



A Critical Study Of Cross-Cultural Conflicts In The Selected Novel Of Anita Desai

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Abstract

Culture encompasses social behaviour, belief customs, norms and value found in human societies round the globe. The present research paper analyzes various dimensions relating to Anita Desai's treatment of Cross-cultural conflicts with the relevant and inherent complexities, diversities and challenge involved in the process. It would also explore vision and attitude of Anita Desai according to which she comes to handle the vital subject of Cross-cultural conflicts. Accordingly, the focus is on analyzing the aspirations, anxieties, frustration, helplessness, identity-crises, social and psychological problem of immigrants through the themes and characters in the fictional world of Anita Desai who has successfully depicted various problem faced by the Asian immigrants, especially Indian immigrants in England or America. Moreover, the study also attempts at exploring the situations of conflicts and resolutions, displacement and adjustment, alienation and accommodation, where characters come to feel entrapped in the beginning and then released at the end of the process.

Introduction

The word culture in truest sense of term is used to describe the values, beliefs and attitude of a particular place. It occupies a very important place in human society. Broadly speaking, culture signifies growth. It is the sum total of all the custom, traditions, institutions etc., Inherited by people. A person with good moral values, character and conduct is said to have a good cultural background. The earth has seven continents which otherwise mean huge areas of land. Each continent is made up of several countries. The people living in each country speak different languages and have different culture. They have different ways of life like music, dance, art, food, belief, history, clothing, sports, celebrations etc.

The term Diaspora has been a matter of great concern from the long past. There are a lot of speculations and rife when it comes to express it in writing and a lot of authors and poets have explored it in different angles across ages. Cross cultural behavior is very much associated to the term Diaspora as it refers to the

behavior of Diasporas spread across the continent. The Indian Diaspora today constitutes an important facet of world culture.

Cross cultural behavior affects Diasporas in numerous ways. Cross cultural behavior is felt in reality when people migrate to other countries in search of economic freedom or other reasons. Suddenly uprooted from their people, society and culture, the forces of a completely different society, culture and climate cause a feeling of spotlessness. Sense of alienation makes it very difficult to adapt to the new soil. Nostalgic memories of their place and people they have left haunts them. They feel lost in the alien culture and the beginning years of settlement is definitely a period of anxiety and depression for the people who have moved into new soil and culture.

Cross cultural behavior is compared to a tree where people notice only the visible cultural differences like communication styles, attitudes towards conflicts, decision making style and approaches to knowing. They fail to notice the invisible cultural roots like beliefs, values, expectations and attitudes. But writers, being very sensitive, understand and pen the trauma felt by the uprooted people, their beliefs, values and expectations in the minds of the immigrants. Indian diasporic writers are adept in this as they themselves have undergone similar experiences.

Discussion

The Indian society is a complete amalgamation of culture, tradition and different religions which result in a *mélange* of social stereotypes. Indian writers are greatly influenced by the social class structures, subcultures, regional cultures and its ethnic structures. Each strives to bring in the meaningful and many have succeeded in this attempt too. Most of the writers are Diasporas who having moved into other countries have become distinguished writers and intellectuals. The Indian diaspora in America, have in their works, portrayed their dilemmas, anxieties, nostalgia and rootlessness of their existence. Besides these, there have been probes into the cultural and gender conflicts as word-painted in the works of Anita Desai, Chitra Banerjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Bharathi Mukherjee. Stories of history, historiography and colonialism have appeared in many other works. Apart from this, Anita Desai and other immigrant writers also used cultural and mythological motives to further their Indian identity. Desai found a place for herself as an immigrant writer due to her cross-cultural background, and it may not be out of place to say that she has carved a niche for herself in the edifice of Indian Writing in English.

Her befitting image as a global citizen has molded her way of looking at life and things. Her portrayal of human conditions in her novels speak volumes

of embedded culture and entrenchment in certain situations. *Bye-Bye Blackbird* portrays the life of Indians in Britain of the late 60's. *Fasting Feasting* hovers around a lonely Indian pushed to U.S.A to accomplish certain dreams. *Clear Light of day* elaborates on how diverse situations change people into thinking rationally while *Journey to Ithaca* portrays the attraction towards spirituality and *'Baumgartner's Bombay'* revolves around a nowhere man stranded in an alien country. It is a well known ideology that Anita Desai only explores the female psyche in her novels, but a little deeper look into it will reveal her nature as a diasporic writer and a perceiver of cultural scenarios.

Anita Desai rose to fame with her first publication *"Cry the peacock* in 1963 followed by *'Voices in the City'* in 1965, *'Bye Bye Blackbird'* in 1971, *"The Peacock Garden'* in 1974, *"Where shall We Go this Summer'* 1975, *'Cat on a Houseboat'* in 1976, *Fire on the Mountain'* in 1977, *'Games at Twilight* in 1978, *"Clear light of Day'* in 1980, *'In custody'* in 1984, *'Baumgartner's Bombay'* in 1989, *"Journey to Ithaca'* in 1995, *'Fasting Feasting'* in 1999, *'Diamond Dust'* and other stories in 2000, *'The Zigzag Way'* in 2004 and *'The Artist of Disappearance'* in 2011. The dual cultural impact on her life due to her mixed parentage gave her the advantage of having a dual perspective about life and people. Her name is identified with a new literary tradition which deals with themes of quest, identity and marginal homeland. Speaking of Anita Desai's sensibility and its maturity, "The modern sensibility that seeks expression through Anita Desai's novels is that of the average middleclass Indian-a product of the multicultural, multilingual, multireligious Indian society. Her own mixed parentage, her early education in a Christian missionary school in Delhi-itself an amalgam of Muslim, British and Hindu cultures-must have made the author particularly sensitive to the conglomeration of cultures woven into the very texture of Indian life. Her later status as a non-resident Indian must have sharpened her sensibility towards the emotional and cultural instability of the modern Indian. Desai's protagonists, mostly centred in the cities, turn out to be drifting, alienated products of mixed heritage".

Her novels mostly depict the cultural canvas of the Indian society with special effect on the lives of isolated women who are subjugated to male dominance and deceit. Apart from exploring the female psyche she has successfully created convincing characters who are projected as sufferers of diaspora feelings in her novels. The novel *"Bye Bye Blackbird'* seems to be closest to her as it reveals some of her personal experiences as an immigrant. *Baumgartner's Bombay* reminds us of Ms. Desai's German parentage while *'Clear Light of Day'* and *Journey to Ithaca'* focus on spiritual urges.

Although Anita Desai herself insists that her novels are not only an image of Indian society but also women and their struggle for existence, an Indian cultural background that helps her bringing women's issues forward. It can be said without a second thought that she often examines the ingredients of Indian culture such as the superstitious beliefs, religious interventions and such like prevailing in India in all the novels the researcher has chosen for her study.

The concept of existentialism is also a favorite subject of Anita Desai. It embodies the total framework of her stories. The isolation of man from the irrational world, the result of his separation from ordinary society and his recognition of the world as ugly and meaningless in the hope of living alone reaches the Desai sail and paints a beautiful picture. The present Indian society is very much suited to these problems and loneliness rules the roost. Some men by nature are very much interested in staying aloof from others and remaining in the confines of their own world. They do not want to mingle in a group nor does he want people by his side. Anita Desai finds these people interesting and hence projects them in her novels and she has also found a massive audience to support her taste.

Pier Paolo Piciucco, once when interviewing Anita Desai asked: "Destructiveness, self-destruction and violence seem to be among your privileged settings. Do you think this is due to your sensibility and/or personal experiences or as a sort of cultural inclination' the Bengalis have towards their kali myth?" Anita Desai: "You see, I don't think the Indians are extremely peaceful people. In India one is always running up against tremendous violence or threats of violence. It is a certain element in the atmosphere which has many causes, really. It comes from huge population which crowds the country, it comes from extreme poverty, it comes from a sense of powerlessness and frustration.... I have always felt that there was a state of tension that could erupt any time to violence, and not to acknowledge that in my writing would have not been true to it. And the kali myth explains a great deal of the Indian psyche, how the destructive is very much a part of everyday life. The destructive and the creative lives are very close together in India and they prevail so much of life. And out of this has born so much: poetry, music, art, laughter, pleasure in living. The two seem to lie very close together. This belongs to the way Indians experience life. I have seen the same thing in Mexico where, at the same time, there are extremely deep, dark and destructive forces and life, colour, pleasure, crowds, beautiful objects. The two seem to need to exist together". This interview serves as a platform in understanding Indians to some extent and thus supports the findings which lay emphasis in the writings of Anita Desai.

Indian migrants in the west are not treated as aliens but the feeling of exile at an emotional level still continues. They are somehow intact in their roots with the help of advanced technologies, music, movies, media and food. But the feeling of exile lingers which is pre-conditioned to succumb to the sense of estrangement, non-belongingness and dislocation. Anita Desai's fictional world upholds the rebellious attitude and struggle of the individuals and also examines the nature of adjustment and compromise for survival.

The characters with whom Anita Desai people her novels are basically from the Indian background and she has her own reasons for selecting such people to paint her canvas. Her skill lies in her careful selection of characters woven against the backdrop of Indian society. Her molding of Indian subcontinent with all its finery and imagery makes one think of her as a person born to achieve this feat. Her world is two headed where seeking central harmony is a distant dream.

Middle-class women trapped under the tradition -bound patriarchal culture imposed upon by the society are the main focus in Anita Desai's novels. She attempts to paint a backdrop of the events that happens post-independence and it can be seen that she attempts to portray familial bonds and tensions that prevail over different generations. Her novels are submerged in truth and are of utmost relevance even today though it is many years since India won its freedom. The fodder of culture and tradition of India is sprinkled in many of her novels and though the countries keep changing with the passing of each novel, her attempts to portray India and its people remains the same however rich the backdrop may be.

Conclusion

Anita Desai has dexterously woven the cultural aspects of India in the rich fabric of her novels. The researcher feels that one can find both conflicts and synthesis with regard to Indian and Western cultures, in her works, as she happens to be a woman who has lived not only in her own culture but in a foreign culture as well. So the researcher chose to detect a kind of paradigm that has gone into the texture of her novels, revealing to the discerning eyes both conflicts and unifying elements, that is to say, diversity and synthesis of two opposite cultures. By placing two different cultural backgrounds-the East and the West in juxtaposition, Anita Desai has attempted to show to her readers how India can be looked at by her own people and by the foreigners. She (seems to) indirectly asks her readers if India is progressing or regressing by painting conflicting patterns of the modern mixture of what is called Indian Culture.

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