

**Ambivalence of Diasporic Experience: a Study of Anita Desai's *Bye Bye Blackbird* and Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter*.**

التناقض في تجارب المهجر: دراسة روايتا أنيتا ديساي - باي باي بلاكبيرد و بهاراتي موخيرجياي/بنة النمر

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**Abstract**

Postcolonial theory and literature became prominent in the late twentieth century as a means of analysing the common experiences and problems of people from former colonies as they navigate the world post-independence. One important aspect of postcolonial studies is the experience of Diaspora, which has been a common theme in English literature. Diaspora is not only a physical mobility of the immigrants from their homeland to the foreign land, but a kind of psychological dislocation in which the immigrants experience a sense of displacement, marginalization and a loss of identity. Some immigrants experience ambivalent feelings of 'in-betweenness' and are torn between the two cultures, thus they suffer from a broken and split identity. On the other hand, other immigrants try to fully adjust themselves and assimilate with the new culture and live as expatriates. This study examines Anita Desai's novel, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, and Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter*, both were published in 1971, and fallen in the category of immigration literature. Both novels recapture the experiences of diasporic Indians in Britain and the U.S immigrants but from different perspectives. Moreover, the study attempts to explore the similarities between the two novels but more importantly, how these novels differ in their views of diasporic experiences. Cultural heterogeneity within and across the countries concerned, and the variety of individual voices within the postcolonial novel mean that the Indian Diaspora cannot be construed as one common experience.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, postcolonial, Anita Desai's, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Bharati Mukherjee, *The Tiger's Daughter*,

**المستخلص**

يعد ادب ما بعد الاستعمار من اشهر الأشكال الأدبية في اواخر القرن العشرين و الذي يعنى بتحليل تجارب و مشاكل سكان الدول التي كانت تحت سيطرة الأستعمار اثناء استكشافاتهم لبلدان العالم بعد الأستقلال . و تعد تجربة الشتات من الثيمات الشائعة التي يتناولها الأدب الأنكليزي . ظاهرة الشتات ليست فقط حركة المهاجرين الجسمانية من موطنهم الأصلي الى ارض اجنبية. لكنه نوع من الأختلال النفسي يختبر من خلاله المهاجرون , التهميش و فقدان الهوية. تظهر لدى بعض المهاجرين المشاعر المتناقضة من الوقوف بين ثقافتين و عليه فهم يعانون من الأقسام و اختلال شخصياتهم .. من ناحية اخرى يحاول الكثير من المهاجرين التكيف و التعايش مع ثقافة البلد المستقبل و بالتالي العيش كمغتربين. تسعى هذه

الدراسة الى تفحص عملين ادبيين من ادب المهجر: هما رواية أنيتا ديساي - باي باي بلاكبيرد و رواية بهاراتي موخيرجيال- ابنة النمر واللذان طبعتا 1971. تتناول كلتا الروائيتين تجارب المهاجرين الهنود في المملكة المتحدة و الولايات المتحدة و لكن بمنظور مختلف. علاوة على ذلك تحاول هذه الدراسة التعرض الى نقاط التشابه و الأختلاف بين الروائيتين في تناولها لتجربة الشتات. ان التغيير الثقافي في البلدان الجنبية و تعدد الأصوات المفردة ضمن رواية ما بعد الأستعمار تبين ان الشتات في الهند لا يمكن النظر اليها على انها تجربة مشتركة.

## **Introduction**

Colonialism and Post colonialism are the academic terms used to refer to the occupation of one country by outsiders, and the after-effects of such occupation. In fact, the theory of Post colonialism is most usually concerned with the colonial projects of European powers, the independence of these colonies throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the experiences and problems of people from these former colonies after independence, both at home and abroad. It further explores the manifestation of colonialism in Western Heritage and ideology and the depiction of racial discrimination in literary texts. As for the Postcolonial literature, once called “Commonwealth Literature” it refers to the writings produced in former colonies, which examine the effects of colonization and suppression on the individual and how it shapes the political cultural identity of the colonized people. It may also include the writings of colonizing countries, which usually are a justification of colonialism and often distort the experiences and images of the colonized people.<sup>[1]</sup>

The major theorists who have fashioned the postcolonial theory are Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. But it was Edward Said, a Palestinian American academic and lecturer, whose 1978 book *Orientalism*, laid the ground for the theory of Post colonialism. It is a landmark in the study of Diaspora as it examines the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and the attitude of the West towards the East. Gayatri Spivak declares that *Orientalism*, is “the source book of our discipline”,<sup>[2]</sup> that defined and analysed the ‘style of thought’, dominant in many aspects of the arts, academics and material culture, that is “based upon an ontological and epidemiological distinction made between “the Orient” and... “The Occident””.<sup>[3]</sup>

Said coins the words ‘Orient’ (East), which serves as the ‘Other’, and the ‘Occident’ (West), which stands for self. The ‘Orient’, the colonized, is depicted negatively as weak, primitive unusual ignorant, while the ‘Occident’, the colonizer, is described as strong and superior, positive and safe. Said argues these false images are a fabrication of the West to justify the colonial attitude towards the colonized cultures. This idea is a key in postcolonial studies: that divisions such as first world/ third world or colonists/ colonized can all be regarded as manifestations of this division between the self and the other. In these ways post colonialism overlaps with other discourses such as feminism, politics, philosophy and race studies in attempting to define and critique how these binaries have operated in society, and ways in which these binaries are crossed and blurred. One important way that such binaries can be blurred is the effect of global migration, and the effect that this has on the identity, leading to assimilation and integration or displacement and dislocation. As different cultures live side-by-side, hybridity- the in-between space between distinct cultural identities- becomes particularly important because it narrows the gap between the colonizer and colonized and between the East and West.<sup>[4]</sup>

The word ‘Diaspora’ is derived from the Greek word ‘dia speiro’ meaning ‘to scatter’ or ‘to sow over’. In Hebrew, the term refers to the exile of the Jews outside Palestine in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B. c. In modern usage, it is most commonly used to refer to the movement of people and cultural groups, with the same religion or ethnicity, to different places round the world, but often still retaining feelings of cultural and racial attachment to the homeland.<sup>[5]</sup>

James Clifford, an interdisciplinary American scholar, defines ‘diaspora’ as “a signifier not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local- I would prefer to call it place- as a distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement”.<sup>[6]</sup> Thus a community with racial, ethnic and cultural ties to their country of birth, or their parents’ or ancestors’ birth, is to some extent no longer part of the country it is in, but on a localized level a part of the country of origin. To what extent this occurs, is based on both individual intentionality and on historical and economic structures. Diaspora emphasizes “the historically spatial fluidity and intentionality of identity, its articulation to structures of historical movements (whether forced or chosen, necessary or desired)”.<sup>[7]</sup>

Diaspora is not only an effect of post colonialism, since colonists may retain their attachment to the homeland or over time create their own national identity in the new country. Diasporas may be unwilling, caused by the displacement of people due to war, natural disaster or political oppression. They may also be caused by the movement of people for economic reasons. In these cases, the diasporas may be temporary, with migrant workers intending to make money and then return to their homeland, or permanent, with the immigrants intending to live permanently in the new country.<sup>[8]</sup>

As for the Indian diaspora, the British colonies existed in India from the 1700s until the independence of India in 1947. The Indian Diaspora dates back to the British Raj, when Indians went to work in plantations and mines in other areas of Asia, including Burma, Malaysia and Singapore.<sup>[9]</sup> After Indian independence, Indians have moved to Britain and other countries to study or in search of better economic opportunities. Indian writers have seen their people’s ability to flourish outside of India as a point of pride. Bhikhu Parekh, an Indian political theorist, describes the Indian Diasporas as:

“like the banyan tree, the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life, he spreads out his roots in several soils, drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up. Far from being homeless, he has several homes and that is the only way he has increasingly come to feel at home in the world.”<sup>[10]</sup>

This study examines two novels, Anita Desai’s *Bye-Bye Blackbird* and Bharati Mukherjee’s *The Tiger’s Daughter*, both were published in 1971. Both women were born and grown up in India and both have spent considerable time as academics in the United States. *Bye-Bye Blackbird* deals with the experience of an Indian man who lived in Britain and married to a British wife, while *The Tiger’s Daughter* is about an Indian woman who lived in the U.S. and married to an American man, who in the course of the novel, travels back to India. Although both novels are acknowledged as important parts of the writing of the Indian diaspora in the later twentieth century, they have rarely been directly compared, and many studies go into little detail. This study aims to look more closely at the texts of both novels, to explore the similarities of the novels but perhaps more importantly, how these novels differ in their views of diasporic experiences. Cultural heterogeneity within and across the countries concerned, and the variety of

individual voices within the postcolonial novel, mean that the Indian diaspora cannot be construed as one common experience.

### **Diasporic Experience in Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird***

Following the decline of the empire and the independence of many colonized nations, such as India, the British Nationality Act 1948 granted British citizenship to the people of its former colonies. As British passport holders, they were free to live and work in the U.K., and consequently there was a wave of migration to the U.K. in the late 50s and 60s. This was largely an economic migration, spurred by low wages and high unemployment in the migrants' home countries, and the relative prosperity in the U.K. The U.K. became a multi-cultural society, as boundaries opened up and the dominant culture and hegemonies were challenged.<sup>[11]</sup>

It is in this context that Anita Desai wrote her novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, set in London in 1965. Bojana Gledic argues that "What makes Anita Desai especially important from the aspect of postcolonial literature are her depictions of the ordinary people alone against a sea of troubles, both in their original and adopted homeland".<sup>[12]</sup> *Bye-Bye Blackbird* tells the story of two Indian immigrants to the U.K., and their struggle to work out their relationship to both homelands. Adit is an Anglophile, settled in London and married to an English wife, Sarah. Dev is his friend who comes to Britain to stay with them and study economics. Adit seems settled in Britain and Dev openly dislikes England and does not intend to stay long, but over the course of a few months, their positions are reversed. Adit and Sarah eventually return to India, and the novel ends with Dev happily preparing to settle down in the U.K.

Dev's experience is not just that of an Indian abroad, but specifically an Indian of a higher class. He has trouble with accepting his new place in English society, and his dilemma is described as:

"...he thought with momentary bitterness of the cup of tea that would have been brought to him if he were at home in India now, by a mother fresh from her morning prayers, or a servant boy scorched and sooty from a newly made fire... It was the first lesson his first day in London taught him: he who wants tea must get up and make it".<sup>[13]</sup>

Dev no longer has the support structures or status he had in India; his immigration experience is one of moving to isolation, and then recreating a community for him. By the end of the novel, Dev may seem to be more alone than at the beginning, since his friends have left. However, thanks to his newfound love of Britain and the 'groove' which his friendship with Adit has made for him there, he is far less alienated than the bitter, homesick Dev of the opening.

Dev is aware of and plays with Western concepts of the 'Orient' and 'Orientalism', and the stereotypes associated with it. For example, he tells Adit sardonically about his plans to apply to university: "All I had in mind was approaching the professors and impressing them with the subtle complexities and the deep wisdom of the Oriental mind". (p.9) Adit replies:

"Approaches! Do you think you can get into an English college by sending the Principal a basket of mangoes? All you can do is fill in the forms and pay the entrance fees. There's no such thing as bribery here, you know." (p. 9)

India is a country of many religions and castes, and therefore there is not one single monolithic India Diaspora, just as there is not one single monolithic 'Indian' culture. Dev feels

little fellow feeling with Indian immigrants of different backgrounds: “Engineering!” Dev spoke with scorn. “Do you think I want to join the Sikh fitters of Bradford, and live in their ghettos and do the dirty work for the British engineers?” (P.9) There is not one but many Indian diasporas, which carry some of the divisions of Indian society over to the adopted country.

Adit is both acknowledging real cultural differences, and stereotypical perceptions and English ‘fair play’. However, since Dev and Adit are Indian they have a greater awareness of the shades of division greater than a simple British/ English binary. As Ania Loomba writes:

“In reality any simple binary opposition between ‘colonizers’ and ‘colonized’ or between races is undercut by the fact that there are enormous cultural and racial differences within each of these categories as well as cross-overs between them”.<sup>[14]</sup>

The relationship between Indian and British culture is an example of appropriation, the concept in post colonialism which explains the way in which postcolonial societies adopt the manners of the ‘imperial culture’ in identifying their own social and cultural identities. Thomas Macaulay wrote in 1835 of his desire to form “a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern,—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect”.<sup>[15]</sup> However, the imposition of this culture does not mean that it is always ungratefully received. Adit looks at his friend and muses that Dev’s presence in England is due to:

“the magic of England—her grace, her peace, her abundance, and the embroidery of her history and traditions—and the susceptibility of the Indian mind to these elements, trained and prepared as it was since its schooldays to receive, to understand and appreciate these very qualities”. (p. 180)

Some aspects of colonialism are portrayed as a gift, and their successful absorption a reflection of some inherently sympathetic link between Indian and British values. Indian Diasporas arriving in Britain can put the appropriated culture to full use in not only easing their way into British society, but also understanding themselves as Indian and their relationship to that culture.

Appropriation is one way in which hybridity manifests itself. Hybridity is at its most basic, the mixture of identities and cultures. The key text for this concept in postcolonial theory this creates a hybrid, liminal space, where the colonial Other is located. Bhabha emphasises was presented in his *Location of Culture*, where he argues that the dominant culture defined itself in opposition to the ‘Other’. As the colonial culture iterates and translates its culture to the other, that this was an ongoing process, since when the subject fully occupies the hybrid space, this makes the colonial culture’s authority less visible, and it must reaffirm and strengthen its difference from the ‘Other’. This is the root and practice of discrimination, for, as Bhabha emphasizes:

“the discriminatory effects of the discourse of cultural colonialism, for instance, do not simply or singly refer to a ‘person’... or to a discrimination between mother culture and alien culture...the reference of discrimination is always to a process of splitting as the condition of subjection: a discrimination between the mother and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is

disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different—a mutation.”  
[16]

However, hybridity is not always only to the advantage of the dominant power. On the part of the colonized subject, hybridity is attributed to, in part, ‘colonial desire’, a wish to invade the inner territory of the dominant ‘other’.<sup>[17]</sup> Gandhi advocated a liminal form of cultural hybridity as a tool of the independence movement.<sup>[18]</sup>

Hybridity, as a means of self-assertion, can be seen in Adit’s exhortation to Dev, as they prepare for a day in the country: “Come on, *yar*, be a man, an Englishman, take a deep breath, put on your tweeds and get your riding crop out.”(P.143). The sentence combines Indian slang, with a tongue-in-cheek awareness of how they are performing and appropriating a certain type of Englishness and a certain glee in successfully doing so, the glee of adopting the colonial culture. However, underneath there is some suggestion that their cultural education has left some uneasy belief, based on the work that the English did it separating and discriminating, that the colonial culture is in fact superior, a genuine feeling on Adit’s part that this type is something to be emulated, that it means ‘being a man’.

Adit’s enthusiasm for these stereotypes of Britishness comes across as slightly comic, which is a result of hybridity that Desai had noticed in Europeans living in India:

“There were very few Europeans in India so they made up quite an intimate circle. They were strangely eccentric, obviously outsiders, not belonging to the Indian society, and I always wondered what made them so eccentric. Was it because they were in India or had they left Europe because they didn’t fit in there either? The element that I most sympathize with is the one of being an outsider.”<sup>[19]</sup>

Desai’s mother was a German living in India, so Desai had first-hand experience of this kind of cultural hybridity from an early age. Adit and Dev believe they are a better class of Indian, one that is very close to being English: Dev expects, as Raji Narasimha puts it, “external corroboration of his emotional identification with the English psyche”. However, he “does not get it: the English psyche is irretrievably racist and colour conscious, rebuffing his moves for acceptance”.<sup>[20]</sup> Once English culture has performed its act of cultural dominance by teaching the Indians to value Britishness and draw them into the hybrid, liminal zone, English culture once more raises the drawbridge and redefines itself against the other, excluding the diasporic Indians.

Desai has often been depicted as less interested in political issues and the East-West divide than female Indian contemporaries such as Nayantara Sehgal, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Praver Jhabvala. Usha Bande argues that Desai “disowns all social concerns and asserts more than once that she is interested in individual and not in social issues. Social issues intrude only where they affect the character”.<sup>[21]</sup>

However, it seems self-evident that social issues in a novel will be presented through the lens of the character’s experience, so it is not clear how Bande is drawing this distinction. Exchanges such as those between Dev and Adit quoted above show a very clear desire to explore social issues surrounding the place of Indian immigrants in British society. Real-world political events play a part in the story when, at the end of the novel, Adit decides, after news of Pakistan attacking India, that he should go to fight for his country, although the narrator makes clear that: “his disenchantment with England had begun some time before he read the news in the

papers”.(p.264) The true explanation is something closer to a conclusion is that he cannot flourish as his English self, and he must go to his native India to have a “real life”.(p.264)

Dev’s journey of self-fulfilment plays out the other way. After Adit and Sarah depart for India, Dev has a sudden epiphany, sitting in the English countryside:

“... for the first time felt the rapture of the victor and lover, a rapture that accompanied him back to London so that he no longer saw it with the eyes of a member of a once-conquered race, or of an apprehensive and short-sighted visitor, but of someone before whom vistas of love, success and joy had opened.”(p.265)

Desai presents the difference between what happens to the two men as something mystical and incapable of explanation:

“Somewhere, at some point that summer, England’s green and gold fingers had let go of Adit and clutched at Dev instead... It was as though this were an arbitrary act of England’s, an abstract law to which Adit and Dev had quite unwittingly succumbed.” (p. 264)

Desai has said that she did not feel ‘proud’ of *Bye-Bye Blackbird* and another early novel, *Cry the Peacock*: “I can’t bear the sight of them and I certainly can’t bear to read them, I think because they’re pure emotion, pure, uncontrolled, rampant emotion”.<sup>[22]</sup> This is most obvious in the ending of *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. Contrary to what Bande says, the primary concern of the novel here becomes clearly that of working out the East/West, home/ adopted home divide, over and above describing the actions of the characters. In the last pages there is suddenly no dialogue, events are extremely condensed, and it is primarily placed on the narrative voice to explain the characters’ feelings and motivations, in a way that feels rather heavy-handed. These motivations are presented as largely emotional and difficult to pin down to any particular cause. If the novel reached any conclusion, it might be exactly that, that cultural attachment or dissociation is largely an individual and emotional matter. The external trappings of having assimilated to the new culture are no prediction that someone will form a strong attachment to it, while the opposite is also true: someone who might seem to have stronger ties to the home country may succeed there. Desai ultimately seems to conclude that cultural attachment is an aspect of a journey of self-discovery, which cannot be forced but must be played out to achieve full self-awareness.

At the end of the story Dev who always complains about the country and its people decide to settle in England to reap a rich harvest. He is successful to establish his roots in England. But Adit and Sarah bid good bye to England. At the time of bidding goodbye, Dev calls out, “Blackbird, bye-bye.” (p.266) This is how Anita Desai describes the diasporic element to the readers.

### **Diasporic experience in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter***

*The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) was the first novel by Bharati Mukherjee. Mukherjee was born in Calcutta, West Bengal, and moved to the United States as an adult for her postgraduate studies. She subsequently spent 10 years living in Canada, in Toronto and Montreal, where she wrote *The Tiger's Daughter*. Mukherjee has described Canada in the late 60s and early 70s as

experiencing the first “visible effects of racism”.<sup>[23]</sup> Mukherjee has described the purpose of her novel as depicting the American immigrant experience for an American audience:

We immigrants have fascinating tales to relate. Many of us have lived in newly independent or emerging countries which are placed by civil and religious conflicts...when we uproot ourselves from those countries and come here, either by choice or out of necessity, we suddenly must absorb 200 years of American history and learn to adapt to American society... I attempt to illustrate this in my novels and short stories. My aim is to expose Americans to the energetic voices of new settlers in this country.<sup>[24]</sup>

The heroine of *The Tiger's Daughter*, Tara Banarjee Cartwright, is like Mukherjee originally a Bengali from Calcutta, an upper -class Bengali Brahmin. However, the novel first goes back in time, opening in 1879 at the wedding ceremony for the daughters of Hari Lal Banerjee, a landowner in Pachapara and Tara's great-grandfather. The scene depicts the grandeur of the family and their home and their sense of settled roots. However, Mukherjee presents here a note of warning for what is to come. Hari Lal cannot imagine what is in store for India, because “The shadows of suicide or exile, of Bengali soil sectioned and ceded, of workers rising against their bosses could not have been divined by even a wise man in those days.”<sup>[25]</sup> From the start, the novel makes clear that postcolonial problems will be a focus of the novel.

Tara travels to America for postgraduate studies (again, like Mukherjee). Her first thought is that:

“... if she had not been a Banerjee, a Bengali Brahmin, the great grand daughter of Hari Lal Banerjee, or perhaps if she had not been trained by the good nuns at St. Blaise's to remain composed and ladylike in all emergencies, she would have rushed home to India at the end of her first week.”(p. 15)

At the end of her first year abroad, as her fellow students prepare to go home for the vacation, she has a sort of breakdown:

“....She suffered fainting spells, headaches and nightmares ....She complained of homesickness in letters to her mother, who promptly prayed to Kali to save Tara's conscience, chastity and complexion'. (p.18)

She is ill from cultural dislocation. Mukherjee thus combines, in the first few pages of the novel, the overall political problems of colonialism and the small everyday feelings of ambivalence towards emigration and the diasporic experience. The Banerjees' fortunes were brought down by history, and it manifests itself in the individual misery of one of the family's scions. Tara continues to feel out of place and homesick in America into her married life:

“On days she had thought she could not possibly survive, she had shaken out all her silk scarves, ironed them and hung them to make the apartment more "Indian". She had curried hamburger desperately till David's stomach had protested”. (p.39)

Tara attempts to resist the system of relocation by bringing her native culture into her new one. She finds it difficult to communicate about her background and life in Calcutta to her



husband David, and he asks naïve questions about Indian culture. She values family, as is important in India, but he sees this as overdependence on her family. Her feelings of cultural alienation are represented by both America as a whole and her distance from her husband, who is unable or unwilling to understand her: ‘Madison Square was unbearable, and her husband was after all a foreigner’. Feroza Jussawalla points out that:

“South Asian immigrants [in the U.S.], more than any other immigrant group, have struggled to belong to the majority culture while attempting to maintain their identity. Their reception has been mixed, largely because of their refusal or inability to assimilate totally”.<sup>[26]</sup>

Tara feels as if she is being forced to assimilate totally, to make a choice between rejecting her past and never becoming fully American.

The same juxtaposition is repeated in reverse: Tara returns to Calcutta on a long-awaited trip after spending seven years in America. However, she is horrified by India and her reaction to it. Seeing it through new eyes, she only sees poverty and decay: a “colony of beggars”, ‘shrivelled women’, walls ‘patterned with rust and mold’. (p.8) Her letters to her husband are full of trivial, everyday details, perhaps as an attempt to mask her feelings of alienation to ‘articulate it is to acknowledge that she is dispossessed’.<sup>[27]</sup>

David, conversely, wants Tara to protest against “injustice, against unemployment, hunger and bribery.”(p.136) Tara acknowledged that she could never inform David that the wretchedness of her city was too dreadful. She believed that: “it was fatal to fight for justice; that it was better to remain passive and absorb all shocks as they came.” (P.31) She thought the trip would adjust the gap of cultural alienation, but she discovers that while she may be too Indian to feel at home in America, she is now too American to feel at home in India.

Tara has been yearning for India. It is made obvious from the story of Hari Lal at the beginning of the book:

“... years later a young woman who had never been to Pachapara would grieve for the Banerjee family and try to analyse the reasons for its change. She would sit by a window in America to dream of Hari Lal, her great-grandfather, and she would wonder at the gulf that separated him from himself. (p.14)

The references to Tara’s thoughts of India suggest that it was not an initial period of homesickness, but recurring feelings of dislocation and alienation. However, she never saw India as she has dreamt of, because the problems of the end of the British Empire and the beginnings of independence have already torn it apart. Bengal played a major part in the overthrow of British rule, with many Bengalis killed or exiled, and Bengal was divided between India and Pakistan. The process of decolonization involves not just rebellion and the overthrow of colonial rule, but the desertion of colonial ideology and ways of thinking. As Pramod K. Nayar argues:

“Decolonization seeks freedom from colonial forms of thinking, to revive native, local and vernacular forms of knowledge by questioning and overturning European categories and epistemologies”.<sup>[28]</sup>

This process is detected, both in Tara’s resistance to complete assimilation and her attempts to dream herself back to the Bengal of her great-grandfather, and in Dev and Adit’s self-conscious

mockery of stereotypes of ‘Englishness’ and ‘Indianness’. As the first generation after independence, they are beholding new perspectives, and their attempts to overturn the colonial ways of thinking can only be partially successful.

When Tara returns to the real, contemporary India, she sees Calcutta with all its post-colonial problems, and she is repelled, and in her exchanges with family and friends she is reminded constantly that she no longer belongs. She has lost parts of her language: “she had forgotten so many Indian-English words she had once used with her friends’.(p.112) She has lost parts of her religion, forgetting the next step when preparing for worship with her mother: “It was not a simple loss... this forgetting of prescribed actions; it was a little death, a hardening of the heart, a cracking of axis and centre”(p.56)

Emigration was an act of forgetting India, whether Tara has meant to or not. In this context, forgetting is not merely an individual act. Maurice Halbwachs’ notion of ‘collective memory’ in relation to ‘social frameworks’ demonstrate how external social and historical forces shape how groups remember their pasts.<sup>[29]</sup> Groups of people rely on each other to outline and recall their inherited experiences. This in particular is very important in a postcolonial context, as Michael Rothberg argues, memory “constitutes one of the most significant fronts in the struggle against empire”, which tends to erase the pasts it regards insignificant or dangerous.<sup>[30]</sup>

In remembering her grandfather, Tara’s performance act of cultural reclaiming. This act of memory could be seen as gendered, given her husband’s hostility to Tara’s adherence to her own cultural practices; the expectation seems to be that she will naturally move towards American customs. Therefore, memory becomes particularly important in this context; throughout the act of recollecting and documenting memories, some women in the Diaspora have refused to accept the designation of ‘Others’ about themselves.<sup>[31]</sup> On the other hand, by forgetting the language, religion and customs which connect Tara to her family and friends, she is letting down the group, which may account for her former friends’ hostility towards her.

*The Tiger’s Daughter* thus presents a vastly less positive view of the Indian Diasporic experience and culture in contact than does *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. In *Bye-Bye Blackbird* there are some references to problems in both societies, bribery and war in India, racism in Britain. However, it ultimately depicts both India and Britain as essentially good options, which are both integral to Adit and Dev’s development and character. Neither suffers any enormous hardship or internal struggle. The whole action of the novel takes place over a few months, which is enough time for Dev to overcome his antipathy towards England (in stark contrast to Tara’s years of struggling to feel adjusted in America) and look forward joyously to his life there, and for Adit and Sarah to make their decision and go ‘home’ to India. The dilemma of the novel, such as it is, is for the characters to decide which country they like more, which country is their true home. Roger Kennedy states that:

“ the idea of home goes beyond building blocks into the area of the interior of the soul... If exiled, we may be able to carry the sense of home with us, yet there is often a poignant yearning for the original home”<sup>[32]</sup>

Tara’s dilemma, however, is to find her longed-for visit back to the original ‘home’, India, nothing like she expected and confront all her preconceptions and ideologies. Life in the diaspora is most likely a condition in which the immigrants engage in an ‘interstitial space’ between the country they depart and the country where they live in. The diasporics are expected to identify

the 'grey area' between the 'host country' and India, between two ways of life, cultures and values and acknowledge that as 'home'.<sup>[33]</sup>

This in-between-state is captured by the ambiguous, unresolved ending to the novel, which ends with Tara caught in a violent demonstration in the city, and it is not known if she escapes. The novel thus treats its protagonist very harshly, and some critics have found the protagonist as unsympathetic. Roshni Rustomji-Kerns thinks that: "Tara's petulance and constant nervousness... overshadows her well-intentioned efforts".<sup>[34]</sup> Nevertheless Rustomji-Kerns also believes that Mukherjee intended the reader to feel uncomfortable around her characters:

"Mukherjee has taken her own fears and struggles, as well as the fears and struggles of many among us who have remained without a voice to speak of the immigrant experience, and presented some of the more violent and grotesque aspects of cultural collisions".<sup>[35]</sup>

Yet, Mukherjee is writing about India from a Diasporic perspective, and some critics have seen the work as disdainful towards India, as viewed from the outside. It could also be noted that perhaps the gender of the respective protagonists makes some difference in the point of view of the two novels. The opportunities for a woman, even a well-educated, upper-class woman like Tara, were fewer than those for men in 1971, which could perhaps partly explain the optimism of the men in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. As quoted, when Dev arrives he is scornful of lower-caste Indians and laments the days when his mother or servant would wake him with tea. For the mothers and servants, perhaps life at home or in a new country is less promising.

Female voices have been important in postcolonial literature for pointing out how female experiences can differ from the male, and many feminist theorists have criticized important male theorists of Postcolonialism, such as Said, for constructing a rigid patriarchal version of 'Orientalism' that can be as dismissive and reductive in its way as 'Orientalism' itself.<sup>[36]</sup>

The link between the masculine West and the female East has often been made metaphorically; as Robert Young points out:

"Colonial and imperial rule was legitimized by anthropological theories which increasingly portrayed the peoples of the colonized world as inferior, childlike, or feminine, incapable of looking after themselves [...] and requiring the paternal rule of the west".<sup>[37]</sup>

It is important to challenge this model, but by simply saying that the colonized world does not have those attributes, it reinforces the idea that masculine= good, feminine= bad. Novelists such as Desai and Mukherjee were amongst the first female writers to explore how women could have a very different experience of the postcolonial world from men.

Both novels engage with questions of East/West, colony/colonized, home/abroad and the hybridity therein from an almost entirely diasporic perspective, and neither show much concern for the substance of the issues facing India.

## **Conclusion**

These two novels are only two of thousands written by Indian novelists about postcolonial India and the Indian diaspora. The superficial biographical similarities between the two novelists are striking, Mukherjee and Desai having been born in the same part of India, seen India's independence during their childhood and spent much of their working life in the West. Both novels were published in 1971, in the wake of extensive migration from former European colonies to Europe and North America, which particularly for white Britons in many cases meant the first time they were coming into contact with people of other cultures on a daily basis, causing negative problems of cultural contact like racism, which arises from a dominant culture seeking to define itself against the 'Other'.

Both novels feature Indian protagonists living outside India, and the problems of cultural contact appear in the novels to some extent, most sadly in Tara's distance from her husband when he fails to understand or attempt to understand her cultural background. Most importantly, both novels are concerned with the idea of belonging- the belonging to a culture, or whether it is possible to belong to two. This raises questions of hybridity and assimilation and whether they can ever benefit the postcolonial subject as it does the dominant culture.

However, this is also wherein lies the biggest differences between the novels. Anita Desai seems to suggest that the benefits of being exposed to and part of two cultures prevail over the negatives. This would be an example of appropriation- Dev and Adit take on the parts of English culture they find appealing and useful, and rather than denying their Indianness they rather enhance it. Although the core of the novel is in Dev choosing to stay in England rather than return to India, and Adit choosing the opposite, neither is depicting as rejecting the other entirely- there is always the possibility of both. Bharati Mukherjee, in contrast, seems to suggest in *The Tiger's Daughter* that it is not possible to have both. When Tara makes herself part of an American family and takes on American values, she is unable to see India in the same way. The message of the novel seems to be that once one starts testing the sores left by postcolonial experience and cultural alienation, one will never be able to fully heal them again. Thus, this experience serves as a driving force to reconsider who one is? To conclude, the immigrants who integrate by mediating between cultures, the native culture and the new culture are better adapted than those who cultivate by orientating themselves to one culture. In the end, integration and assimilation work best in a multicultural society! This depends on one's education, upbringing, religious beliefs and cultural influences.

Notes

- 1- Pramod K. Nagar, *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* (Delhi: Pearson Education, 2008), p.17-18.
- 2- Gayatri C. Spivak, quoted in Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (New York: Verso, 1997), p. 34.
- 3-Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 2016), E-book [no pagination], 'Introduction'.
- 4- Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: the Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.20.
- 5- Scott Levi, "Multanis and Shikarpuris: Indian Diasporas in Historical Perspective," in *Global Indian Diasporas: Exploring Trajectories of Migration and Theory*, ed. Gijsbert Oonk (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), p.31.
- 6-James Clifford, 'Diasporas', *Cultural Anthropology* 9 (1994), p. 308
- 7- Lawrence Grossberg, "Identity and Cultural Studies: Is that All There Is?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), p. 92.
- 8 - Nicholas Van Hear, *New Diasporas* (London: UCL Press, 1998), p.50.
- 9- Lipi Ghosh and Ram Krishna Chatterjee (Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2004), p.7.
- 10- Bhikhu Parekh, "Some Reflections on The Indian Diaspora", *Journal of Contemporary Thought* 3 (1993), p. 106.
- 11- Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-War Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press., 2000), p.35-36.
- 12-Bojana Gledic, 'The (Dis)Position of Immigrants in the 1960s London of Anita Desai's Bye-Bye Blackbird', *Rocky Mountain Review* 66 (2012), 58-72 (p. 61).
- 13-Anita Desai, *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1971), p. 4. All quotations and references to the novel, under study, henceforth, will be taken from this edition, and will be cited in the text, parenthetically by page number.
- 14- Ania Loomba, *Colonialism / Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 105.
- 15-Quoted in Bojan Gledic, "The (Dis)Position of Immigrants in the 1960s London of Anita Desai's Bye- Bye Blackbird" *Rock Mountain Review* 66 (2012), p.63
- 16- Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.121.
- 17- Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge,1995), 2.
- 18-----, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (London: Wiley, 2016), p. 337.
- 19 'Against the Current: A Conversation with Anita Desai', ed. by Corinne Demas Bliss, *The Massachusetts Review*, 29:3 (1988), p. 521.
- 20 Raji Narasimha, 'Desai versus Desani: Norms of Appreciation', *Indian Literature* 16:3/4 (1973), p. 181.
- 21- Usha Bande, *The Novels of Anita Desai* (New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1998), p. 12.
- 22-'Against the Current', p. 525.
- 23- Michael Connell, Jessie Grearson and Tom Grimes, 'An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee', *Iowa Review* 20:3 (1990), p. 11.
- 24- Quoted in 'Sunday Review', *The Times of India*, October 1989, p. 1.

- 25- Bharati Mukherjee, *The Tiger's Daughter* (New Delhi: Penguin Books (India) Ltd, 2014), p. 11. All quotations and references to the novel, under study, henceforth, will be taken from this edition, and will be cited in the text, parenthetically by page number.
- 26-Feroza Jussawalla, 'Chiffon Saris: The Plight of South Asian Immigrants in the New World', *The Massachusetts Review* 29:4 (1988/9), p. 583.
- 27-Sharukh Husain, 'Passive Disorientation: Indo-Anglian Journeys', *Third World Quarterly* 11:2 (1989), P.171.
- 28-Pramod K. Nayar, *Postcolonialism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 3.
- 29- Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis Cosner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- 30-Michael Rothberg, 'Remembering Back: Cultural Memory, Colonial Legacies, and Postcolonial Studies', in *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. by Graham Huggan, p. 374.
- 31-Anh Hua, 'Diaspora and Cultural Memory', in *Diaspora, Memory and Identity: A Search for Home*, ed. by Vijay Agnew (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 205.
- 32- Roger Kennedy, *The Psychic Home: Psychoanalysis, Consciousness and the Human Soul* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 12.
- 33-Chandrima Karmakar, 'The Conundrum of Home in the Literature of the Indian Diaspora: An Interpretive Analysis', *Sociological Bulletin* 64:1 (2015), pp. 77-90(p. 81).
- 34- Roshni Rustomji-Kerns, 'Expatriates, Immigrants and Literature: Three South Asian Women Writers', *The Massachusetts Review* 29: 4 (1998/9), P. 657.
- 35- Rustomji-Kerns, 'Expatriates, Immigrants', P. 659.
- 36- See 'Gender', Justin D. Edwards, *Postcolonial Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 96-106.
- 37- Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 'Introduction'.

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