



ANNIHILATION OF THE SELF OF WOMEN IN ANITA DESAI'S BYE - BYE BLACKBIRD

K. Valarmathi* & D. Priyadharsini**

Assistant Professor of English, Thiru Kolanjiappar Government Arts
College, Vriddhachalam, Tamilnadu

Abstract:

This article is an attempt to analyse the universal theme of the annihilation of self of women that marriage involves. It also traces Anita Desai's treatment of the psychological changes a woman undergoes after getting married. Sarah an Englishwoman, married to an Indian is forced to give up her identity, her culture, her individuality and totally her self.

Key Words: Annihilation, Immigrants, Identity, Alienation & Self

Introduction:

Anita Desai, winner of Sahitya academy award, occupies a secure place among the Indian women novelists in English. Her treatment of the psychological problems and the inner sensibility of her characters make her stand apart from the other novelists. Sarah becomes a lonely and helpless person after marriage. She is culturally alienated and her marriage to a wog forces her to keep to the loneliest path and walk away from others, drawing across her face mask of secrecy. When she sees people near her, she hurries away from them as if to hide from them, from their curiosity, questions and touch. Those who glance at her are made aware of the violence with which she turns away from them. Even Adit senses this anguish in her. It is an anguish of loneliness. He realizes it is absurd to call her, by his own name, or by any name. It seems to him that she has shed her ancestry and identity. She refuses to visit her friends. And she refuses to talk about her Indian husband. She is sincerely attached to Adit and has a real knowledge of his moods and his mental states which Adit lacks. She considers her relationship with Adit more important.

But Adit always indulges in his own self and problems. He never tries to understand her feelings. In his frustration against his situation in England he accuses his wife of xenophobia. He tells her that she would never accept anything but her own drab, dingy standards and her own dull boring ways without ever considering his feelings on leaving permanently for India. He makes up his mind and informs her that his son should be born in India only. All on a sudden Sarah feels as if her life is filled with more than she could manage. Everyone about her decided to dump their surplus onto her. It is like an avalanche.

She now has to look after her baby, the voyage and the uprooting. But all she feels she is capable of doing only one thing that is to sit down quietly and cradle her child inside her womb. It is she, when compared with other characters of the novel, has real power. She keeps a balanced relationship with her mother, friends and Dev. It is in her that there is a real split, a real dilemma, a real suffering. Her real problem is to know her identity. She wonders who is she Mrs. Sen, who has married in a red, gold Banaras sari on a September day, or Mrs. Sen, the Head's secretary who sends bills out and receives the cheques, who keeps order in the school and is known for her efficiency. She feels she is playing roles when she deals with the bills, when she taps her fingers in response to Adit's sitar music.

She has only a little command over these two roles, the one she plays in the morning at school and the one she plays in the evening at home. However, she cannot realize with how much sincerity she plays her roles. It seems to her, when she is not

playing these roles she is nobody, she wonders if she has any existence at all, if she would ever be allowed to step off the stage, leave the theatre and enter the real world, English or Indian, she does not care, she wants only its sincerity, its truth. This acting out of roles tells upon her and she feels like going out and slashes pieces. By the Time they move to live in a new house, Adit retires from Sarah's life as well. Herself puzzled by her husband's bewilderment, she begins to have a clear idea of her miserable life.

Adit always keeps her in tender hooks. There was no going against his wishes and Sarah dreads the effect even the smallest refusal or contradiction might have on him." he might start beating his chest and complaining of being misunderstood, he might start screaming accusations at her, he might shut himself up and weep.....anything was possible in his highly strong and dramatic conditions". She is ready to sacrifice anything in order to maintain order and discipline in her house and in her relationship with him. In spite of her Anglo-Saxon birth and brought up, he wants her to have oriental gentleness and submissiveness. Very sternly he tells her not to have any romantic ideas about her life in India. Back in India she is not going to live in a Maharaja's palace, she is going to live with her in-laws and till he secures a job, she has to help him out.

Adit is no worshipper of a pregnant woman and never shows any special tenderness towards Sarah. He occasionally helps her in lifting a heavy box or shift a piece of furniture but it never occurs to him that she needs help. He thinks of his child as a son and that too only when he hears Sarah being sick in the bathroom. So naturally Sarah finds him lacking in sympathy. When Sarah informs him of Miss. Morris' offer for a new job in a school he looks as though he would like to throw something – his hat, his umbrella, his newspaper at the wall. He shouts, "she will never come with me," Adit shouted, pointing at Sarah. "She's got cold feet She's seen to it that I've burnt my boats and ready to go, then she breaks it to me. Always, gently, always quietly. But I knew it all along. She hasn't the courage, she's backing out—". And in the end, Sarah becomes a docile, complacent and demure and always prepared to accept anything he throws at her.

She compares herself to a cup that is not worthy enough to be packed or given away but is left here like the remains of a picnic, a holiday on a lonely bank or a deserted beach. She loses all her curiosity and courage and doubts even Adit would be able to lift her or transport her to a land where she would regain warmth and personality. If she wants to become alive again she knows it has to be in a different light and personality.

She begins to feel as though she has chosen to be cast out of her home, her background, to the extent that even her husband cannot draw her back into it. When she hears the stream rush and an owl's cry she feels she is caught in a slow whirlpool of dark, deep water. Yet she is capable of winning her problems. Even when she finds out Adit's frenzy she never loses her calm and quiet nature. It reflects her maturity. She knows even a small refusal or contradiction is enough to make her come home to complain about being misunderstood. She fears such reactions from him. So she decides to sacrifice anything in order to maintain order and discipline in her house and in her relationship with him. When she tells him of the advent of the baby he says without being disturbed, "my son will be born in India". His words are a shock to her. She feels a huge, sudden revulsion. She finds herself being dragged by the emotions this way and that way as though she is their victim. But she does not lose poise; very calmly she says "Let's have a cup of tea".

When Adit offers her a chance to live her own life she decides to go with him to India. But she cannot help thinking that her English self is receding, fading and dying. England will remain as it is only at a greater distance. There is always the scope of a

return visit to it. Her suffering reminds us of the real dilemma of isolation and not immigration. She feels free in the company of the strangers where her identity is not known. For her loneliness has risen out of her circumstances. The sense of rootlessness and unreality, "Swaps the paper walls of her fort turning them soggy, making the pages float along dim waves". In spite of her attempts and questioning there is no relief from this predicament. She represents, says R. S. Pathak, ". . . in a sense, all immigrants wives who have their own problem of adjusting when placed in the contexts of culture at logger heads". Desai compares their fate to that of, "the bouncing dog, the homeless adventurers".

Conclusion:

To conclude we can say that Anita Desai has touched on a universal theme of annihilation of the self of the women, marital incompatibility, alienation, freedom and death convincingly but at the same time she has not fulfilled the promises of the first few pages the novel contained. The interaction of the characters, the cultural values and motives, the crisis faced by Sarah are not given their due attention.

References:

1. Desai, Anita .Bye-Bye Blackbird. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1985.
2. Bande, Usha. The Novels of Anita Desai: A Study in Character and Conflict .New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1988.
3. Dhawan,R.K, ed., The Fiction of Anita Desai. New Delhi Bahri Publications, 1989.
4. Iyengar, K.R. Srinivasa. Indian Writing in English. New Delhi: Sterlin Publishers, 1985.
5. Jain Jasbir. Stairs to the Attic: The Novels of Anita Desai. Jaipur: Printwell Publishers, 1987.
6. Jena, Seema. Voice and Vision of Anita Desai .New Delhi: Ashish Publications, 1989.