
The (Dis)Position of Immigrants in the 1960s London of Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird*

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In today's world with its high level of mobility, it is difficult to capture with a satisfactory level of precision the identity and the history of a modern-day immigrant community. The United Kingdom is still considered to be a haven for immigrants from across the globe. Throughout the nineteenth century it was "a net exporter of people" (McCormick 54), most of which emigrated to the United States and some dominions of the "Old Commonwealth" and in those days very few foreigners were living in Britain. This notably changed in the mid-twentieth century, following the decline of the colonization era, and a great number of immigrants, mostly from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, West Africa and the Caribbean (McCormick 54) came to live in the United Kingdom. Today, even though problems with racism, which started to arise more than half a century ago, have not been fully resolved, and despite Primer Minister David Cameron's controversial statement that multiculturalism in the United Kingdom has failed,¹ the UK is still considered to be a multicultural society.

In her novel from 1971, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Anita Desai describes an episode of the "acclimatization" of two men from India in the postcolonial London of the 1960s. The generation she describes are people who were born around the time of the Partition of India and the story encompasses a period of a few months in the course of which significant changes take place in the protagonists' characters.

The story is set in the summer of 1965. Adit is a young man from India, who leads a seemingly happy life in the United Kingdom with his English wife Sarah. Adit has been living in Britain for a while, and Dev, his friend from Calcutta, arrives in England to stay with them for a while. He wishes to study economics, but does not plan to stay in Britain longer than absolutely necessary. For a while the three of them live together, and the novel describes a number of their outings and afternoons together. As the story unfolds, it turns out that Adit has been subconsciously unhappy all the while, and Dev unexpectedly starts to find England very appealing and eventually decides to stay there and make it his home. The two friends, Adit and Dev, become transposed as the story develops, both with regards to their character, their personal characteristics and the result of their life

in England as it is presented in the book. Adit is a self-proclaimed Anglophile who turns into a hopeless nostalgic returnee, while Dev, his old Calcutta coffee-house friend, is a sworn Anglophobe who turns into a hopeful Anglicized inhabitant of Great Britain.

New historicism allows us to observe any text as a product of the appropriate cultural context, and every text in its own way contributes to our reconsideration of a period in history. In history books, we would read the facts, whereas a literary text brings us closer to understanding what such pieces of information could actually mean. Reading Anita Desai's novel from 1971 in this light contributes to our better understanding of the possible reasons behind multiculturalism failing in Great Britain, if it indeed has failed.

Light is also shed on the depiction of a first generation of immigrants, which is a very topical issue due to the fact that decades later their reasons for choosing England as their new home are brought into question. (Just one example of such a reconsideration of a father's choice is Abena P. A. Busia's article, titled "Re:Locations—Rethinking Britain from Accra, New York, and the Map Room of the British Museum," in David Bennett's *Multicultural States: Rethinking Identity and Difference*).

At the end of World War One, at one point the British Empire covered approximately one quarter of the earth's land surface. However, during this period there were also some signs of the weakening of the empire because the British right to rule was being brought into question. At a peace conference in 1919, Britain had to agree that it would try to help its colonies to establish successful self-government. In addition to this, there was a growing demand for freedom in some of the colonies. India is an example of this, as the country's aspirations for freedom kept growing in the 1920s and 1930s. By 1945 it was clear that something had to change, and the British left India in 1947. Other colonies followed suit and the only thing that remained from the old Empire was the "New Commonwealth."

Following World War II, there was a period of prosperity in Britain due to financial aid received from the USA. The 1950s were a stage for many changes: new supermarkets were opened, new urban shopping centers, there was more television. Between 1956 and 1960 the number of television licenses doubled (Briggs 358). There was also an unparalleled consumer boom in this period: the proportion of the British population who used refrigerators rose from 6 to 16 per cent, washing machines from 25 to 44 per cent and those owning a motor car from 18 to 32 per cent (Briggs 358). The 1960s in the UK, as in the USA and some other European countries, was a wonderful period for young people, who were beginning to discover new freedoms and found their expression through music,

which was the new popular culture. This was also the period when youth started to question authority and demanded sexual freedoms, and the 1960s announced the beginning of common law marriages in the UK. The 1960s were a break with the old ways, and life began to be more comfortable in many aspects. People started to spend more, the credit card was introduced from the USA, houses became warmer due to the development of central heating. Leisure clothes began to cost more than working clothes, eating habits changed; fast-food restaurants were introduced, and foreign cuisine restaurants became very popular with their take-away option. Vegetarianism was adopted, and so were health foods and low calorie slimming diets (Briggs 360).

During the 1950s and the 1960s Britain remained very successful with regards to economy, and their economic problems would not start to appear before the 1970s. However, in the 1960s Britain was faced with a new gush of problems, namely social problems in connection with the arrival of a large number of immigrants and the consequent racism troubles that soon followed. Asa Briggs lists two reasons for this change in English society: the immigrants were faced with low wages and unemployment in their home countries, and there was relative prosperity in the UK (364). The newcomers accepted mainly those jobs that were unappealing to the English-born worker. In 1958, an estimated 210,000 people of different race were living in the UK (Briggs 366), but they had trouble blending in. There were tensions in the areas where the immigrants lived, and they were often indirectly forced to live close to each other in the “so-called ‘zones of transition’ within the great cities” (Briggs 366). This brought on the first signs of trouble with domestic youth. As unemployment grew, these problems also grew, and the immigrants were frequently blamed for the economic problems.

Following the liberation of the colonies, the British Nationality Act of 1948 allowed the peoples of the former colonies to become citizens of the UK and Colonies and they were granted passports that allowed them to travel to Britain freely and find employment there. As a direct consequence of this Act, the island was hit by a large wave of immigrants. David Goldberg described these changes as causing an opening up of borders and boundaries, both transnationally and culturally, and challenging the predominant hegemonies (73). Immigration to the UK from its former colonies increased in the 1960s; the memories of the former times were still quite alive, and the local population did not welcome their new compatriots with open arms: “It was met with a hostile response from many of the indigenous inhabitants, their fear of economic competition compounded by their long-established sense of the racial superiority of the white people” (Ní Fhlathúin 31). The Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 limited the rights

of Commonwealth peoples to migrate into the UK, and the Immigration Act 1971 and British Nationality Act 1981 further changed these regulations and tightened up procedures. The single, unified citizenship of the UK and Colonies was replaced by three separate citizenships: British citizenship, British Dependent Territories citizenship, and British Overseas citizenship (Briggs 367).

Taking into consideration that today we can talk about several generations of immigrants, it is very interesting to analyze the first generation due to its most difficult role of paving the way for future generations. Desai's text has been selected for analysis due to tackling this exact topic. The novel also touches upon all the aforementioned changes in British society, as well as the problems that started to arise in the 1960s. Although neither of the main protagonists is British, the reader can get a glimpse of the life in Britain in this period of history through the depiction of Adit's neighborhood, his and Dev's relationship with Sarah's family and Adit's former landlords, the Millers. Sarah's environment at her workplace is also indicative of the manner in which immigrants were viewed in this decade, and so are her and Adit's relations with their neighbors.

Anita Desai is considered to be one of the most important Indian writers today. She is well known for her presentations of India and the Indian people throughout different historical periods, but she is also famous for her literary presentations of isolation, loneliness, family affairs, immigration, and the position of women. 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 their adopted homeland. In 1993 she was described as a writer who is "struggling to find a voice that can (in an 'authentic' way) bridge the gap between a glorious (pre-British, precolonial) Indian past and a much diminished, more sordid, postcolonial present" (Afzal-Khan 60), but her topics today include a large variety of subjects.

Desai was born Anita Mazumdar in Mussoorie, India to a German mother and a Bengali father. Her first language was German, but she also spoke Bengali, Urdu, Hindi and she learnt English in school, which later became her writing language of choice. She received a BA in English literature at the University of Delhi in 1957, and, having moved several times, she is currently residing in the United States. Desai was shortlisted for the Booker Prize three times, and according to this criterion her most famous novels would be *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984) which was adapted as a Merchant Ivory Production movie in 1994, and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999). *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, perhaps one of her less famous works, was published in 1971. Desai's first novel was *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), and her other notable works are *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *The Village by the Sea*

(1982), *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1989), to name only a few. Her 2004 novel *The Zig-Zag Way* is set in twentieth-century Mexico, and her most recent work is a collection of three novellas titled *The Artist of Disappearance* (2011). The topics Desai presents in her numerous works that span the course of an amazing half a century are very different, but also very related: all her novels echo the difficulties of people who are caught between two cultures, as she herself may have felt to have been in her own family, unable to decide which side to incline towards.

In her article on Hanif Kureishi's narratives, Ruth Maxey analyzes the first generation of immigrants as depicted by Kureishi. She concludes that "By demonstrating the impermanence of home through the realities of migration, he [Kureishi] records the ongoing difficulties faced by the first generation and pays tribute to their endurance" (20-21), and perhaps the same could be said for Anita Desai with regards to *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. Desai clearly presents her characters as not having truly managed to settle in Great Britain, despite their efforts. In addition, although first generation immigrants are not recurring characters in Desai's novels, as they are in Kureishi's, in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* they are drawn in detail and their plight is clearly visible in the text itself.

Clear identity categories were difficult to establish even in the times of colonialism. In her study of colonial/postcolonial identity Ania Loomba wrote that "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" (105). The colonizers often cross the imaginary borderline with their wish to enter the identity of the "other." On the other hand, the colonized often cross the boundary by wishing to become the colonizer, not in practice but for promise of a better life. Binary oppositions in such cases are impossible because of the emergence of hybrid forms of identity. Robert C.J. Young addresses the topic of hybridity in detail, attributing it to, among other things, "colonial desire" (2), a wish or even an obsession to invade the inner territory of the other.

The best way to regard the aspect of hybridity in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* is through its definition which is connected with "syncrethicity, cultural synergy and transculturation" (Ashcroft 118), putting aside the negative connotations. In this sense, the notion of hybridity is close to the notion of "liminality," existence in an in-between space (Ashcroft 130), which also implies transcultural change. The emergence of such hybridized forms is never simple. This is most clearly visible in the character of Adit: on the one hand, he practically believes he is English; and on the other he cannot forsake his Indian friends, he cannot forsake Indian food, he sings Indian songs and loves Indian music. There are plenty examples of the

two male protagonists' hybrid identity in Desai's novel, but let us mention one: when Sarah announces that they will be going to the countryside, Adit ecstatically screams at Dev: "Come on, *yar*, be a man, an Englishman, take a deep breath, put on your tweeds and get your riding crop out" (124). Here, Adit clearly calls upon Dev to be a man, which he equates with being an Englishman, and we can also see the hybridity of the language he uses, which Desai marks by using italics.

The case of India is very interesting in this context because the colonization left a very strong impact on the local population. This is nothing unusual, if one takes into consideration the various non-violent strategies which were used there. In his *Minute on Education* from 1835, Thomas Macaulay openly discloses, and justifies, point by point, his desire and plan to form, in India "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." One of Desai's two main protagonists, Adit, believes that this class does exist. One afternoon in a pleasant mood he gazes out the window at Dev and wonders what brought on this merging of elements, his friend from India being in England. He believes that it is all 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" (Desai 157). This is an obvious echo of Macaulay's *Minute*, and both Adit and Dev are obviously quite influenced by the education they received in post-colonial India.

The dangers and seriousness of using literature to influence an entire nation is dealt with in Gauri Viswanathan's essay "The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India" where Viswanathan, after providing a brief history of introducing English Literature in India, and, quoting Trevelyan, states that "the English literary text functioned as a surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state" (437). In Desai's novel the result of such a strategy is clearly visible: on the one hand Adit believes that because of having been raised in India he is particularly susceptible to British culture; on the other hand there is Dev who realizes in the 100-year-old British pub that everything is familiar to him, a product of his years-long education in the British system in India (10).

Loomba points out that the lives of millions of Indians were interwoven with the life of the Empire, even though they never interacted with the British in person (111). This is also plainly visible in the novel itself. We have no evidence of either Adit or Dev having been in contact with the British, and yet they associate Great Britain with the very best. Adit disapproves of Indian immigrants who are too Indian, because he believes they should be more like the British, and Dev believes

that only in Britain can a person receive proper education. At certain points in the novel both Adit and Dev associate the United Kingdom with the color of gold, the symbol of wealth and prosperity. At one point Adit says, “I see gold—everywhere—gold like Sarah’s golden hair. It’s my favorite color” (Desai 19), and later on Dev mentions this same association: “There’s something about your house that makes one dream golden dreams, Sarah—too golden” (154).

Half a century ago, Fanon wrote that in the decolonization process one “species” cannot be simply replaced by another (35) and individuals are fundamentally changed (36). Without the colonization setting, where there is at least a clear boundary between the roles of the colonizer and the colonized (if not between the categories) the clear setting of identity is made even more difficult than in colonial times.

The inner conflicts and doubts of the first generation of immigrants (who mostly came to Great Britain immediately following the Partition of India) are presented throughout the novel in great detail. At one point, Dev wonders why he came so far, why India was not enough. In this excerpt we can clearly see the opposition that probably many immigrants felt: “I am here, he proselytised, to interpret my country to them, to conquer England as they once conquered India, to show them, to show them” (Desai 123) only to add, as if changing his mind: “All I want is—well, yes, a good time” (123). We can see that while the colonial era definitely was over, the ordinary people still felt that the colonial times were, in a way, quite alive. Dev struggles with a wish to be a representative of his homeland, while at the same time he is perhaps willing to forget about it for a while for promise of a better future.

As I have stated previously, in a globalized world in which people migrate in huge numbers it is very difficult to precisely determine the endings and beginnings of a single nation. While borders still physically exist, national boundaries are becoming vague and indeterminate due to constant migratory circulations. In an essay titled “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” Homi K. Bhabha states that “the space of the modern nation-people is never simply horizontal” (293) implying that every nation has a diverse background, and that it is difficult to capture its essence. Let us apply this statement to modern Britain: if we read it as also implying a vertical dimension of immigrant history, and accept Desai’s text as a “currency” of exchange (Greenblatt 12), the text may then bear witness to setting the foundations for Indian communities in Britain, and the complexity of the first-generation immigrants’ identity may be one of the reasons behind the possible failure of the idea of multiculturalism.

In *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, the protagonists have all the opportunities they had ever dreamed of, which is in harmony with the period of prosperity in Britain

in the 1960s (and they both are young men who are in a position to enjoy life). On the other hand, they are also occasional victims of the emergent social issues and consequently start feeling the onset of racism-related troubles. If we also reflect here on the fact that during the 1960s an experienced observer noticed that immigrants “had become an accepted part of the British urban landscape, if not yet of the community” (Briggs 367), we can also see this aspect in Desai’s story: while the two men have absolutely no financial difficulties, one may also notice the fact that they do not socialize with English-born friends, they do not engage in Britain’s social life and all that it has to offer in this time of abundance. Throughout the story, they are mainly alone, visiting relatives, or interacting with their Indian friends.

Adit’s life in England was a road of slow but certain improvement; he first worked in a post office in Coventry, then with camping equipment, then he did occasional jobs of teaching English after he moved to London, then he worked in an Indian agency office which he hated before coming to Blue Skies, a travel agency, where he got his dream job. At one point in the novel, he enumerates all the things he likes about England: going into the local for a pint on his way home to Sarah, wearing good tweed on a foggy November day, the Covent Garden opera house, the English girls, steamed pudding with treacle, thatched cottages, British history, reading the letters in *The Times*, economic freedom, social freedom, reading the posters in the tube, the Thames, the ravens, the feeling he can nip across the Channel for a holiday in Paris when he wins the football pool, strawberries in summer, a weekend at the seaside, even the BBC! (Desai 18-19). From this excerpt it is obvious that the London of that time could be a pleasant city to live in, even for a foreigner. This fact is further proven by Dev, who, in India, “had found it necessary to be on the defensive in public, to assume an arrogance, a superiority to the rest, however unpleasant and disagreeable” (Desai 12), but, among the carefree British people on a bright Sunday, he becomes captivated by the atmosphere and it is easy for him to forget about this self-consciousness and feel good about himself and his surroundings.

Nevertheless, Dev is aware of the constant struggle that takes place in both of them, while Adit believes that the two cultures are reconciled. Adit’s identity is somewhere in between, in what Bhabha calls the “Third Space” (*Location* 37). In his *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie warns about the entrapment of such a position: “our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind” (10). This position is presented in the novel when

Adit has a change of heart and decides to leave Britain. He starts having romantic visions of India, which are most probably far removed from reality:

The long, lingering twilight of the English summer trembling over the garden had seemed to him like an invalid stricken with anaemia, had aroused in him a sudden clamour, like a child's tantrum, to see again an Indian sunset, its wild conflagration, rose and orange, flamingo pink and lemon, scattering into a million sparks in the night sky. (Desai 178)

The language that Desai uses here is a visible exaggeration of her usual writing style. Using images such as “invalid stricken with anaemia” and “scattering into a million sparks” are obviously intentional markers of Adit's melancholy and his visions of an India that does not actually exist. This can be listed as another thing that Desai and Kureishi have in common, according to Maxey's article. The “village” that the first generation always returns to in their minds, according to Maxey “is not lost, but a living place to which they can return permanently: the centre to Britain's periphery” (20). One may also argue that Adit must have had his doubts about living in India, since he decided to move to Britain. However, his reasons for leaving are not stated in the novel, so one may only guess.

The two protagonists' identities change from feelings of being O/others, through taking on forms of hybrid identity, to trying to become Anglicized in every way. A very interesting narrative technique of Desai's is that she takes us on this journey from different poles of the immigrant world: both protagonists change but their identities never meet at the same point. Adit changes from trying to be English to being the Other, while Dev takes a journey in the opposite direction.

One can clearly deduce from the text of *Bye-Bye Blackbird* that the first generation of immigrants was on a very slow and difficult path of trying to fit into the community. In the novel the world of the immigrants and the world of the English seem to be permanently disconnected. Desai even mentions the existence of a “basic disharmony of the situation” (175). Adit's relationship with his former landlords, or the attitude of Sarah's mother toward her Indian guests further prove this claim. When Adit pays a visit to his former landlords, his former landlady, Mrs. Miller, behaves as if she wishes “to reject the fact of Adit having lived in their house for three years” (Desai 81). When Adit and Sarah's friends visit Sarah's family in the country, Desai stresses the differences between them by describing the presence of the Indian people as strange. The Indian people are so different that Desai suggests that “a strange and incredible twist of fortune” (131) seems to have brought them and the English together.

In postcolonial theory, the term O/other can refer to “the colonized others who are marginalized by imperial discourse, identified by their difference from

the centre” (Ashcroft 170). In this given context, it is combined with dislocation, which is a direct result of the former colonization process, and it is a term brought into connection with Heidegger’s “not-at-home-ness” (Ashcroft 73). In spite of their dislocation experience, Adit and Dev are supposed to feel at home, because their migration was voluntary, but they do not, at least not the entire time. Though the act of migration was the central point of change, their inner selves keep changing as the story progresses.

The aspect of otherness is visible at various levels in the novel. As far as Adit is concerned, one gets the most immediately visible impression of his otherness if one takes into deeper consideration his estranged relationship with his wife Sarah. She feels that they are strangers, she does not understand him, she does not understand what he is talking about when his nostalgia breaks out. We can conclude that they are strangers because she failed to notice all the while that he was unhappy deep inside; a close-knit couple would surely have talked about such things sooner. She has mixed feelings about her marriage to a man who is different, she has mixed feelings about the child she is carrying. Her confusion is living proof of his otherness. Throughout the novel, this does not change. Nevertheless, she tries to listen and provide him with support. She does not wish to leave him, but things only get worse for the both of them, and even though at the end of the novel she accepts to go to India with Adit, one might argue that she has little choice in the matter, having found out that she was pregnant. It is very important to note that, unlike Adit’s feelings of being the other, Sarah’s sense of being an exile in her own life is a matter of her personal choice. On the other hand, this might also be a product of her constant unrest regarding her marriage.

If we understand Sarah as a typical representative of an Englishwoman of that time, she is a gold mine of information: a) to her, her husband is a mysterious foreigner she is irreversibly drawn to; b) to her, her husband is a stranger and will always remain one, because she cannot or will not understand him; c) she is in two minds about having decided to spend her life with him, she is concerned about the opinions of others; d) now that they are together, she sees no way out and decides to stay together with him and see how that unfolds in the end, because, as always, she believes everything will eventually fall into place, just as it should. Examples of the behavior of Sarah’s mother and Mrs. Miller only strengthen the argument that the self/other binarity could not be easily overcome.

These excerpts, and the frequent mention of racism-related incidents in the novel, bear witness to the resistance of the local population to accept their newly-arrived compatriots. There are occasional strong depictions of racism-related incidents in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, even though this is not the central theme. On the streets of London, while the protagonists are waiting for a bus, a boy yells “Wog!” at them.

An old lady in the neighborhood shouts so that they can hear her: "Littered with Asians! Must get Richard to move out of Clapham, it is impossible now" (Desai 16). In such examples, although Desai occasionally uses humor and sarcasm in her writing, her images of the non-acceptance of the local population remain clear.

It is also mentioned in the novel that the London docks have three kinds of lavatories: Ladies, Gents, and Asiatics. Dev waits in front of this last one, because he wants to show the white men that he does not want to go into their dirty lavatory (Desai 17). From their visit to the Millers, it becomes obvious that they disapproved of Adit because of his skin color. Even Sarah, who is not an immigrant, is insulted because of her husband. As she goes to work children call after her: "Hurry, hurry, Mrs Curry" (Desai 34). In this example Desai uses rhyme, which makes the insult almost sound like a chant, and a very haunting one.

The novel also includes mention of racist graffiti in the tube. We learn that Sarah's mother still cannot fathom the fact that her daughter really married an Indian. In the course of their visit to the countryside, she asks Mala Singh when she will start wearing English clothes, and refers to them as "you people." This is another example of the self/other binarity, which is visible throughout the text.

At work, Sarah is ashamed to talk about her marriage, and we can only assume that this is due to a fear of her colleagues' response. When she learns that Sarah is pregnant, her coworker Julia Baines mentions, while discussing Sarah's future child "those tiny boys with the giant turbans" (Desai 208). Although Desai presents to us the London of Emma Moffit with her romantic visions of India and her Little India Club of Clapham (which are also debatable due to their implications of a necessary "otherness"), she does not let us forget that the postcolonial world also has its dark side.

In an essay on multiculturalism, Bhikhu Parekh states that "citizenship is about status and rights; belonging is about acceptance, feeling welcome, a sense of identification." The novel clearly shows that being granted citizenship of a country does not imply that a person has been able to fit in and feel at home. At the beginning of the novel, Adit is cheerful and proud, he sings all the time and then, without providing any explanation whatsoever, Desai writes:

But now his own education, his "feel" for British history and poetry, fell away from him like a coat that has been secretly undermined by moths so that its sinews and tendons are gone and, upon being touched, crumbles quietly to dust upon the wearer's shoulders. Unclothed, Adit began to shiver in the cold and fear the approaching winter. (182)

In this example Adit's identity is presented in the form of a coat, which would be his outer, social self, while his inner self is quietly being eaten away. The only conclusion one can draw is that he had been unhappy all the while, at the level

of the subconscious, and felt that he did not truly belong in Britain, although he pretended otherwise.

Dev is the one who experiences this non-belonging most acutely:

There are days in which the life of an alien appears 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 and, drawing himself together, he feels he can never bear to be the unwanted immigrant but must return to his own land, however abject or dull, where he has, at least, a place in the sun, security, status and freedom. (Desai 86)

Here again we have this constantly present dilemma with regards to staying or leaving. To leave would mean to give up, but this is the easier path, and to stay requires a lot of effort, patience, and hope that the situation will one day change for the better. At the beginning of the novel, while holding some coins in the palm of his hand, Dev feels himself “Director of the East India Company” (Desai 12), but his behavior changes quickly “on the High street where he was a stranger again” (12). His constant rejection of his new surroundings is also proof of his feelings of not belonging, of not being at home. Dev immediately sees everything new as overwhelming, while for Adit it takes a while for the complexity of things to sink in. These feelings of being an eternal outsider are very well presented in Hanif Kureishi’s essay “The Rainbow Sign.” Kureishi does not write about India, he writes about Pakistan, but the somewhat tragic destiny of every generation of immigrants becomes unpleasantly obvious when one reads about his friends in Pakistan telling him: “we are Pakistanis, but you, you will always be a Paki” (24).

When we first encounter these men, Adit appears to be living the immigrant dream: he lives in a nice flat in Clapham, has a pretty English wife who cares for him and a good job that he is satisfied with. Dev, on the other hand, has come to London to study economics, and he finds it difficult to adapt in his new surroundings. The novel opens with his waking up in the London flat, and he wonders if his watch “had died in the night of an inability to acclimatize itself” (Desai 5). His watch is something he always wears, and it is something that helps him organize his day. If the watch cannot acclimatize itself, it is not strange that neither can he. He thinks with sadness about the cup of tea he would have gotten in India, and these are the first signs of the two cultures being seemingly irreconcilable: “It was the first lesson his first day in London taught him: he who wants tea must get up and make it” (6).

Towards the end of the novel, when Adit moves from the trance-like state of utter happiness and feelings of satisfaction to a deep dark depression that he cannot fathom, suddenly, in his London flat he feels “like a stranger arrived at an hotel in

a strange city” (179). A hotel is not one’s home, so the feelings of being dislocated and unadapted are again presented by Desai. The footsteps of the passers-by sound different, laughter has a sinister ring to it. It seems to Adit that he has turned into one of the Indians he used to despise: “the eternal immigrants” (181). He never wanted to be one of them, because he felt that with his natural susceptibility to the British culture he would have no difficulty blending in.

Even though at first it seems that Adit is satisfied with his decision to return to India: “now he was going to carry the message of England to the East—not the old message of the colonist, the tradesman or the missionary, but the new message of the free convert, the international citizen, a message of progress and good cheer, advance and good will” (225-226) we see him clutching his umbrella as a sacred symbol of England. His dilemma seems to be unresolved even at the very end. He is tired and he will leave everything to fate because he is quickly becoming a “good Hindu” (227). This clearly implies that he felt to belong to a different nation while he was living in Britain.

Contrary to the reader’s expectations, Dev is the one who decides to stay in Britain and make it his home. England slowly draws him further inside her mesmerizing embrace. At one point he stops talking about the London School of Economics and starts talking about finding a job in London. He explains to Adit that the streets of London are a rich education and that he cannot possibly waste his time in school, but,

It is partly the reasons. The other part is something he cannot explain, even to himself, for it is only a tumult inside him, a growing bewilderment, a kind of schizophrenia that wakes him in the middle of the night and shadows him by day, driving him along on endless tramps in all weathers while he wonders whether he should stay, or go back. (Desai 85-86)

What once started as only a thought of definitely staying in England fights for keeping its secure space in his mind and heart. He feels that something has inexplicably changed inside him, and he can never be the same man he used to be. He is determined to find “the England of his dreams and reading” (Desai 168) and decides to stay and pursue this course. Adit leaves Dev his job, and he and Sarah leave him the flat in Clapham. The first to arrive make the situation more comfortable for those who will succeed them. Dev perfectly fits into “the groove already cut and warmed for him by Adit” (229). As the novel ends, he is not a man completely at peace, but one has the impression that the good sides of the life in Great Britain will eventually outweigh the potential problems.

Ralph Waldo Emerson coined the term “double consciousness,” proclaiming it to be “one solution to the mysteries of human condition” (Sommer 166). A

similar idea can probably be said to lie behind the idea of multiculturalism, as it advocates being different, but respecting the others' differences as well and being open to changes which always inevitably come. Multiculturalism is currently in the spotlight due to the reconsideration of the many policies introduced in its name, in these times when we are faced with constant disquiet in multicultural communities, and we are witnessing "disillusion and compassion fatigue" (Bennett 1).

On February 5th, 2011, UK's Prime Minister David Cameron declared, in a speech to an international security conference in Munich, that state multiculturalism in the UK has failed. This was said in connection with the Government's announced anti-terrorism strategy, but it caused a great public stir. Some read this statement, and still read it, as an attack on Britain's ethnic minority groups, but others saw it as a true depiction of the state of modern British society. In whichever way one chooses to read this statement, one fact remains clear: multiculturalism seems to have always been, and today certainly is, an idea which is difficult to both define and implement.

The first generation of immigrants were perhaps in the most difficult position because of the actual act of migration, but decades have proven that even today later generations find it difficult to fit into their adopted community. Multiculturalism has not fully developed in the way it was meant to, and the possible reasons for this are constantly assessed and reassessed. Analysis of literary texts written in such a cultural setting in the last few decades may be offered as a modest contribution. Desai's novel is interesting because it gives us a glimpse of the obstacles a first generation of immigrants faced. Excerpts from the selected novel have presented how the self of the migrant subject is multi-layered and how crossing actual borders did not and does not necessarily imply crossing inner borders, and this additional step requires additional effort. If such collective effort is combined with the understanding and acceptance of the surrounding community, multiculturalism may prevail.

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