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Archetypal Imagery from the Continent to Island as Portrayed in Anita Desai's *Bye Bye Blackbird*

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The present research paper aims to focus on the problems of acculturation. Adit and Dev in this novel are Indian immigrants in Britain and they suffer from many cultural shocks and degradation. The major reason for such problems is a romantic image which the Indians have had of England and vice-versa. Adit is first of all fascinated by British culture and then disillusioned. He marries a lady named Sarah who is fascinated by India. Sarah marries Adit without knowing whether Indian family system would accept her or not. This is again a clash between continent and Island and vice-versa. Thus Anita Desai highlights the post-colonial phase of the relationship between India and England which brought about many perceptible changes which Sarah and Adit are not exactly able to realize. As a result they develop a mythological image of each other's culture. After all the problems that Sarah, Adit and Dev face are generated by the fact of their different nationalities which are mutually exclusive and even culturally shocking. Bye-bye black bird studies those Indians who are collectively represented by Adit and Dev in two different experiential moods carrying the archetypal feelings of the whole lot of Asians who have either migrate to England or are going for short visit to the country which once colonized them

Accounts of India by foreign mercenaries, traders, and historians in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were guided by a number of considerations, mostly evangelic. Other kinds of jealousies and prejudices were not lacking. The reliability of such accounts has always been in doubt. However, it were such accounts that the British imagination about India was nourished on.

India came to be recognized as a land of innumerable goods and goddesses, Maharajas and snake charmers. On the contrary, the knowledge of the British in India was given by businessmen, travelers and workers of East India Company. The image of the British that such sources projected was guide by an overriding sense of superiority, which amounted to the superiority of religion, economic well being and decency of life. British came to India in seventeenth century and when they left the country roughly in the middle of twentieth century they left mixed memories. The accounts given were odd as well as peculiar and perhaps never genuine. Such problems of acculturation particularly emanated after the British had left India. The relationship between the British and India became that of the colonizer and the colonized, or to put it more clumsily, that of the master and the slave. When India achieved freedom, many Indians migrated to England along with their Gorasahebs and Memsahib's. This gave them an opportunity to live in the land of the dreams which fulfilled their material desires. The early phase, therefore, of the image of Britain in the minds of Indians and the image of India in the minds of the British was, by and large, ideal and romantic, India evoked mixed feelings as being a land of primitives on the one hand and potentially rich on the other Bye Bye Blackbird deals with the problems of acculturation. Adit and

Dev in this novel are Indian immigrants in Britain and they suffer from many cultural shocks and degradation. The major reason for such problems is a romantic image which the Indians have had of England and vice-versa. The clash is between a romantic image and a real image of India and Indians in England and British and Britishers who come to India. The clash is further highlighted by the fact that the British have ruled India for two centuries. Adit is first of all fascinated by British culture and then disillusioned. He marries a lady named Sarah who is fascinated by India. Sarah marries Adit without knowing whether Indian family system would accept her or not. This is again a clash between continent and Island and vice-versa. At the end of the novel Adit returns to India search of his roots. Anita Desai emphasizes and is clearly able to put forth the fact that the romantic immigrant's lives that torments them. This novel also deals with the theme of xenophobia or dislike for the foreigners. Thus replying to a question regarding *Bye Bye Blackbird* Anita Desai observes that "of all my novels it is most rooted in experience and the least literary in derivation".

I

Adit Sen, a young man from India, lives in England with Sarah, his English wife. In spite of a degree from British University he is unable to get a job in India. As a result, Adit returns to England and settles down there for attraction by the people of one country for another is as necessary a fact of life as one getting disillusioned.

The first section of the paper will talk of images- both of India and England – in the minds of Englishmen as well as the Indians. These images are largely romantic and hypothetical since they are not based on primary sources but on secondary and tertiary. The second section will try to project, by analyzing key-events and characters in the novel, the image transforming into an archetype. The archetype will be taken as a collective unconscious- Adit representing the whole lot of Asians (continent) in relation to Island (England) which remains an image in fact, the concepts of the Island and Continent in all their practical implications are inbred into the structure of the novel. The Island seems to merge into the Continent as the Continent seems to be receding into the Island. The section will also focus attention upon the disillusionment aspect of the problem enlightening us as to when and how the romantic image gets broken down into pieces- all made up of a clumsy earth. The third section will gather findings and make necessary generalizations, whenever warranted. Although the novel is mainly concerned with the lives of Indian immigrants in England, it mainly explores the existentialist problems which are inter-racial in nature and often complicated. While going through the Nobel, the reader begins to brood over the hollowness of the last few years. In the beginning Adit is quit comfortable in English Society with a middle-rung while collar job fully at home in an alien country:

I am happy here. I like going into local for a pint on my way home to Sarah. I like wearing food tweed on a foggy November day. I like the Covent Garden Opera house.... I like the girls here.... I like their nylon stockings and the way their noses tilt upwards, and I used to like dancing with them (p.18).

Like his fellow immigrants, he quietly listens to racial insults and humiliations to which he is continually subjected. Having been exposed to English life and manners for years, he now feels a sense of cultural affinity.

In the beginning of the novel we see Adit critical of everything Indian. He leaves India and decides to settle down in England. What leads him to go to England can be explained as his romantic attraction for England which, later in the noble, changes into repulsion. His hate for India and Indian social system can be seen in these lines when Dev, his newly arrived friend from India, criticizes everything English;

I am so happy here, I hardly notice the few drawbacks, I will tell you – I did go back, three years ago, when I got engaged to Sarah and my parents wanted me to come with her. I stayed there looking for a job for four months. All I could find was a ruddy clerking job in some Government of India tourist bureau. They were going to pay me two hundred and fifty rupees and after thirty years I could expect to have five hundred rupees. That is what depressed me—the thirty years I would have to spend in panting after that extra two hundred and fifty rupees.... I said no thank you, I am not made for this, and I came back”. Yes, I am sitting pretty (He is so much fascinated by it that he loves it). I Love England I admire England. I can appreciate her history and her poetry as much as any Englishman. I feel a thrill about Nelson’s battle, about waterloo, about Churchill.... (17-18)

II

But we see how during the course of the novel this attraction for England does not change the sense of his own cultural identity. He secretly longs for Indian food, music and friends, when he sees that his English wife is unable to make Indian food, he himself goes into the kitchen and prepares. This longing for his country suddenly grows intense during one of his visits to Sarah’s parents. And gradually we see how he shifts from being an anglophile to transforming himself into an Anglophobe.

Ironically, it is not Adit who suffers most on this account but his docile wife Sarah. She incurs the anger of the white society by marrying a brown Asian as she had broken the social code of England, hence, she is always subject to taunts and comments of not only her colleagues but even of young pupils of the school where she works as a clerk. “Adit’s romantic love for England is matched by the romanticism of her imagination about India.

She marries Adit because to Sarah, Adit seemed so rich to her... seemed to have so much to give her –so many relations and attachments, pictures and stories, legends, promises and warnings.”

This is the romantic image of India (and Indians) that Sarah had of Adit before marriage. Adit is impressed by her “Shyness and rectitude”. He tells her in the early days of their courtship: “You are like a Bengali girl... reserved, quiet, and may be you were one in your previous life (p.84).

She never thought that she will be passing through such a plight her predicament becomes all the more acute when she had to face identity-crisis. She always avoids questions regarding her husband and family life but her peers take a perverse delight in asking such questions. Her colleagues in the school are critical and satirical her, as a result of which she starts avoiding them:

Sarah made no effort to join them. She was still breathing hard at having so narrowly escaped having to answer personal questions. It would have wrecked her for the whole day to have discuss Adit with Julia...But to display her letters from India, to discuss her Indian husband, would have forced her to parade like an imposter, to make claims to a life, an identity that she did not herself feel to be her own (p.36).

Her dreams of India and Indians fall to pieces when she had to face reality. Indeed, Sarah's problem is rooted in her cross-cultural marriage. Sarah is overwhelmed by the change because she cannot fully involve herself in her husband's culture, not can she adopt herself to her own society. Her bewilderment and frustration is the result of "cultural shock", which Asian immigrants experience in England. Both of them maintain their cultural identities, yet experience a close affinity with each other's culture. But Sarah had a dread of being labeled an Indian wherein lies the crux of her difficulty.

Moreover, the noble rarely presents any scene of love or intimacy to indicate that Adit and Sarah had any fascination for each other. They soon settle down to a dull, drab routine of cooking, washing dishes and keeping house. Her conduct prompts one of her colleagues to remark: "if she's ashamed of having an Indian husband, why did she go and marry him? (p.37). Adit notice in Sarah "an anguish of loneliness (p.31) and notices the disappearance of her former "cheerfulness, vividness, the sure, quick quality of the humor that he had known when he fell in love with her" (p.32). Sarah herself feels a loss of identity:

Her face was only ask, her body only a consume where was Sarah? Starting out of the window at the Chimney pots and the clouds, she wandered, if Sarah had any existence at all, and them she wandered, with great sadness, if she would ever be allowed to step off the stage, leave the theatre and enter the real world whether English or Indian, she did not care, she wanted its sincerity, its truth (p.35).

The noble portrays a variety of immigrant experiences and this experience not the same for everyone, it ranges from acceptance to ambivalence, acute awareness to unawareness, and from loving England to hating it.

Dev who had ostensibly come for higher studies in Economics forgets about his academic pursuit in course of time and strives for a job he finally gets one, but interestingly, it is the job of his friend and host Adit who decides to leave London in search of his roots in India along with his wife Sarah. Dev's dislike and hate stem chiefly from the alien treatment which is often insulting in nature. These immigrants are openly insulted and abused. They are called "The London docks have there kinds of lavatories- Ladies, Gents' and Asiatic" (p.17).

Dev is the iconoclast, a critic of everything to the extent of becoming a cynic. If Adit begins with pretensions and ends in sincerity and truth, confessing his phoney existence, Dev begins with denouncing and attacking everything British. Dev believes that he is a cultural ambassador to England and wants to reverse the historical fact of colonization of India by the British. He wants the reversal of it by the colonization of England by Indian. Though he is not able to conquer England but his wish is very subtly and artistically expressed through wishful fantasy:

I am here as an ambassador. I am showing these damn imperialists with their lost colonies complex that we are free people now, with our own personalities that this veneer of an English education has not obscured, and not afraid to match ours theirs ... to conquer England as they once conquered India to show them (p. 123).

But, unlike Adit, Dev does not think seriously over his realization to put into action and is lost among the crowd of many Indians settled in England. And by the end of the novel the roles change – the English hater stays back in London, in his friend's shoes, being employed in his friend's place and living in his flat.

On the other hand, we find a change in Adit caused by his deeper realization that in spite of superficial ease and adjustment his life and existence in England is phoney. The little India in England is not real. Everything he does there is merely pretensions. And then he decides he has had enough of it and now is the time to go back to his roots, to India, his own country in spite of all ills, overpopulation, poverty, backwardness, and unemployment.

After assessing himself, his mind is clear, his blurred vision cleansed and focused. He declares to his wife:

I can't live here any more. Our lives here- they've been so unreal, don't you feel it? Little India in London. All our records and lamb curries and sing songs, it's all so unreal. It has no reality at all, we just pretend all the time. I'm twenty-seven now. I've got to home and start living a real life. I don't know what real life there will mean. I can't tell you if it won't be war, Islam, communism, famine, anarchy or what. Whatever it is will be Indian, it will be my natural condition, my true circumstance. I must go and face all that now. It's been wonderful here. Sarah, you know I've loved

England more than you, I've often felt myself half English but it was only pretence, Sally, now it has to be the real, thing, I must to. You will come?" (P.203).

III

The foregoing analysis shows existential dilemmas the English and the Indians confront while facing differently contextualized situations. In fact, the concepts of Island and the Continent are two aspects of an epistemological problem that is rooted in a free consciousness, free will and free expression. The question of identity crisis arises only because we have closed and narrowly contextualized the doors of our consciousness. India and England are real situations as well as fictional entities. The difference between fact and fiction, myth and reality, is very thin indeed, still

it is a very vital difference. It is because of this that India is India and England is England. It is this problem which is at the root of the problem of acculturation. After all the problems that Sarah, Adit and Dev face are generated by the fact of their different nationalities which are mutually exclusive and even culturally shocking.

The post-colonial phase of the relationship between India and England has brought about many perceptible changes which Sarah and Adit are not exactly able to realize. As a result they develop a mythological image of each other's culture. These images carry their own continents and islands in various combinations and permutations which verily Sarah, Adit and Dev are images when multiply by the phenomenon of recurrence become archetypes. The Indians who are collectively represented by Adit and Dev in two different experiential moods carry the archetypal feelings of the whole lot of Asians who have either migrate to England or are going for short visit to the country which once colonized them. Individual images spread and merge into sprawling archetypes which in turn emanate from the collectivity of experience that is culturally specific. This is how the limited time bound images acquire a multidimensional archetypal significance within historical-temporal limits. All mythologies are transplantations of consciousness which sometimes give birth to reality and sometimes endlessly supplement it. All distance is fascination as deep horizons invariably are. The distance is not immediate reality. That is precisely the reason that when Sarah confronts the reality of the Indian landscape her mythological graph of India falls to pices. The same is true of Adit who dived to be like the British Lords but ended as a slave in the process. Dev is the product of an imagination that is counter-productive. To put it more crudely, this is another form of post colonial consciousness, like another form of post-colonial imperialism like its counterpart the technological imperialism. Anita Desai places situation and possibilities before us of the two different cultures-one the most ancient, and the other, relatively modern. India is a continent not precisely because it is so big but because it is culturally so rich.

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