Indian couple behaving like that, Adit made a prompt reply with a brisk air of confidence and sarcasm, "No... There aren't any. Not unmarried ones, and the married ones aren't in the parks, they're at home, quarreling" (66) and comes up with a concluding remark, "in India, too much goes on in the dark" (67).

The Duality of the Immigrant Experience in Bye-Bye Blackbird

Adit takes immense satisfaction in his uncritical devotion to England. Offering his unwavering loyalty and affection, he believes he has earned the right to partake in the nation's cultural offerings, famously stating that he is entitled to enjoy "the Convent Garden Operas and the pub down the road... picnics in the Hyde Park. (164).

Paradoxically, despite his reverence for a land defined by liberty and individualism, Adit discovers that England denies him these very values. He is frequently targeted by racial bias and systemic exclusion. Regarded as an unwanted interloper rather than a citizen, he faces the indignity of segregated facilities and racial slurs like "wog" as an unavoidable part of his life in Britain. A poignant exchange with Dev highlights this painful resignation:

"You heard him." "I did not." "Adit, I saw you turn, I saw your face. You can take that form a school boy." "It is best to ignore those who don't deserve ones' notice." (162)

Adit is acutely aware that professional growth is capped by his ethnicity; top-tier positions remain reserved for the British, leaving him to endure the role of the "unwanted expatriate." Even his wife, Sarah, is not exempt from this hostility. She is subjected to the taunts of children who shout, "Hurry, hurry, Ms. Curry" (32). At work, Sarah lives in a state of constant social anxiety, dodging intrusive questions from colleagues about her marriage and her in-laws. Her reluctance to share often invites malice, with coworkers questioning, "if she is ashamed of marrying an Indian husband, why did she go and marry him" (37).

While Adit initially insists, "I love it here, I am so happy here. I hardly notice the few drawbacks" (164), Sarah grows to resent the societal treatment she receives. When Adit romanticizes the English countryside, Sarah's response is biting: "when I think of all the Millers of England, I could leave at once" (83).

Eventually, the weight of being an "alien" triggers a deep longing in Adit for his homeland. His nostalgia manifests in simple desires, such as craving carrot halwa at Christmas or dreaming of a return to India where:

"I will go. My mother will go cook hilsa fish wrapped in banana leaves for me. My sisters will dress Sarah in saris and gold ornaments. I'll lie in bed till ten every morning and sit up half the night listening to the Shehnai and Sitar." (48)

Adit's patriotism is further cemented by his fundraising efforts during the Indo-Pakistani war, which ultimately drives his decision to repatriate. His friend Jasbir is stunned by this transformation, remarking on the irony of the "most Pukha sahib of all" returning to India.



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As Adit's journey comes full circle, a new narrative begins with Dev. Initially, Dev is a fierce critic of British society, mocking Adit's sycophancy and declaring, "I wouldn't live in a country where I was insulted and unwanted" (17). He even accuses Adit of having the soul of a "Babu" who would have crawled before colonial masters (163).

However, Desai illustrates a subtle psychological shift in Dev:

The life of an alien appears to be enthrallingly rich and beautiful to him, and that of a homebody too dull, too stale to return to ever. Then he hears a word in the tube or notices an expression on an English face that overturns his latest decision (86).

Ultimately, Dev is seduced by the vibrancy of London—its theatres, art, and parks. By the novel's end, he chooses to stay, taking over Adit's old job at the tourist bureau. He chooses the "exquisite relief of the unemployed at last employed" (230) over his previous convictions, effectively trading his pride for a future in England.

'Bye-Bye Blackbird' serves as a profound exploration of the love-hate relationship between the immigrant and the host country. Anita Desai masterfully mirrors the paths of her protagonists: Adit, the lover of England, departs for India to find his soul, while Dev, the skeptic, remains behind. Adit's departure is sparked by the realization that in England, "everything tells you you're an outsider and not entitled to the country" (162), a truth that finally grants him the freedom to go home.

In conclusion, *Bye-Bye Blackbird* functions as a poignant autopsy of the immigrant soul, meticulously dissecting the fractured identities that emerge from the post-colonial encounter.

Through the divergent destinies of Adit and Dev, Anita Desai illustrates that the expatriate experience is rarely a static state of being, but rather a volatile "circular journey" fueled by the oscillating forces of attraction and repulsion. While the novel highlights the grim realities of prejudice—noting that the "alien" is often relegated to a secondary status—it equally emphasizes the seductive power of a foreign culture that can eventually consume even the most cynical critic. Ultimately, Adit's return to India and Dev's assimilation into the British workforce serve as a profound commentary on the "schizophrenia" of belonging; they remind us that for the expatriate, the search for a "real life" is an ongoing negotiation between the nostalgia of the past and the pragmatic allure of the future. Desai's narrative thus leaves us with a haunting realization: in the globalized landscape of the 20th century, the "Blackbird" may bid farewell to one shore, but the shadow of its dual identity remains forever cast across both.

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