

## Chapter 2

### ‘One Foot in a New Land and a Couple of Toes in India’:

#### Analyzing Fiction by First Generation Indian Diasporic Writers

For the last few years, an increasing number of works by the first and second generation South Asian Diasporic Writers have emerged in the literary field. Although the individual talent of the diasporic writer has always been embedded in the tradition and culture of a particular society, the true potency lies in the appeal of the individual’s dilemma with regard to alienation, immigration, expatriation, exile and quest for identity. The two kinds of identities discussed by Stuart Hall in his article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”- identity as ‘being’ and identity as ‘becoming’ (225) - are vividly observed in diasporic Writings. But the style and content of writing differs and are influenced by the extent to which the writers have succeeded in identifying with and adapting to their new host countries. Some of the prominent features, which keeps surfacing are in diasporic Indian writers of the first generation are, a sense of being uprooted from the native cultural traditions and values, the loss of indigenous language, man’s position as a mere outcast or an eternal alien, coupled with multiple injuries and lacerations of the psyche, and so on.

These are the features, which are found in the writings of Kamala Markandaya, a native of Mysore, India and who later moved to Britain; Meena Alexander, born in Allahabad, India, now residing and working in New York and Anita Desai, born in Mussoorie, India and recently working as a Professor in English at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts, United States. Some of the prominent works of these writers are *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Manhattan Music* (1997) and *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971), respectively. We encounter the trauma,

nostalgic reminiscences, identity crisis and sense of being alienated particularly in these writings along with many other writings by first generation Indian diasporic writers.

This chapter explores the three primary sources by first generation Indian diasporic writers - *The Nowhere Man*, *Manhattan Music* and *Bye-Bye Blackbird* - in the context of the fundamental postcolonial characteristics such as Dislocation/ Displacement/ Sense of Rootlessness/ Deracination, Nostalgia/ Past overlapping Present, Identity Crisis/ Identity formation, Ethnicity/ Cultural Change, Indigeneity/ Lack of Sense of Belonging, Discrimination, Assimilation/ Survival, Imagining Homeland, Alterity/ Otherness/ Exoticisation, Loneliness/ Alienation/ Sense of Loss and so on, derived from the postcolonial literary theories.

Two of the primary sources, novels by first generation Indian diasporic writers- *The Nowhere Man* by Kamala Markandaya and *Bye-Bye Blackbird* by Anita Desai are written almost contemporarily and depict the setting of London. To understand both the novels, it is essential to know the immigrants' history in London. During and immediately after colonization, many migrants from the colonized country have chosen to settle in U.K. In the initial stage, life was pleasant and comfortable, except for the haunting sense of alienation. However, from 1960 onwards the economic desperation of U.K altered the opinion of the British people about the immigrants as a sole responsible factor for the unemployment problem and displayed their hatred for the immigrants leading towards obvious discrimination. Since these two novels are located in the same historical time period, the subject matter of prejudice and discrimination dominates other features of diaspora in them. Whereas *Manhattan Music* by Meena Alexander is written after about two decades of these previous two novels. In *Manhattan Music*, there is strong autobiographical element, since the central character resembles the author, who constantly tries to discover herself as an immigrant and to realize the procedure of self-composition to sustain

the self in an alien land. Now let us interrogate these three primary sources by first generation diasporic writers as a diasporic discourse.

### **2.1. *The Nowhere Man* by Kamala Markandaya**

Purnaiya Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004), a pioneer member of the Indian Diaspora occupies a prominent position among the Indian diasporic women novelists writing in English. Since 1950s she had been living in Britain and has written novels about India or about Indians in England. Thus she has attained her outstanding place amongst the third world post-colonial writers such as Salman Rushdie, V. S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri to name a few, who, by choice or otherwise, have left India and made their homes elsewhere.

Markandaya is a South Indian Brahmin from an upper middle class background, educated in intervals at various schools and at the Madras University. She had a great interest in writing and travelling for her father was working in railways and was an inveterate traveler. Her intense observation during the travels ultimately encouraged her to opt for creative writing. However, this interest obstructed her way of getting a degree in history. Consequently, she gave up college studies and tried her hand at journalism and also did some clerical and liaison work for the army. She also worked in a solicitor's office for a while in London. She married an Englishman in 1948, and had been living in England, writing novels ever since. Nine of her novels - *Nectar in a Sieve* (1955), *Some Inner Fury* (1956), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *Possession; a novel* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Coffer Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgins* (1973) and *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) - came out in quick succession between 1954 and 1977. Apart from these, she has written two more novels *Shalimar* (1982) and *Bombay Tiger* (posthumous 2008).

About Markandaya's work Uma Parameswaran, who has studied Markandaya's oeuvre and interviewed her and has stated that her strength as a novelist comes from her sensitive creation of individual characters and situations which are simultaneously representative of a larger collective; her prose style is mellifluous and controlled. Parameswaran further observes about *The Nowhere Man* that Markandaya is a pioneer member of the Indian Diaspora, and her best novel, *The Nowhere Man* foreshadows many diasporic issues with which we are preoccupied today. Most of her novels deal with different dilemmas of identity and the persistent themes in her novels is of cross-cultural and interracial conflicts.

Though Markandaya had spent most part of her life in England, as a writer she has used Indian setting in almost all her eleven novels, typically depicting traditional life and values of India and their conflicts with modern values. Markandaya settled in England after her marriage, but there she missed several Indian customs and values which are part and parcel of her life as she belonged to first generation Indian diasporic community. The attachment of Markandaya with India becomes obvious and visible in her most of novels, especially *The Nowhere Man*. This was the only novel, having a setting in England, though there are frequent depictions of India in the form of flashbacks. Praising Kamala Markandaya for her valiant endeavours in portraying a profound understanding of human motivations, Parameswaran writes: "... *The Nowhere Man* [is] powerful novels which reveal new strengths in the author, mainly a far deeper understanding of human motivations, and a bold experimentation in prose style." (109)

As Anil Bhatnagar writes in his book *Kamala Markandaya: A thematic Study*:

Markandaya's seventh novel, *The Nowhere Man*, reveals her maturity as a novelist. Here again the East-West theme is depicted in a new manner and in a different environment of England. This novel is a true presentation of the racialism whose

horrible glimpses were witnessed recently. The theme of human relationship is not restricted to a particular individual or a particular country. It concerns the whole world. Remarkably enough, Kamala Markandaya has very artistically handled the theme of rootlessness. (6-7)

In *The Nowhere Man*, Markandaya approaches the theme of confrontation between East and West from a new point of view by depicting the despairing dilemma of the first generation Indian immigrants in England from pre to post-Independence. In the words of B. Krupakar: “Kamala Markandaya’s novel *The Nowhere Man* ... is a compassionate and distressing tale of an aged Indian immigrant who becomes a martyr to racial hatred” (24). The novel illustrates the author’s “continued concern with cultural values in the context of racist attitudes in England following the decline and defeat of British imperialism” (Rao, and Menon 105). Markandaya artistically presents the dichotomy of the East-West confrontation “which is shown through the undeserved plight of an old and friendly Indian immigrant in England; the portrait of his misery is probably the result of a deep study of the helplessness of Indian expatriates in Britain” (Rao, and Menon 105). The Indo-British interaction is portrayed predominantly through the experiences of the protagonist of this novel, Srinivas, a first generation Indian immigrant in Britain, who is disoriented by the biased mentality of the British community that considered him to be merely a trespasser, an outsider, even after living for half a century in England. Being cut off from his well-grounded cultural and traditional foundations, he tries to get sustenance from his adopted country, but ultimately he tends to feel like a “nowhere man, looking for a nowhere city” (Markandaya 189). *The Nowhere Man* was the favourite of Markandaya out of all her works because it depicts a compassionate and distressing tale of racial prejudices against Indians

in the UK of the 1960s, which estranges the characters of the novel and heightens their sense of displacement. As Ashcroft and his co-writers express:

A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place. A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or 'voluntary' removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. The dialectic of place and displacement is always a feature of post-colonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention, or a mixture of the two. Beyond their historical and cultural differences, place, displacement, and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity are a feature common to all post-colonial literatures in English. (*Empire* 8-9)

In this novel, Srinivas is a South Indian Brahmin, nearing seventy, who resides in London for more than twenty years, not by preference but by compulsion. He was compelled to migrate to London because in the British-ruled India, he had to face difficulties of surviving with honour and where he experiences identity crisis for the first time. His father was a well-qualified official in the British Government, however he was not given promotion that he was worthy of, just because he had sung an Indian song at the reception function of a chancellor. When Srinivas retaliated about this unjust act, his father was sent to psychiatric hospital and he was expelled from the college. It was this depressing prospect of survival with dignity in the British-ruled

India and the fear of having a tarnished identity, which had driven Srinivas to England after hasty marriage with Vasantha. As Srinivas and Vasantha, along with their two sons Laxman and Seshu, settle down in a foreign country, their attachment with their homeland is almost busted. They own a house named after their home in India, 'Chandraprāsād', even though for their foreigner neighbours and others it is merely 'No. 5' and their family identified as 'the people at No.5'. As Vasantha said with pride for her home, "At last we have achieved something. A place of our own, where we can live according to our lights although in alien surrounding: and our children after us, and after them theirs" (Markandaya 22).

On one hand they are disconnected from India, on the other hand they try to adjust in England but the biased attitude of their neighbours like Mrs. Field and Mrs. Glass constantly make them feel alienated. The extreme sense of rootlessness felt by Srinivas was expressed sarcastically by Markandaya in the novel:

It was people. The peril was people. Not all people, but people like himself, their threatening presence, the presence of their offspring and their offspring's offspring, since their children were only off-sprung, never born decently in bed. Thousands upon thousands of them, threatening millions upon millions of these islanders at every turn of existence, not excluding their very lives. (189)

According to a French philosopher and sociologist known for developing the concept of collective memory, Maurice Halbwachs' sociological concept of nostalgia, "... the dialectic of past and present reveals how the present becomes privileged and it is clear that without it no recollection or retrieval of the past becomes possible" (43). It means, it is not the past that occupies the present, but the contrary, and nostalgia acquires its social character by the very fact

that it integrates the rudiments of the present. Another observation made by Halbwachs is that through nostalgia the irreversibility of time is transcended. As a result,

[The past] does not impose itself on us and we are free to evoke it whenever we wish. We are free to choose from the past the period into which we wish to immerse ourselves. If certain memories are inconvenient or burden us, we can always oppose to them the sense of reality inseparable from our present life. (50-51)

To be more precise, through nostalgia the irreversibility of time can be exceeded and the individual escape and freedom from the constraint of time can be exemplified. This competence of nostalgia symbolizes the freedom from the constraints of identity, since the 'home' which is evoked nostalgically is an imaginative reconstruction, not recuperation but a persistent search. Nostalgia permits the avoidance from the compulsions of social bondages by finding a 'home' outside of the logic of the ordered totality of the nation. As Srinivas deals with the existentialist problem of racial prejudice, loneliness, alienation, discrimination, adjustment and belonging, in the middle of such agitations, he often recollects the memories of past and finds immense contentment in looking into the box containing old stuff of his wife, Vasantha. He remembers:

The festivals of India? There had been a profusion of these, Srinivas recalled, a richness that rounded out his childhood memories; and Vasantha had brought them with her, complete down to the last detail of correct observation. But it was she who knew about these things, as it had been his mother who remembered to bring out the consecrated vessels and send for the priest, while his father's energies were fully stretched between earning a living and his political duty. Now, searching his mind, Srinivas came upon large areas of uncertainty, not to say blankness. Festival lights



had dimmed, and even the seasons in which they had been lit – let alone dates – had receded from memory. (Markandaya 72)

He remembers a marked difference in the attitudes of himself and Vasantha, who always recognized herself with her deep-rooted native traditions and culture, and despite her long residence in London, she never detached from the Indian culture and continued its way of living. Vasantha, “who in her breath and bones had remained wholly Indian” (Markandaya 43), was a constant source of survival for Srinivas. Srinivas desires to return to India but cannot do so and only make an expedition to visit his land of birth in imagination, as

... he found he had no notion of where to go to in India, or what to do when he got there, since so much had been destroyed or given up – self-respect, livelihood, family cohesions – during the struggle for independence. In the absence of these robust lifelines the decision to leave did not survive. (Markandaya 48)

In post-colonial communities, the issue of identity crisis often seems to dominate all other concerns, as identity is the core issue in exploration of diaspora, especially diasporic identity that is composed of various factors and sub-factors and can be described in terms of hybridity, cross-cultural and corrupted social and cultural systems. Theorist E. H. Erikson described identity as “a subjective sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image” (730). Identity characterizes an individual, defines him, impacts upon everything he does and achieved when he has gone through an exploration of different identities and made a commitment to one. However, if an individual loses the sense of personal similitude and historical permanence he experiences identity crisis. Identity crises and alienation are some of the major issues that the first generation immigrants have to deal with. The 20<sup>th</sup> century has accurately been called ‘The Age of

Alienation’ (Murchland 208), specially the post-war period, for it has been an age of great spiritual distress and struggle. This age has always witnessed a constant conflict between what the individual seeking for and what he attains, what he professes and what he practices, what he really is and what he pretends to be, and this conflict has lead his life towards an precarious consequence on his inner being. In *The Nowhere Man*, Markandaya has intuitively investigated the major diasporic issues like identity crisis twenty years before others could even think of it.

Srinivas, after his emigration to London in his youth, spends about thirty years of his life there and almost becomes a “naturalized Briton” (Markandaya 99). The predicament of Srinivas is even more serious than the main characters in Anita Desai’s novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Dev and Adit, who are young men, having two options before them- either to settle in England or go back to India, but Srinivas, being an old man, who spent half a century in England, has no such choice except to stay in England. He has already started looking at England as his own country. After settling in London, Srinivas has a flourished business and also own a house. He started recognizing himself as a Londoner and put every effort to assimilate within the local society. On one hand Srinivas and his family are disconnected from India, on the other hand they try to adjust in England but the biased attitude of their neighbours like Mrs. Field and Mrs. Glass constantly makes them feel like aliens.

However, with the passage of time Srinivas realized that upholding his Indian identity in England was neither easy nor convenient, so gradually he starts developing a kind of patriotic closeness with this adoptive land. In fact many other factors are also responsible for this realization. His wife was dead, from whom Srinivas had drawn substantiality and reinforcement in his preservation of Indian identity. Secondly, failure in business and separation from sons, for Seshu was killed in the war and Laxman instead of being a support to his parents, simply

abandons them and prefers a different way of life. In such unfavorable circumstances, it was difficult to maintain the distinct Indian identity for Srinivas and compels to adopt British identity, which at times gave him a thought to go back to India. In the company of Mrs. Pickering, he tries to assimilate with British identity, but for Britishers like Fred, he was a soulless 'black man', a trespasser with the mark of a devil, "transformed into a stranger, said the unwanted man" (Markandaya 248) and not allowed to be one of them. He is completely disorientated as to where he actually belongs and represents millions of first generation immigrants who, for some or the other reason depart from their roots of origin, spend years on an alien soil, but still fail to strike their roots in it and die as rootless, restless individuals. As Srinivas feels about himself:

Soulless. There was a word for it, only it was not acceptable until its terrifying sense had been expelled. Soul taken from that too ... unknown, unknowable, somewhere, invisible, the soft trickle that he could not feel, reconstituting the human being. (Markandaya 185)

Ethnicity is an another issue that the first generation diasporic writers often deal with, which is witnessed in *The Nowhere Man*. Jary and Jary in *Collins Dictionary of Sociology* define an ethnic group as "a group of people sharing an identity which arises from a collective sense of a distinctive history." In fact every ethnic group has its own unique culture that comprises traditions, norms, value- systems, and a defined language for communication among the members of the group. Ethnicity is defined as a 'shared racial linguistic or national identity of a social group', and we should note that "racial attributes are not necessarily or even usually the defining features of ethnic groups" (Jary and Jary). Jary and Jary also define the term 'assimilation' in the *Collins Dictionary of Sociology*. According to them assimilation is "the

process in which a minority group adopts the values and patterns of behaviour of a majority group or host culture, ultimately becoming absorbed by the majority group” (31-2).

Nevertheless, a definition of assimilation should also take into consideration that it is a procedure which can influence both sides in the relation; the majority may also change its values, patterns of behaviour and culture.

In his paper, “Ethnicity in the Perspective of the Sociology of Knowledge”, R. A. Schermerhorn expressed: “Ethnicity refers to the fusion of many traits that belong to the nature of any ethnic group: a composite of shared values, beliefs, norms, tastes, behaviours, experiences, consciousness of kind, memories and loyalties” (qtd. in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial* 80). “A person's ethnic group is such a powerful identifier because while he or she chooses to remain in it, it is an identity that cannot be denied, rejected or taken away by others” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial* 80). It is evident throughout the novel that Srinivas and his wife, Vasantha have different attitudes towards England. On one hand, Srinivas tries to imbibe a kind of cosmopolitan point of view in his life; on the other hand, Vasantha prefers to stick to her Indianness entirely till her death. Even after settling down and spending years on the soil of London, Vasantha never finds the middle ground for her conventional Indian traditions and culture and deep-rooted native ways of living. As a typical Indian woman, she holds on to her Indian lifestyle, dressing, eating, rich religious traditions and even dying. She always preferred to dress in her nine-yard sari, kept her hair in bun and wear vermilion along the parting of her hair. With deep adoration she treasured Ganges water, which she brought from India, for the rest of her life and wished that Ganges water to be sprinkled over her ashes after her death, which reflects her strong affection for the Indian milieu and her identity as an Indian. Moreover, Vasantha’s yearning for security and individuality is reflected in her strong longing to

attain a house of her own and named their house in London ‘Chandraprāsād’ after their original home in India, which also reflects her nostalgia for India. In spite of securing good life, assets and financial position in London, Srinivas and Vasantha could never fully integrate themselves with the foreign surroundings and its socio-cultural environment, because they could never abandon their fundamental inhabitant traditions and religio-cultural entity. Srinivas tells Mrs. Pickering: “One does not realize, when one leaves one’s country, how much is chopped off and left behind too.” (Markandaya 72) When Mrs. Pickering tells him with a note of consolation, “There can be compensations, if one is cut off from one culture there is always the adopted one to draw upon” (Markandaya 73), he replies, “But you see, we .... that is to say, my wife and I ... I do not think we did” (Markandaya 73).

The Indo-British conflict took place in this novel mainly from the economic anxiety confronted by Britain in awoken of the collapse of the British Empire. As a consequence, the post-War England with all its immigration problems is neither safe for first generation people like Srinivas nor second generation people like Laxman. With the Depression, the two World Wars and the loss of companies, unemployment and housing have become the most sensitive issues and reason of clash between the British and those of the immigrants in England. The British have started treating the immigrants in London as mere trespassers or outsiders, viewing them skeptically for in due course they will overstep their rights and fearfully for prevailing economic competition for them. According to Britishers, the immigrants without money are like animals to snatch their rights and at no level is it possible to treat them as humans. As a result of such circumstances, immigrants like Srinivas becomes the victim of discrimination and labeled as ‘The Other’ by the young men of England like Fred Fletcher, Mike, Joe and Bill who experience the terrific tension of being jobless and consider the immigrants as the reason of their

pathetic situations and turn antagonistic towards them. In his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon expressed the domination of the white man over the black man through the linguistic construction of opposite terms: the 'One' and the 'Other'. Here 'one' subordinates the 'other' and renders it inferior. Both the colonizer and the colonized are entrapped in an ailing association of remorse and innocence. Edward Said determines a European cultural tradition of 'Orientalism' as a peculiar and well established way of classifying the East as 'Other' and inferior to the West and adds that the Orient features in the Western mind 'as a sort of surrogate and even under-ground self' (*Orientalism* 3). The young men of England like Fred Fletcher hold the immigrants responsible for "The blacks were responsible. They came in hordes, occupied all the houses, filled up the hospital beds and their offspring took all the places in schools" (Markandaya 176). Fred believes that heaps of African and Asian immigrants are jamming the way of success for the English youth to economic stability and blames immigrants like Srinivas for the miseries of the wandering jobless English youth "and becomes a self-styled champion of the cause of the English youth, campaigning systematically against the foreigners whom he wants to go back to their own countries" (Rangan 190). While referring to immigrants, Fred bursts out, "He is a devil. They're all devils" (Markandaya 190) or like Mike who bellows, "Bloody Swine. Deport the whole bloody lot" (Markandaya 221), or like Mrs. Glass who comments during argument with her husband, "These immigrants. They keep coming here, who asked them? One day they're poor, living off of the rates, the next they could buy us all up" (Markandaya 213), or even once Mrs. Fletcher expresses about immigrants, "The place isn't the same. Full of foreigners, you see all sorts, going around in their big cars. They're the ones with the money these days" (Markandaya 85). Out of frustration, Fred started behaving like a racist demon and bursts his anger even on a coal-black man who is sweeping the street: "Here you.

You got no right to be in this country. You bugger off, see?” (Markandaya 176). When Fred meets Srinivas, he tries to insult him and tells him without any hesitation on his face, “You got no right to be living in this country” (Markandaya 177). Srinivas, in self defending replies that he is British “by adoption” (Markandaya 177), Fred begins to feel a so-called patriotism in his hatred for the immigrants like Srinivas: “He decided he hated that colour, and the man, and the untold evils he and his kind were letting loose in his country, his beloved England which he felt he had never loved so much before, not even where he left its shores for Australia” (Markandaya 177).

Moreover, under the consuming fire of racism, Fred becomes an apparent protector and leader of the British youth, campaigning thoroughly against the immigrants. He started feeling as if he was born to lead and he was aware with absolute confidence that he would lead his people in the fight to conquer the wicked, hidden forces that were frightening them in their own homeland:

For he [Fred] was riding high, the breath of success sweet in his nostrils ... They [people] had dwindled, Fred noted, or had fallen silent, while his company multiplied ... People who had once shunned him stopped to listen when he spoke, or even came expressly for that purpose. For Fred, once reviled, had become respectable. He had acquired a status within the community which it had hither to denied him. Fred breathed deeply, and pressed on with his company. (Markandaya 230)

As the intensive agitation against the black mounts, posters begin to appear in different parts of London carrying “man-sized messages of hate, BLACKS GO HOME” (Markandaya 181) and opening “ whole new hells of corresponding fear and desolation in those at whom they

were aimed” (Markandaya 181). When he is tormented by Fred and his friends, Srinivas is able to understand the warning words of Abdul: “Then you better stop, because they won’t. The British won’t allow it. First thing that goes wrong it’ll be *their country*, and you go back, nigger, to *yours*, back where you came from” (Markandaya 80). Srinivas realizes over his situation as “An alien, whose manners, accents, voice, syntax, bones, build, way of life - all of him - *shrieked alien!*” (Markandaya 248). He voices his miserable condition to Mrs. Pickering: “The people will not allow it. It was my mistake to imagine. They will not, except physically, which is indisputable, have me enter. I am to be driven outside, which is the way they want it. An outsider in England. In actual fact I am, of course, an Indian” (Markandaya 249).

He, no doubt, looks upon himself as an unwanted man and pathetically tells Mrs. Pickering “It is time ... when one is made to feel unwanted, and liable, as a leper, to be ostracized further, perhaps beyond the limit one can reasonably expect of oneself” (Markandaya 209). The young men of England such as Fred, Mike, Joe and Bill start their attacks on Srinivas and he realizes that if he leaves England, he has nowhere to go: “Nowhere, he said to himself, and he scanned the pale anxious eyes which were regarding him out, a nowhere man looking for a nowhere city” (Markandaya 189).

Considering England as his own country, Srinivas pour his heart to adapt, adjust and assimilate to overcome the trauma of displacement and alienation on an alien land. In the context of social sciences, the term ‘assimilation’ is an approach towards merging and mingling, through which, not only immigrants but also other marginalized groups, such as African-Americans in American, women in society, schedule castes in India are bounded up into an incorporated prevailing social paradigm. Assimilation is the process, which avails the minority and marginalized groups to progressively adopt the customs and attitudes of the customary culture. In



1921, Park and Burgess provided an early definition of assimilation: “a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (735). “The erosion of boundaries through assimilation is always a temporarily extended, inter-generational process” (Alba and Nee). In this novel, Srinivas is pouring his genuine efforts to incorporate in the prevailing culture of London. He is very careful not to upset or affront his hosts in any way and when Mrs. Pickering advises, “If one lives in a foreign country, it is best to fall in with the ways of the natives, as far as possible” (Markandaya 63), he even expresses to Mrs. Pickering with great conviction: “This is my country now ... My country. I feel at home in it, more so than I would in my own” (Markandaya 63). He shows similar feelings to his friend, Zanzibari Abdul bin Abdul, telling him that England is his country, “This is where I live in England” (Markandaya 80). He tells cheerfully to Abdul bin Abdul that he considers England as his own country now. In the company of Mrs. Pickering, Srinivas starts taking interest in the Christian religion, celebrates Christmas, helps Mrs. Pickering to decorate a Christmas tree, and deliberately places the tree in a window for the neighbors to notice. “They placed it [Christmas tree] in the window where passers-by could see, and the neighbours in particular approved, observing that the occupant of No. 5 [house number] had after all these years become civilized” (Markandaya 70). With Mrs. Pickering, Srinivas’s mind begins to open up for the adopted country, which was blockade for years with his wife, Vasantha. As Srinivas expresses to Mrs. Pickering, “But today is important, since one lives in the present. I needed something to take me out of myself” (Markandaya 56). Gradually, England and its weather begin to appear beautiful and Srinivas started sharing smiles and warmth greets with his English neighbors. “Mrs. Pickering introduced him to English rivers

no whit less enchanting, took him to areas of total peace, added sycamore and even oak to his limited appreciation of rosebay and goldenrod, supplied the underpinning he needed from her own not inconsiderable strength” (Markandaya 73). Sometimes Srinivas feels: “I am becoming more English than the English ... and felt almost as if he could enter their skins. Indeed, his whole awareness seemed to have grown, as if the finest cilia covered all surfaces of mind and skin, ready to pick up messages” (Markandaya 74).

However, at such point of time, a feeling also haunts him as if he were pretending to be part of England. He also feels that he cannot and should not act as if English, because his wife had never done that. He felt as if he was becoming more English than the English himself and felt more or less as if he could get into their skin. Srinivas was not agreeable with warning words of Abdul when he says that Britain would one day like to turn him out and he harbors the illusion that he is happy and contented in this foreign land.

Srinivas’s son, Laxman responds to the issue of racialism in a quite different manner than his father, as the situation becomes even more perplexing for second generation migrants like Laxman, who have never identified themselves as Indians, are far removed from their family’s place of origin and are strangers to their ancestral culture. However, they have had their education in Christian schools and have immersed themselves in the culture of their birth country; they had to undergo the antagonism and denial, which made them double strangers. The racial discrimination against the blacks shocks Laxman profoundly, as his contribution in the War for Britain and his marriage with an English woman makes it apparent that he, “a pale brown Englishman with a pale pink wife” (Markandaya 36), has completely imbibed himself with the English identity. Avtar Brah rightly observes, “Identity then is simultaneously subjective and social and is constituted in and through culture. Indeed culture and identity are

inextricably linked concepts” (21). Therefore, even though Laxman engrossed and incorporated in the western life pattern, he feels entirely lost, as the question of ‘them’ and ‘us’ raised by the racists, shocks he intensely. He persistently desires to belong to the country in which he was born, which is visible in the rebellious feelings aroused in him:

Whatever anyone might say or think or do he knew he belonged, and where he belonged. To the country in which he was born and lived and laboured, not in some reservation rustled up within it. Whatever fathers of sons or sons of bitches might think, suitable inmate for a ghetto he was not, and did not intend to be.

(Markandaya 278).

When an English woman instructs Laxman in a spirit of racial antagonism, “Go back where you belong” (Markandaya 281), the furious Laxman retaliates to the discourteous remark of his opponent with identical impoliteness, “I belong right here” (Markandaya 281). When blamed by the English woman’s husband of total ungratefulness of blacks towards England for its aid to India, “That’s the gratitude we get ... after all we’ve done for them. Given away millions in aid, we have” (Markandaya 281), Laxman retorts defending India, “Loans totalling one quarter of one percent of the gross national product. Lent at rates of which a back-street money-lender would be ashamed. It is, in any case, . . . less than a hundredth of what has been lifted or looted” (Markandaya 281). As a reply to the rude remark of English woman’s husband’s adversary, “You’re going to cause an explosion, you and your sort” (Markandaya 282), Laxman says with contemptuous spirit, “You mean you are. You’ll be blown up with it, what’s more, you and your sort” (Markandaya 282). Through the characters of Laxman and Seshu, Markandaya depicts the satire of the circumstances is that even Srinivas’s eldest son, Laxman, is a nowhere man, too and gives an example of the second generation immigrants, who are neither here nor

there, their alienation is complete in that their roots are completely cut off. Vasantha cannot bear Laxman's rude attitude and dies of shock, for Laxman marries without the knowledge of his parents and even does not invite his parents on the occasion of birth of his child.

Alienation is generally contemplated as a notion connected with minority, the underprivileged, the unemployed, and other marginalized groups who have limited influence of bringing about changes in the society. The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy defines Alienation, "as a feeling of separation or isolation which results problems stemmed from rapid social changes such as industrialization and urbanization which has broken down traditional relationships among individuals and groups and the goods and services they produce." However, this definition does not give an ample explanation of the term; the very notion of alienation has been used extensively in the contemporary literature, sociology and philosophy. "Hegel uses two distinct German words *entausserung* (surrender) and *entfremdung* (a state of separation) for describing the theme of alienation" (qtd. in Recep 116). He argues:

Through self analysis and contemplation, the human moves from an immature sense of universality to a powerful sense of his/her own individuality, but as universality is essential to all things spiritual, this process leads to an acute sense of self-alienation from one's inner nature and the extremity of discord. (qtd. in Recep 116).

Melvin Seaman, in his paper "On the Meaning of Alienation", tries to put this complex structure of alienation into an order by a five-fold classification: "Powerlessness, Meaninglessness, Normlessness, Social Isolation and Self- Estrangement" (783). This five-fold classification of alienation can be witnessed in the life of Srinivas at the sudden and unexpected demise of Seshu and the death of Vasantha. His son, Laxman leaves him. With the death of his wife Vasantha, who has been a source of great strength to him, Srinivas finds life quite drained

and unfruitful. Simultaneously he starts getting failures in his business and the house becomes as his elder son, Laxman, disapprovingly calls a 'pigsty' (Markandaya 49). Srinivas's alienation hangs heavily on him by his separation from his relations that gradually took leave of him from his life forcing him into a dilemma against a lonely and pathetic situation. The spiritual solitude disturbs him more than his physical loneliness. If his son, Laxman, had been a good moral support to him, he would have been in a much better condition. However, it seems Srinivas is destined to undergo terrible loneliness and rootlessness, feels frustrated: "Especially now that he was alone, with the unpleasant realization dawning that in the last analysis one would always be alone. All I want is peace, said Srinivas, staring at himself, stranger in the glass; all I want is peace. Is that too much to ask?" (Markandaya 139) and often resorts to the memories of the past, even thinks of returning home. Though he wishes to return to the land of his birth, he cannot do so and frequently make a journey to India only in his imagination. To R.S. Singh, Srinivas is "a rootless creature, a product of the meeting of the East and the West" (147). In the words of Rangan, Srinivas is,

... a rootless restless individual, dispossessed of India and disowned by England.

Though the predominant theme of the novel is displacement, alienation, and a search for identity in alien environs, it treats of larger human relations rendering the work an interesting psychological study of human relationship as well as of the essential human loneliness. (186)

Although, Srinivas's relation with Mrs. Pickering has drawn much criticism, their attraction for each other is natural. The circumstances of both of them bring them together, for on one hand, old and alone Srinivas's wife is dead, his son, Laxman ignores him and Srinivas is mentally starved and on the other hand, Mrs. Pickering is a widow of middle age, not physically

attractive and in need of support. Both Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering provide mental strength to each other in their crucial times. As Parameswaran expresses, “The relationship between Mrs. Pickering and Srinivas could be read as the relationship between the best of India and the best of Britain” (124). Srinivas is befriended by an English woman, Mrs. Pickering, an extremely kind, understanding and helpful lady, who takes care of him and defends him frequently at the times of racial instances by her own people towards Srinivas. She enters Srinivas’s heart and house, cooks for him, cleans the house, mends his clothes, sometimes even spends her own money to help him with good counsel, tries to ease his sufferings and gradually influences him. Srinivas have a high regard for her and later she becomes a sort of common-law wife to him. She develops closeness with Srinivas still she cannot fill up the gap left by Vasantha, in her tranquil and passionate spiritual love. Mrs. Pickering can never restore the place of Vasantha because the love and warmth between Srinivas and Vasantha is the outcome of India marriage, the union of two souls.

The relationship between Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering after the death of Vasantha converts the novel into an insightful piece of art. The episode of their relationship certainly depicts a consistent dedication towards human values based on true freedom, which is basically devoid of any obligation or compulsion. The novel also grants the prospect of intercultural reunion through this relationship established on the basis of deep human understanding, concern and compassion, rejecting racial and cultural barriers. Srinivas reciprocates the love and care of Mrs. Pickering with the realization of his responsibilities towards Mrs. Pickering, her culture and the country he has adopted as his own and which has given him refuge. Therefore, he remains submissive and tranquil though he experiences lot of racial conflict. Markandaya expresses: “But he [Srinivas] would not comment. His dual affiliation restricted him. It made him aware of incongruity as the islanders were not, and the merging in him of them and us called for an

honourable consistency which kept him silent” (92). His spirit does not surrender completely even he is tormented brutally in the hands of extremists like Fred and others like him. Fred throws faeces, dead mice etc., at Srinivas’s door step; abuses and scandalizes him and eventually sets fire to his house to burn him alive, but in trying to set fire to the house of Srinivas, he himself gets caught in the flames and dies. Fortunately Srinivas is saved from the burning house, but soon dies of shock. The climax of the novel symbolizes the height of racial tension and also a blemish on humanity. There is no trace of guilt on the face of Mrs. Pickering for Srinivas’s death, since she has cared for him and feels that ultimately Srinivas is free from all his miseries. Through the character of Mrs. Pickering, Markandaya is giving out her message: “Blame myself” (Markandaya 322), said Mrs. Pickering. “Why should I? I cared for him.” And indeed, that seemed to her to be the core of it” (Markandaya 322).

Through the characters like Dr. Radcliffe, Mrs. Pickering, Mr. Glass, Mrs. Fletcher and the constable Kent, who stand for the highest British traditions, *The Nowhere Man* also tries to convey the message that in spite of the presence of extreme racialism prevailing in England, there do exist people of good sense. On one hand, there are self-designated fanatical racialists like Fred; while on the other hand, there are people like Dr. Radcliffe, Mrs. Pickering, Mr. Glass, Mrs. Fletcher and the constable Kent, who are able to understand the process of history and the genuine spirit of the times. Mrs. Fletcher, the good and kindly mother of Fred Fletcher, feels awfully remorseful for the misbehavior of her son towards Srinivas and even asks for forgiveness from Srinivas on behalf of her son. When Fred arrogantly tells Srinivas that he has got no right to live in England and tortures him by giving ill-treatment to him, Mrs. Fletcher apologizes to Srinivas, “You’ve been a neighbor to us these many years, Mr. Srinivas, and you’ve been a good neighbor, and whatever’s been said you’ve as much right to be here as any of us and there’s few

as wouldn't be sorry if you were to feel you had to leave because of what our Fred said. And if he hasn't got the decency to apologize, then his mother's got to do it for him" (Markandaya 179). She adds, "You don't want to pay any attention to Fred .....He doesn't know what he's talking about, you've got as much right to live here as what he has. More. Even if you weren't born in this country, Mr. Srinivas, you belong here, and don't let anyone convince you different" (Markandaya 179-180). Srinivas also replies, "I won't. I do belong here now. It was good of you to remind me" (Markandaya 180). Mrs. Fletcher is full of love and is thoughtful enough to right the wrong caused by her son towards a good - hearted Indian, Srinivas. While Srinivas suffers from a sense of restlessness out of his alienation, Dr. Radcliffe and Mrs. Pickering extend mental and spiritual help to him. People like Mr. Glass and the constable Kent prove that humanity still exists.

To conclude, it can be stated that *The Nowhere Man* offers an insightful account of the predicament of the first generation diasporic community.

## **2.2. *Manhattan Music* by Meena Alexander**

A postcolonial diasporan, (born in India to Syrian-Christian parents and gone through several migrations to Sudan, Britain and the U.S., traveling back and forth to India), who had lived on different continents before immigrating to the United States with her Jewish American husband, Meena Alexander has crossed multiple borders and occupied hyphenated positions as a "Third World woman poet", a South Asian American writer and critic, and a professor who lives in New York City and teaches at Bard College and the City University of New York. (Alexander, *Fault Lines* 193)



Alexander was born as the eldest of three children on February 17, 1951, in Allahabad, India, to George and Mary Alexander. Her father, an employee of the Indian government, was sent to North Africa when Alexander was five, hence her childhood was split between two enormously different worlds, but her identity remained resolutely fastened to India. Alexander believes that her grandparents, especially her maternal grandfather played an important role in shaping her budding ideological awareness and sharpening her political insight. At the age of thirteen, as a remarkably talented child, Alexander could explore the world abundantly, entering the University of Khartoum. When she was fifteen, her poems were being translated into Arabic and published in Sudanese newspapers and by the time she was eighteen, the University of Nottingham, in England, awarded her a scholarship to pursue Ph.D. After finishing her doctoral thesis, Alexander lectured in English at various Indian universities, including the University of Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and the University of Hyderabad. Within two years after she returned to India, her first volume of poetry, *The Bird's Bright Ring*, was published. However, soon she left India for New York where she arrived as newly wedded and pregnant. Reminiscent of her move to England, the now-familiar sense of displacement was enlarged by a profound sense of loss, which could fortunately fuel Alexander with creative imagination and she jumped into writing thoroughly. Hereafter she has written many poems such as *Stone Roots* (1980), *House of a Thousand Doors* (1988), *The Storm: A Poem in Five Parts* (1989), *Night-Scene: The Garden* (1992), *River and Bridge* (1995), *Illiterate Heart* (2002), *Raw Silk* (2004), *Quickly Changing River* (2008), *Birthplace with Buried Stones* (2013) and *Atmospheric Embroidery* (2015). She has also written poetry and essays *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience* (1996) and *Poetics of Dislocation* (2009), an autobiography *Fault Lines* (1993), Novels *Nampally Road* (1991) and *Manhattan Music* (1997), as well as Criticism *Women in*

*Romanticism: Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Shelley* (1989) and *The Poetic Self: Towards a Phenomenology of Romanticism* (1979).

Alexander's writings exhibits the distinctiveness of what Edward Said calls 'exilic' writings in his book, *Culture and Imperialism*, "born in the resistance and opposition to the confinements and ravages of imperialism", which now have "shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, decentered, and exilic energies ... whose incarnation today is the migrant, and whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages" (332). Her writings depict her life experiences of cultural diversity among various cultural and religious group of people. In the context of memory, place, and language in identity formation, Alexander's works study the distinct elements of her legacy and her cultural dislocation. Alexander's quest for psychic entirety through writings also emphasizes the concerns, faced by many postcolonial writers, who are restrained by the dominant literary traditions of the imperial past. Her writings are poetic, heart touching, and sensual; often focus on her contributions to postcolonial literature with feminist point of view on literary and cultural concerns such as prejudice, terrorism, cultural fanaticism, interracial affairs and marriages. On the cover page of *Manhattan Music*, there is a comment by MS: "Alexander's writing is imbued with a poetic grace shot through with an inner violence ... With her gift of heightened sensibility; she can take a tragic, violent situation and juxtapose it with a description of terrible beauty."

Alexander is distinct from all the other contemporary diasporic writers in the sense of touching multiple diasporic dimensions and effectively getting hold of the position for herself as renowned diasporic writer in the paradigm of fiction, rather semi-autobiographical works of her,

creating the Identity, which she has always tried locating in various migrant situations and circumstances. In the writings of Alexander, memory plays a unique role as a trope for performance of ever changing immigrant identity, which is also marked by a sense of intimate passions about the body that is implied in her writings as more like a tool or a metaphor or an instrument. Since the body is a center of action, it acts as a privileged image and is able to suffice the exercise of choice and it is through the memory, that the body offers a mode of choice and action, which is very well executed in the writings of Alexander.

*Manhattan Music*, a novel by Alexander, published in 1997 and set in New York City in the 1990s, focuses on the increasingly urgent issues of dislocation of migrants, immigrants and diasporans in Western metropolises, as well as the succeeding unsettling of national, racial and ethnic boundaries. In a review of the novel, Susheela Rao, on one hand, commends Alexander's use of epigraphs and quotations from a wide range of writers, including William Shakespeare, Kalidasa, Franz Kafka, and Akka Mahadevi (12<sup>th</sup> century Kannada writer), and her knowledge of Hindu epic stories, on the other hand, Rao points out Alexander's occasional errors such as the stated meaning of the name 'Sandhya' (qtd. in Sanga 4), whose name Alexander describes as "those threshold hours, before the sun rose or set, fragile zones of change before the clashing absolutes of light and dark took hold" (qtd. in Sanga 5) and asks a pertinent question about the novel's intended audience. Fellow Asian American women writers Chitra Divakaruni's and Jessica Hagedorn's reviews, cited on the novel's back cover, expresses their opinion of Alexander. Hagedorn describes it as "An insightful look at the multiculti, trendy New York downtown art scene of the troubled '90s." Divakaruni applauds it saying that at once violent and erotic, and somber, *Manhattan Music* is infused with the power of myth and poetry and the inner

life, the electric intersection of characters who illuminate for the reader both the Old World and the New.

*Manhattan Music* illustrates upon the histories of colonization of India, Africa/America, and the Caribbean and by linking these histories; Alexander successfully embodied them with the story of two female protagonists in the novel. In the novel, Alexander presents the third-world women protagonists' somatic experiences in New York, that reforming their identities as 'national' or 'transnational' in light of the histories of voluntary or involuntary migrancy and Alexander also presents her critique of modernity through these protagonists, who escaped fixed subject positions anchored in the histories of immigration and who seek liberatory subjectivities by exoticizing, romanticizing, and performing hybrid identities other than their own. In a chapter, "Imagined Communities as Imaginary Homelands", Monika Fludernik writes about *Manhattan Music* with bit appreciating tone:

The novel, untypically for a cosmopolitan setting, and even more untypically for a diaspora novel, really concerns immigration problems, or problems of transplantation to a new culture. It is particularly interesting for its constructing of the successful Jewish diaspora, to which Sandhya's husband belongs, and the problematic status of diaspora for the South Asian female protagonist. (281)

In *Manhattan Music*, the central character of the novel Sandhya Rosenblum resembles Alexander herself, who constantly tries to discover herself as an immigrant and to realize the procedure of self-composition to sustain the self in an alien land. Sandhya is an Indian immigrant in her mid-thirties, married to Stephen Rosenblum, a Jewish American, whom she met five years ago, while he was on vacation in her native India. She at present finds herself residing with her husband and their small daughter, Dora in Manhattan, however feeling directionless in her

life. Her anguish as an immigrant, doubled with the news of her father's death back in India and being rejected by her Egyptian lover in America, which ultimately leads her to a nervous breakdown and a suicide attempt.

The narrative technique applied in the novel is a stream of consciousness and the setting of the novel swings between Manhattan and India with its frequent flashbacks. Apart from Sandhya, the voice of another character heard in the novel is Draupadi Dinkins, a conceptual artist and a second generation Indian immigrant from the West Indies, who is a guide to Sandhya and encourages her to make meaningful sense of her past. Draupadi is an independent performer, the 'woman who was permitted everything', whom Sandhya meets and befriends in New York City. On one hand Sandhya clasped the rigid nostalgia of her past heritage; on the other hand Draupadi is constituted with a memory of mixed and obscure culture and heritage. While Stephen proposed Sandhya for marriage, he had thought Sandhya would be very thrilled at the possibility of life in America, which according to Stephen is the land of opportunity and higher mobility, but on the contrary, Sandhya feels terribly displaced and haunted by the memories of the life and people she had known when in India. Her friend Draupadi gives a glimpse of the kind of memories that visited Sandhya:

Sandhya's people, on the other hand, seemed never to have budged from the Indian subcontinent. Her veins were etched by centuries of arranged marriages, dark blue blood pouring through. She could point to a plot of land bounded by granite walls and name ancestors who had owned that land for generations. By fields swollen by monsoon flood she imagined her great-grandmother afloat in a black canoe. Then too she remembered the cemeteries where her grandparents were buried, the houses that had held them, the rites under which they were married. But memory swelling

like black water threatened to drown her. Would she see her face in that flood, the delicate nostrils, the high cheekbones, the long-lashed eyes? (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 4)

In New York City, Sandhya undergoes the learning of English and Americanization, something similar to the dislocation that is the outcome of an imposed commitment towards the Indian inherited homeland. As a result of geographical and cultural dislocation, there emerges to figure a definite sense of cultural depression spreading through her psyche. It is even more complicated for a woman like Sandhya at times because being from a place where everything was under her own systems, she migrated to a land of new set of laws and systems. As a result of the tussle between migration and her love and belongingness for the homeland, she feels trapped in the struggle of converting herself to become a part of the whole new scenario and gets many wounds. She feels that “the emptiness was growing in her” like “a gnawing hunger, a desperation even” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 42). She feels awfully baffled and her mind is all dumfounded as she tries to overcome her dislocation, when seated on a bench at the New York Airport:

The bench was growing colder. Sandhya felt drops on her face. Where was she?

The street in front of her was suddenly crowded. She noticed leaves dropping off trees, people bundled into coats and scarves blurring into each other ... her hand closed over a plastic card in her bag ... It was laminated poorly, and the image was hardly sharp. Still the resemblance was there: the narrow nose, lips slightly apart, hair blown back as if the woman were holding onto the mast of a ship. (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 6-7)

The disharmonious sounds surrounded her at the airport so she could hardly hear Stephen say: “The gates of America are open wide.” Stephen murmured in her ears, “We’ll live here,

Sandy, we'll be happy. I promise you" (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 7). Then he set his arms resolutely around her, and kissed her full on the lips and Sandhya wondered:

Why couldn't it all be simple after that, a play, sensible and short? Wasn't that the way life was meant to be, after all? But nothing felt right. It was as if the sheet against which the figures danced was all askew, the puppeteer having neglected to pull it tight. Neither gestures nor words came out right. As she walked toward the bus stop, a thought gripped Sandhya. Supposing she were to swallow the green card, ingest that plastic, would it pour through her flesh, a curious alchemy that would make her all right in the new world? (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 7)

Nostalgia and memory plays an essential role in the construction of gender and culture of an immigrant like Sandhya, that the wounds so created in this space of diaspora can be healed when the writer takes recourse to immigrant's adjustment in the new land. The torments that the immigrants undergo modulate their identity in diasporic space, where perceived the notion of nostalgia where Bhabha's notion holds true, as he expresses, "Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present. It is such a memory of the history of race and racism, colonialism and the question of cultural identity ..." (90).

Memory, early on, bothers Sandhya, whose "veins were etched with centuries of arranged marriages" (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 4), and she carries the heavy load of memories from her life in India. What is notable is every now and then forceful memory breaks through nowhere to drag Sandhya from her present life in Manhattan to her past in India. She is sitting on a Central Park's bench, when introduced for the first time in the novel. She is pondering upon and imagining a figure seated across from her in the other chair. She ruminates and "tried to imagine

a figure seated across from her in the other chair, but the most that she could make out was a formless thing, something fashioned of mist ... and the scene suddenly shifts “like a curtainless theatre” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 6). Abruptly the scene shifts from the Central Park to a curtain less theatre in India. She memorizes a scene from a puppet-show performance, which she watched with her grandmother, when she was six. The puppet show was narrating the story of a character of Mahabharata, Draupadi and her life of banishment, of being homeless and eternal waiting. The memory then vanishes and she comes back to present, where she is holding her green card and pondering over the expression articulated by her husband Stephen, who promised her of all the happiness in America. Her life with Stephen in America is not smooth enough. Her anxiety and dissatisfaction seems to be obvious. Both, the memories of the grandmother and expression of Stephen confirm the deep-seated sense of discrepancy of Sandhya’s life. The two different memories, in this instance, expose the innate disagreement in her present life as an immigrant that she feels that her own performance as a puppet in her life is not satisfactory.

Usually dreams symbolizes the monotonous effect that a specific memory can have on one’s sense of self, which often tends to weaken the identity. Sandhya, being an extremely sensitive woman, is also severely tortured by her dreams of her first love, Gautam: “Her dreams gave her little respite. They took her to another country. Always it was the same place, the exact same time. That fragile flash of light before the sun rose, the sky still peach, stained with grey. She was a young woman, in her early twenties, sitting next to Gautam by the river bank” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 9). The dreams forcibly take her back to her native self in India, as she is compelled to surrender the violent circumstances that interrupt her gentle, loving relationship with Gautam, which is never complete, as Gautam dies a tragic death after suffering torture by policemen. The dreams always end with Gautam’s disappearance, leaving Sandhya in



the mental turmoil, which is comforted only by physical passion. As Alexander demonstrates in a Bergsonian manner, the memories of the mind are processed through the actions and reactions of the physical body. In Bergsonian terms, “Past is not disconnected from the present. The body offers a mode of choice and action through the act of remembering. This embodied relation of memory thus negates the philosophical question of whatever it is body or memory that determines one’s personal identity” (qtd. in Mehta 233).

Thus, whenever Sandhya suffers from memory, the writer concludes with the narration of sexual activity, as if the mind’s restlessness and tensions are brought to rest by bodily language. In the beginning of the novel, when Sandhya suffers from the monotonous dreams of Gautam and his vanishing, she turns to Stephen to pacify her mental turmoil through sexual comfort:

Again and again Gautam came to her in her dreams, only to torment her by vanishing. She tried to put him out of her mind by turning to Stephen, who slept by her side ... she grew to desire the man by her side, covering her. She soon forgot the dreams that had grown so ungovernable. (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 10-11)

For a time being Sandhya felt warmth in the love and protection of Stephen, but after sometime she was frequently visited by bizarre and disturbing dreams of Gautam and his badly mutilates body, “But one night Gautam came to hereyeless, headless. His arms and legs were cut off. She knew it was Gautam because of the red checked shirt he had on. Because of the shape of his neck where the blood had congealed. The mutilated torso had washed up on the riverbank. Other arms picked it up. A man turned to her, offering her the body. Do you want it?” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 11) Whenever she was haunted by such dreams, she would wake up sobbing and shaking, being comforted tenderly by Stephen on her awaking.

Initially Sandhya gets attracted towards Stephen for the sake of freedom and relief from the depressing memories of her break-up with Gautam in India. She was charmed by Stephen's sophistication and innocence at first, but gradually realized an emotional distance with him. She feels isolated in America, as Stephen's promise of happy life turns out to be hollow, when she finds him emotionally deficient. When Stephen takes her to visit Ellis Island, she is uncomfortable: "their trip to Ellis Island, the discomfort she had felt in the museum, made things much worse for her. It was as if he was proposing a past she might enter, but her flesh resisted" (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 38). Sandhya feels to show her opposition of any notions of her past through her body, when Stephen takes pride in the extensively publicized reconstruction of the immigration facilities on the island. She is possibly reminded of her feeling of being fragile as a new immigrant in America and a sense of recreating a past of sufferings, through the patchy architectural design using broken things like stove-pipe, toilet bowl, and many other discarded items. When Sandhya feels discomfort and shows her unwillingness to enter the boat to visit Ellis Island filled with American tourists, Stephen fails to understand the sense of discomfort she is experiencing. The freedom for Stephen is a chokehold for Sandhya. Hence, although Stephen tries hard to cheer up and support Sandhya to develop oneness with the immigrant surroundings, he fails to reach her emotionally, "For the first time in their years together her sense of lostness had seeped into his own soul, dissolving the clear walls he had constructed to make himself feel at home" (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 37).

Sandhya's story in *Manhattan Music* ends with her restoration from a futile suicide attempt which compels her to reconsider how she has lead her life, both, in the land of her birth, India, and in the land to which she has migrated, America. In the diasporic context, it is obvious that the culture and the gender to which one belongs to, has a vital share in the formation and

deformation of an identity, which tries to locate itself in the new cultural surrounding miles away from the known lands. Alexander finds herself a woman, “cracked by multiple migrations” (*Fault Lines* 3), depicts this idea through the character of Sandhya and articulates the phases of formation and deformation of an immigrant identity, that makes *Manhattan Music*, many a times, autobiographical. In the novel, Alexander extensively expressed the issues of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ in a foreign land, which is a disturbing experience, because for the sustenance of ‘I-identity’, it needs time and circumstances in locating oneself in a new place and getting used to it, far from the rhythms of the homeland. As Stuart Hall says:

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (225)

The dispersal from a known to an unknown land arouses interrogations of I-identity, which leads towards the concept of ‘new Mestiza’ (a woman of mixed racial or ethnic ancestry) by Gloria Evangelina Anzaldua. Through the concept of ‘new Mestiza’, Anzaldua intends to generate an interstitial and flexible space that comes out of the boundaries, disturbing bilateralities and problematizing the discourses of alienation in the course of its tolerance for uncertainty. In her article entitled “La Conciencia de la Mestiza/ Towards a new Consciousness”, Anzaldua expresses in respect of I-identity:

As a Mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman’s sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of

me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective tured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. I am an act of kneading, of uniting, and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings. (qtd. in Manzananas, and Benito 69)

In this understanding and discovering of a variety of parameters and dimensions of migration and assimilation correspondingly, there emerges a hyphenated identity or a blend of two different identifications in the immigrant identity, which is visibly continuously shifting and altering in the execution of Sandhya. The end of the novel presents the idea that for a woman like Sandhya, although the troubles were in abundance, her efforts do not go completely in vain and her traumas and damages due to migration have started healing. Makarand Paranjape's expression of diasporic self when he articulates: "clinging to the old identity and a resistance to making a transition" (61) appears at the same time as Sandhya's "clinging to the old identity" and ultimately her whole attitude changes as the novel progresses towards the closing lines. She was no longer fearful now, she thought there was a place for her in America and she would live out her life here, she gets up from the bench at Central Park, slips her sandals on and moves with firm steps towards the 'waiting city'. The word 'waiting' indicates that the wounds on Sansdhya's identity as an immigrant have started healing now and a new world with enormous promises is lying before to be explored. It illuminates the idea that Sandhya has succeeded in creating a place for herself far from the cultural roots of her homeland.

In *Manhattan Music*, Alexander intersects the story of Sandhya with the third person narration, by means of slim chapters with first person narration from the point of views of Draupadi Dinkins, an Indo-Trinidadian American performance artist. Alexander's purpose of this intersection is to achieve several aims concurrently, for this structural choice enables her to locate intersections and imbrications between geographical and metaphorical spaces that her narrative evolves in its gradual discourse of ethnicity. Most of the immigrant communities unfold into ethnic groups in the countries of destination to facilitate cultural consistency and continued existence in the host societies. They develop a distinct cultural and social life, which is completely different, from that of the prevailing host. According to Greeley, "... for all practical purposes, we can equate ethnic group with immigrant group" (21). Greeley also believes that the cultural associations can be conserved in two ways: "first, by the unconscious transmission of role expectations, some rooted in the past and others in the early experience in this country, and second, through scholarly or artistic interest in customs of the past" (167). As a result, although the ethnic groups in this country have their own culture, more or less self-governing of their countries of origin, many of the old links survives, indirectly, and unintentionally, or in an extremely self-conscious manner. This makes us aware about the task performed by the associations or organizations of immigrants in the preservation and continuity of the immigrant's culture.

Alexander could happen to be a representative for universal dimensions of the experience of migration, through the character of Draupadi, whose artistic projects focus on the issue of ethnicity and her choice to explore by means of art not only her own ethnic background but also that of other minority groups in America. A few examples of art of Draupadi creates ethnicity, which include a performance piece titled "Women of Color Whirling through the World"

prepared for the Museum of Natural History and an androgynous figure made of wire and condoms built for the AIDS show at Franklin Furnace. Through “Women of Color Whirling through the World”, Draupadi expresses her Indian ancestors rebellion for human rights and social equality, which includes her great-grand-mother, also named Draupadi, and, on her mother’s side, Grandfather Hari, who “became part of the revolt on the good ship *Komagata Maru* docked outside Vancouver” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 93). It also includes his brother, Draupadi’s grand-uncle, Kishan, “a member of a Ghaddar party” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 93), who “threw bombs at Lord Chelmsford in Bombay, then landed up in a San Francisco jail” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 93). The art enables Draupadi to reimagine and reinvent the American space by trying to people the North American continent with her Asian, Chicana, African, and Native American ancestors in the making of the American history. For the AIDS show at Franklin Furnace, the stature is painted orange and placed inside a box, next to which the artist herself is standing with a signboard, displaying a deep sarcasm: “CHOOSE YOUR BLOOD. THIS IS AMERICA” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 46).

The matter of ethnicity as a persistent pattern in the art of Draupadi is also perceived evidently in the detailed description of her another performance at the Poets’ Café, when she was asked to “Dream up a performance piece, something that involves crossing borders. Set it by a riverbank. Imagine us all, black, white, yellow, brown, stripped down, leaping into water” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 118). She prepares a performance that attempts to intertwine together histories of many races and herself plays several roles in the performance. The other three women who co-performed with Draupadi were, “one Black, one Anglo, one Hispanic-Asian” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 119), who are supposed to represent all the major migrant ethnic groups in America and to give voice to their repressed histories. Draupadi represents her

own Indian ethnic group, especially all women twice as subjugated on the grounds of their ethnicity and gender and addressed as “Dottie” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 119), a word used by racist and violent gangs that target “dot-head”, means women who wear the traditional dot (bindi) on their foreheads, who are immigrants from India.

*Manhattan Music* ironically brings forth certain tones which can be interpreted as expressions of the predicament of self, for the protagonists appear as constant victims, destined to tolerate the load of their country’s variegated past personally and socially. Besides this condemnation to tolerate the load of country’s variegated past, the imminent assimilation on the host land has occupied critics like Kapil Kapoor, who consider “Assimilation is the function of movement.” He says:

When we go and live somewhere else among others, we want to get assimilated, to become like them and thereby escape disabilities. But the dignity and the strength of the host culture lies in how much it allows you to maintain your identity.

Assimilation is the function of movement. Maintenance is the function of the context, of the whole cultural matrix into which embedding takes place. (28)

In *Manhattan Music*, Sandhya’s cousin Sakhi Karunakaran symbolizes a mode of self-discovery that defies assimilation as conformity and subordination to racial hierarchy and manifests a new way of claiming belonging in America, simultaneously maintaining her Indian identity. While Sakhi’s husband, Ravi, “had coarsened, grown duller in his time at ATT ... middle-management position ... she [Sakhi] herself had changed in a way that she could not have predicted” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 130). She expresses the predicament of never renounce adjustment:

Travelling places was hard, staying was harder. You had to open your suitcase, lay out the little bits and pieces into ready-made niches. Smooth out the sari, exchange it for a skirt ... Then you tucked the suitcase under the bed and forget about it, started accumulating the bric-a-brac that made you part of the streets around.

(Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 207)

Sakhi happened to meet Draupadi through her cousin Jay and Draupadi sends her a book by Bernal Diaz Castillo (1492-1585), a conquistador. She could gain more knowledge about racism and colonialism through reading the book. She is extremely provoked by the harsh racial prejudice in Diaz's book that considers herself devoting "to antiracist, antisexist work, as she put it" (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 136) and becomes a social worker. The further change is marked in her by her interactions with people from various backgrounds and simultaneously begins to have a sense of belonging in America. She feels, "nothing of the guilt so many of her compatriots bore in switching passports, as if they were mortgaging one world for another" (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 132). Even though Sakhi had decided to live and die here in America, "She was Indian, she would live and die that way. No one could change her skin, or say to her: your parents are not buried in the churchyard in Tiruvella ..." (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 132). However, in "responding to what this life, this ceaseless metamorphosis of spirit, required, Sakhi had become an American" (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 132).

On one hand, in becoming an American while remaining Indian, Sakhi defies assimilation and claims a place for herself and others like her in America. On the other hand, America as manifested by whites and formulated through Eurocentric American culture has changed. This mutual alteration is also implanted in Sandhya's process of 'becoming', when Sakhi introduces her to a diasporic community of women in New York City, during her stay with



Sakhi to recover after a suicide attempt following her break up with Rashid. On her going back to Manhattan, Sandhya felt: “a different city for her now that she was under her cousin’s wing. As she set in the large, ill-ventilated room at Columbia University, among many Indian women, Sandhya felt she had entered a country where she needed neither passport nor green card nor any other signs of belonging” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 211). It gives her a new spirit to survive and find a focused life in America as if, “She was racing into America from the dark vessel of the past and she could hear it singing in her, ready to break free, the load of her womanhood, of the accumulated life, breaking free into an inconceivable sweetness” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 219). She eventually makes a decision that she will “live out her life in America” and face the challenges of life because she realizes now that “There was a place for her here” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 228). At the end of the novel, she is confident enough to declare to Draupadi, “I don’t want to speak your words. I have to find my own ... I have to find my own way” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 222).

In pursuing the possibilities for assimilation, Draupadi herself is undergoing profound changes as she crosses multiple borders in her encounters with exiles and diasporans in New York City. She asks, “Why couldn’t they have named me Dorothy? That name would have hung better on me” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 88). Alexander’s Dorothy or Draupadi is expressing here an anxiety of merging unassumingly into her new setting, but her name isolates her as ‘different’, while what she seeks is assimilation. Transformation of Draupadi, along with other Indian immigrants such as Sandhya and Sakhi in the novel, reveals Alexander’s personal experience in the New York City. In her essay, “Diasporic Writing: Recasting Kinship in a Fragmented World”, Alexander states:

The question of identity that face me as an Indian woman, living and working in New York City, a dense, compacted, racist metropolis, where immigrants from all over the world have poured in, are inseparable from an intimate violence that has entered my probing into the bonds that link inner and outer realms. Self and world. (qtd. in Zhou 226)

Like Alexander, Draupadi is cultivating connections with other immigrants, émigrés, and other Americans in the city to collectively reshape the American cultures and space, and moreover changed by the new environments of America.

In *Manhattan Music*, the sense of otherness haunts Sandhya in considering if her coloured identity hinders her assimilation with the American life: “She gazed at her two hands, extended now in front of her. What if she could peel off her brown skin, dye her hair blonde, turn her body into a pale, Caucasian thing, would it work better with Stephen?” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 7) When Sandhya visits her hometown Tiruvella with the purpose of renewal for her drained self, “she felt she had shed a second skin, an itchy nasty thing. She could breathe a little better ...” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 105). Her house in her hometown, along with its enormous backyard, connects her body and mind strongly with her own roots and liberates her from all the anxieties of displacement, she felt in America. She feels: “In her mother’s garden she could breathe deep, feel the warmth of her own flesh .... Even the heat haze that had driven her indoors ... could not exile her now from these acres of wild grass and flowering trees” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 103).

The same sense of otherness haunts the lives of Draupadi and Sakhi, too. Though born in New York, Draupadi, being a second generation of Indo-Caribbean diaspora, has not been able to get away from the racism of the White Americans. In her words: “I was trying to people the

North American continent, but what sense did it make? I felt like a jot of black pepper sneezed out by an irritated god, flung into the flat, burning present” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 93). However, Sakhi thinks that she “had become an American” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 132), some racist white youths ill-treats her and even throws stones on her in the marketplace. Such incidents indicate towards the depreciating position of diasporic community in foreign land that affects their lives physically and psychologically.

Diasporas come in many forms – forced out of the homeland for religious, cultural, or political reasons or willing to search for a better life. Some members of diaspora consider the host land as a temporary halt, while for some may be a permanent residence. “In whichever way they are constituted,” as Adeno Addis has maintained, “diasporas possess one common feature: although they have made the host land their place of residence (temporarily or permanently), they carry an image of a homeland to which they believe they belong and in which they consider to have a legitimate stake” (qtd. in Aechtner 61). Imagining a homeland is a significant feature of all the members of diaspora community for they use the homeland as a kind of cultural replenishes storage, a source of cultural sustenance and pride.

In *Manhattan Music*, the characters necessitate reimagining and redefining New York City, the place they inhabit in, for their sense of belonging raise questions about the meanings of ‘home’. In the novel, the ethnically distinct and gendered status of dispersion and homelessness serves as a condition for reimagining and redefining ‘home’ understood “not as a comfortable, stable, inherited and familiar space, but instead as an imaginative, politically charged space” (353), to borrow the words of the cultural critic Chandra Talpade Mohanty. She discusses thoroughly about the meaning of home for racial minorities in America, particularly for Asians and women of colour and argues that ‘home’ must be understood,

as an imaginative, politically charged space where the familiarity and the sense of affection and commitment lay in shared collective analysis of social injustice, as well as a vision of radical transformation ... Political solidarity and a sense of family could be melded together imaginatively, to create a strategic space I could call 'home'. (353)

This concept of imaginary home is entailed by Alexander in *Manhattan Music*, especially through the experience of Sandhya. After marriage, Sandhya is completely dependent on her husband, Stephen for almost everything and finds herself confined to a domestic life dedicated to the predictable duties of a wife and a mother, which she wanted to escape by seeking an education in India and marrying Stephen. Contrary to her expectations, "She felt an odd bitterness fill her at the lot she had chosen, her life as a woman thrusting her almost into the very role her mother would have picked for her" (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 23). She felt as if, "something in her needed to slip free" (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 9). Stephen, though a caring husband, has little time to spare for his wife and gradually, unintentionally, they move apart from each other. In contrast to the "memories of shared emotion on the cool slopes of Nainital" (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 38), Sandhya only finds that "now she couldn't even speak openly with him, locked as she was into a world she felt she had not chosen" (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 38). Stephen's decision to remain "oddly absent ... from the world Stephen had brought her to" (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 39), to give her space and to encourage her self-sufficiency does not solve her problems that she faces due to her 'dark femaleness' (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 39). Sandhya begins to stay aloof from her husband may be because of their cultural dissimilarity and unequal social positions. When they are visiting Stephen's mother, Muriel, Sandhya notices that her mother-in-law's housemaid from Trinidad

has the same skin colour as her own. While Muriel said in her high-pitched way, ‘Never forget you are marrying into this...the land of opportunities!’ (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 8), Sandhya finds it otherwise. She finds herself, “locked as she was into a world she felt she had not chosen” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 38). She feels, “There was a longing in her to go out, into the streets of Manhattan, saunter freely on the sidewalks, past the stalls of fruits and vegetables, past the scrawny lime trees” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 39).

Sandhya’s encounters with Draupadi, Rashid el Obeid, a Scholar from Egyptian and the ex-boyfriend of Draupadi and a community of women of colour in New York, introduces her to a different New York City that altered her sense of self and her relationship to the city, in which “parts of the globe, places she had no experience of, flowed into her” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 54). Draupadi exposed Sandhya to poverty, homelessness, and dislocation due to the differences of ethnicity and gender, as well the traces of postcolonial diasporas into a different part of Manhattan. Sandhya’s relationship with Rashid also plays a prominent role in her becoming otherwise than a wife or mother. As immigrants, both Sandhya and Rashid are sailing in the same boat to the quest for the meaning of their identities. Both of them are new at Manhattan and are dealing with more or less similar instability and nervousness. She felt, “Rashid was enormously learned, pressured from within by the multiple speeches that jostled in him” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 69). When both of them together alone, they enjoyed sharing similar memories of their childhood and hearing each other singing in their own languages. “Both he and Sandhya were foreigners in America, they would cradle each other. He would cast her afloat on the Nile and with her, he would sail on the Ganges” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 76). Sandhya also could release her sexuality through Rashid, who becomes her retreat from self for when she was with him, she “let herself slip, sank her bewildered consciousness into what

she felt was her strength”, and despite “how little she really knew him she longed to dive into his past, be stung into newness by him” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 142). However, this relationship enhances her sense of existence for when Rashid sings in his language, “How she loved it [Rashid’s singing in Arabic], those sunlit landscapes sparkled by his voice, sights and sounds that promised to release her” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 143). Sandhya hopes that Rashid will become a source of strength to drag her out of loneliness and will set her free from the depressive nostalgia for her homeland. She started fantasizing their house together in Manhattan and that she will wait for him there. However, their love affair cannot prove to be an alternate for independence, nor does it enable Sandhya to claim a place in America. Rashid symbolizes just “[a] passion that could simply live” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 211), when he confesses that he cannot maintain a committed relationship, as he expresses, “... immigrants are like that. Our spiritual self scooped up from here and there. All our memories sizzling. But we need another. Another for the electricity. So we can live” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 154). The bitter realization that her yearning for a real home in America with her lover can never be possible, Sandhya becomes a wandering diasporan in the limbo between past and present: “But it’s all shattered now, that shining picture. And even the bright landscape of my childhood has cracked, cast me out” (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 211). She eventually decides to break up with Rashid in order to get back to herself and her decision to end her love affair is a turning point in her struggle for selfhood.

### **2.3. *Bye-Bye Blackbird* by Anita Desai**

Anita Desai was born on July 24, 1937, in Mussoorie, India to a father, who was a Bengali Businessman and a German mother. Though Desai grew up with English, German and Hindi, English was the first language she learned. Soon after receiving her B.A. in English

literature, Desai worked for a year at the Max Mueller Bhavan in Calcutta before getting married in 1958. She was a visiting fellow at Girton College, Cambridge University, in 1986. In 1987-89, she taught at Smith College. Since then she has been the Purington Professor of English at Mount Holyoke College, where she teaches creative writing for one semester, spending the rest of her time in India. Since she grew up and did most of her writing in India, one may wonder at her inclusion among Indian diasporic writers. This inclusion, however, can be justified in that she views India from a distance, as it was, an element basic to the diasporic sensibility.

Desai's first publication was a story in an American children's magazine. She has published twelve books of fiction and numerous essays, reviews and articles. Except for *Games at Twilight* (1978) and *Diamond Dust* (2000), collections of stories, the rest of her books are novels- *Cry, The Peacock* (1963), *Voices in the City* (1965), *Bye-bye Blackbird* (1971), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984), *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), *Journey to Ithaca* (1995), *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), *The Zigzag Way* (2004), *The Artist of Disappearance* (2011), three of them for children: *The Peacock Garden* (1974), *Cat on a Houseboat* (1976) and *The Village by the Sea* (1982).

Desai's very first novel *Cry, the Peacock* immediately brings her fame as the finest of her generation of writers. As Anita Singh writes, "Desai's novels and short stories evoke characters, events and moods with recourse to a rich use of visual imagery and details, which has led to comparisons with the modernist sensibilities of T.S. Eliot, William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf" (*Existential* 90). Most of Desai's writings focus on the Anglicized, middle-class women's struggles to triumph over the societal restrictions forced by a tradition-bound patriarchal culture. Her most of narratives substantiate the significance of familial attachments,

which causes the tensions between different generations. As stylistically different and less conventional diasporic writer, Desai's writings also deal with themes such as German anti-Semitism, the dissolution of traditional Indian values, and Western stereotypes of India and concerns with issues such as hybridity, shifting identity and imaginary homelands. Two of Desai's novels deal specifically with the predicament of immigrants: Indians in Britain in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971) and Germans in India in *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988). As Sumitra Kukreti expresses, "*Bye-Bye Blackbird* depicts circular journey of a soul searching for a perfect life, as she feels that all these immigrants are prone to a schizophrenia and predicament to live or not live in England" (43).

*Bye-Bye Blackbird*, one of the lesser-known works of Desai, is a genuine study of man-woman relationships tormented by cultural encounters and explores the lives of the first generation Indian migrants in quest of a new identity in an alien society of England. Of all the novels of Desai, this novel is the most closely associated to her own experience, as she said in an interview with Atma Ram, "of all my novels *Bye-Bye Blackbird* is the most rooted and experienced and the least literary in derivation" (qtd. in Jha 157). She believes: "*Bye-Bye Blackbird* is the closest of all my books to actuality – practically everything in it is drawn directly from my experience of living with Indian immigrants in London" (qtd. in Jha 157). In the context of the novel, Maini's view can be taken into consideration as he praises Desai for her "natural poetic and chromatic qualities" in evoking the "sights and sounds" of London and for the descriptions of the "fables English countryside," which, however, he values more for the "rich Keatsian descriptions than for their dramatic intent" (225-26). He also criticizes the superficially drawn characters, who represent stereotypical immigrants and faults Desai for manipulating rather than dramatizing their actions. Discussing about the lacking of the novel, Dr.



Hari Mohan Prasad, the former Professor and Head of Department of English at Magadh University, expresses in “Sound or Sense: A Study in Anita Desai’s *Bye-Bye Blackbird*”:

The novel of Achebe, the African talent, of Wilson Havis, the West Indies artist, of Patrick Whites, the Australian sage or of Raja Rao, the Indian ‘sadhuk’ are successful not because they reverberate with the rhetoric of revolt or the clash of consciousness but because of the interactions between living situation and characters palpitating with life. This is what misses in the total effect of *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. (qtd. in Anita Singh 66)

Contrary to these criticisms, some critics have observed that the characters glow with life, the scenes are delicately painted and the nuances of changing mood skillfully transmitted. It has also been observed that more than a novel, it is a psychological study of the love-hate relationship the immigrants have towards their country of adoption.” Welty considers *Bye-Bye Blackbird* as, “A novel is essentially bound up in the local, the real, the present, and the day-to-day experience of life” (254).

The story of *Bye-Bye Blackbird* revolves around three characters - Dev, a short-tempered, pessimistic and ambitious Bengali young man who migrates to England in pursuit of higher studies and aspires to get back to India with the reason of grand welcome i.e. foreign degree and not to live in a country where he was insulted and unwanted and, Dev’s host Adit, a fellow Bengali, who was forced to leave his homeland out of dissatisfaction with his Indian job and settle abroad for a decent income, now living in England with his English wife Sarah for quite some time. He makes every effort to persuade himself of being satisfied with his new life in adopted land and third character is Sarah, a calm and flexible woman.

The issue of settling is an issue to any member of diaspora community unless one connects oneself with any of the two lands, especially in host land for they have to undergo lot of prejudices, harassment, mental torture and sense of displacement out of cultural change, which are well expressed by Desai in this novel. Dev is the prominent victim of the sense of dislocation. He takes England as “a land of death everlasting” (Desai 127). Maintaining distance from India made him feel intertwined trapped and suffocated. The only thing that gave him relief was the cedar tree, willows, meadows and woods, whenever he looked out of the window. The novel depicts the feelings of utter sadness, despair and frustration of the first generation Indian immigrants in Britain at being an Asian, who although adopt a lot of British lifestyle, attitudes and cultural practices, think that their colour is a main setback. A foreign land is at last a foreign, never becomes one's own, this is quite apparent when Adit is upset and expresses, “...why does everything have to come to this – that we’re Indians and you’re English and we’re living in your country and therefore we’ve all got to behave in a special way, different from normal people?” (Desai 183)

After bitter experience of his in-laws, Adit, who loved mostly everything about England, starts feeling dislocated and realizes that he has to escape from England “and he began to tell Sarah of this nostalgia that had become an illness, an ache” (Desai 178). He tells Sarah, “Sarah, you know I’ve loved England more than you, I’ve often felt myself half-English, but it was only pretence, Sally. Now it has to be the real thing. I must go. You will come?” (Desai 198) Sarah is pleased that Adit has at last taken a decision to return to his homeland and agrees to join him to India. When she declares her pregnancy, Adit is delighted and declares to her that the child would be born in his own land, India.

It is not only the Asian immigrants, Adit and Dev who experience the sense of displacement and identity crisis, even without getting relocated physically to another country; Sarah loses her identity in her own native land. For a girl, who marries in her own culture, it is easier for her to adjust in a new environment and people. However, interracial and intercultural marriage causes adjustment problem for a girl like Sarah, who married to an Indian, which are not easy to overcome. Desai has remarkably expressed an identity crisis faced by Sarah,

She had become nameless, she had shed her name as she had shed her ancestry and identity, and she sat there, staring as though she watched them disappear. Or could only someone who knew her, knew of her background and her marriage, imagine this? Would a stranger have seen in her a lost maiden in search of her name that she seemed, with a sudden silver falling on the light of glamour, to an unusually subdued and thoughtful Adit? (Desai 33)

Sarah has to tolerate the conflict and attitudinal differences within her own community as she is the wife of an Asian. Her experiences are distressing and she feels an ‘outsider’ in the company of her own compatriots. Her friends and colleagues at school where she works, no longer approach her in the way they used to before her wedding to Adit. In fact, now they are more interested in raising questions of her stay in England and her husband’s residential status in England. The consequential stress, suffering and a sense of remorse depart her from her English society, even her parents bury she-self inside her she-made cocoon. She always tries to hide her offended feelings and distract others, fearing the contempt of her own people, with archetypal Anglo-Saxon serenity. However, “her hurried rush and tough briskness of one suspicious, one on the defensive” reveals her bewilderment (Desai 32). Sarah feels homeless and loses her identity in her own country, which is the biggest sarcasm. The question continues to haunt her:

Who was she – Mrs. Sen who had been married in a red and gold Benares brocade sari one burning, bronzed day in September, or Mrs. Sen the Head's secretary, who sent out the bills and took in the cheques, kept order in the school and was known for her efficiency ? Both these creatures were frauds, each had a large, shadowed element of charade about it. When she briskly dealt with letters ... she felt an impostor, but equally, she was playing a part when she tapped her fingers to the sitar music on Adit's records ... she had so little command over these two charades she played each day, one in the morning at school and one in the evening at home, that she could not even tell with how much sincerity she played one role or the other. They were roles and when she was playing them, she was nobody. Her face was only a mask, her body only a costume. Where was Sarah? Where was Sarah? ...she wondered if Sarah had any existence at all, and then she wondered, with great sadness, if she would ever be allowed to step offstage, leave the theatre and enter the real world – whether English or Indian, she did not care, she wanted only its sincerity, its truth. (Desai 36)

Marriage as a medium of assimilation is repeated in many diasporic writings. In this novel also Sarah tries to adjust and accommodate without showing any master-slave complexity or racial dominance. At home, she has to adjust with the mannerisms of her husband, Indian way of cooking and at times take lessons from Adit, which sometimes she dislikes and at her mother's place, she is mostly interrogated against her family and her adopted culture. Her mother asks, "Do you know, I always thought Indians were – what do you call 'em-intro-intro-Introverts? Yes yes. People say they are so moody and self-conscious. But my dear, your – your husband and his friends, they are the very opposite, aren't they?" (Desai 137). Sarah has to

maintain silence in such complicated situations or divert the attention of the gathered, to avoid a repulsive stay. Torn between two cultures, she understands that she has to adjust to the situations, so she tries her best not to face upsetting situations within her family and community. She maintains hold of her mannerisms, but incapable to handle Adit's demands all the time. Meanwhile the war between India and Pakistan starts and out of long-distance patriotism, one day Adit declares that he wants to go back to India and asks Sarah, now expecting their first child, whether she would like to accompany, which she almost readily agrees. At the same time, the very thought of being 'uprooted' starts bothering her, as she is a victim of her own decisions now. She thinks, "There was the baby. There was the voyage. The uprooting. And all at a time when she felt capable of doing no more than quietly sitting down and quietly cradling her child inside the fluids that rocked and heaved inside her body" (Desai 201). Although she is courageous enough to face any circumstances in life, the feeling of being 'uprooted' creates fears to Sarah. One afternoon when Sarah is alone and Emma, her friend cum landlady is upstairs, conducting a committee meeting, she recollects her recent emotions:

She felt all the pangs of saying good bye to her past twenty four years. It was her English self that was receding and fading and dying, she knew it, it was her English self to which she must say good bye. That was what hurt – not saying good bye to England would remain as it was, only at a greater distance from her, but always within the scope of a return visit. England, she whispered, but the word aroused no special longing or possessiveness in her. English, she whispered, and then her instinctive reaction was to clutch at something and hold on to what was slipping through her fingers already. (Desai 215)

She can neither give up her native culture nor completely adopt the Indian culture. During their farewell, when Christine enquires about her baby, Sarah says, “You mean boy or girl? I don’t mind either. Or do you mean who it will look like, Adit or me? I hope it will look like Adit, brown as brown, with black hair and black, black eyes” (Desai 218). Christine replies, “Well, in that case, darling ...I suppose it will be better to have the child in India” (Desai 218). Her identity as an English woman is now vanished, as she is now Mrs. Sen, a multi-cultured wife of an Asian, instead Sarah, the English woman. She hopes that her final decision to join Adit to India may bring a relief to her because her own country has not let her remain a person, rather roles of ‘Mrs. Sen’ and ‘Sarah’ and “when she was not playing them, she was nobody” (Desai 36). At least in India, she hopes, she will have only one role to play, the role of Adit’s wife, Mrs. Sen.

Racial conflict and aggressive resistance are the usual consequences the immigrants have to deal with in the adopted country, England in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, which is full of situations of characters struggling to survive the racial assault. Dev has come to study at the London School of Economics with his intellectual aspirations. At first he is averse to the idea of staying on in England as an immigrant, for he considers London as “a jungly city” (Desai 12) and has no wish to “live in a country where I [Dev] was insulted and unwanted” (Desai 19). He finds it hard to get accustomed with “the silence and emptiness of it [London city] – the houses and blocks of flats, streets and squares and crescents – all, to his eyes and ears, dead, unalive, revealing so little of lives that go on...utterly silent, deserted – a cold wasteland of brick and tile” (Desai 64-65). He ridicules his friend Adit, the heir of a rich Calcutta family, working in a city office like a bourgeois person. What he dislikes most is the “immigrants, sheepishness and abject loss of self-respect” (Pathak 29). He calls Adit a “boot-licking today. Spineless imperialist-lover” (21) He

adds, “You would sell your soul and your passport too, for a glimpse at two shillings, of some draughty old stately home” (Desai 21).

On one occasion Dev and Adit had a get-together at a friend’s home to eat and drink in the company of other colored immigrants. As Sheffer believes, “Modern diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homeland” (3). A Pakistani emigrant, Samar also joined them and was enjoying the evening. Sarah and Adit were enjoying the bhangra dance. As the group was at the pick of enjoyment, they hear a loud voice, “Wrap it up, you blighters, where d’you think you are, eh?” (Desai 25) The scene changes and the thundering voice broke up their joy and intoxication and there was a silence. Dev, feeling slighted, says, “The trouble with you emigrants is that you go soft. If anyone in India told you to turn off your radio, you wouldn’t dream of doing it. You might even pull out a knife and blood would spill. Over here all you do is shut up and look sat upon” (Desai 26). Samar narrates the incident to others, when he was called a ‘bloody Pakistani’ (Desai 28) as he denied shutting his umbrella at the demand of an Englishman.

Dev is more often despondent by the way the whites treat the immigrants, who are frequently subjected to racial discrimination. Such incidents leave a deep scar on him and he feels divided between the opportunity he has been offered by England and the feelings of putting up with suppression and prejudice. He also finds himself uncomfortable to adjust with the “English habit of keeping all doors and windows tightly shut ...of guarding their privacy as they guarded their tongues” (Desai 64). In the novel, racial discrimination often gets expression through the allegations against the coloured immigrants for spreading dirt and filth by a character Mrs. Simpson, who while taking her spaniel for a run, chances to step on a group of Asian

immigrants taking sleep after holidaying in a park. She passes a spiteful comment against them: “Littered with Asian! Must get Richard to move out of Clapham, it is impossible now” (Desai 18).

Adit generally insists to visit his earlier landlady in Harrow annually, while Sarah is weirdly unwilling about the visit. Adit says, “That’s where I lived for three years, Dev. That’s the only landlady I stayed with for more than a fortnight. The others all threw me out, but I stayed with them, with the Millers, for three years” (Desai 78). During the visit at the Millers’, although Adit is treated as an outsider and his visit is rather unwelcomed, he is genuinely enquires about their daughter, but “Mrs. Miller does not seem to like any personal questions about her house or family. It is as though she wishes to reject the fact of Adit having lived in their house for three years” (Desai 81). Mrs. Miller also makes a sarcastic comment to Adit, “I have an excellent lodger now – we are most satisfied with him. He does not take his meals with us, and he is very quiet (unlike you), so he is no trouble at all. We are very satisfied now” (Desai 82). Adit is no doubt mortified, but he controls the situation and takes leave of Millers with Sarah and Dev. Their visit is an unpleasant surprise to the Millers and their neighbors that on their way back, “neighbors stare curiously from behind their technicolored rose trees and a dog barks and barks” (Desai 82). This experience is unforgettable, and Adit “is perfectly aware of the schizophrenia that is infecting him like the disease to which all Indians abroad, he declares, are prone. At times he invites it, at times he fights it. He is not sure what it might be like to be one himself, in totality. He is not sure. Any longer” (Desai 86). His uncertainty is best described:

In this growing uncertainty, he feels the divisions inside him divided further, and then re-divided once more. Simple reactions and feeling lose their simplicity and develop complex angles, facets, shades and tints. He is too excited or agitated a



condition to hold the weighing scales with a steady hand and see whether his pleasures outweigh his disappointments, or vice versa. 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 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 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)

There comes a major twist in the lives of the trio – Adit, Sarah and Dev, when they visit Adit's in-laws, Mrs. and Mr. Roscommon-James, who spending a reclusive retired life at a village near Winchester. Surprisingly, Adit is thrilled about the visit while Sarah is not. Dev joins them in a mental state of uninterested and unconcerned towards the land where he has begun to feel perplexed. On one hand, spending nearly a week in the serene and exquisite atmosphere of the countryside, Dev is touched by the simplicity of the local peasantry and realize that there is more than its arrogance in England. He becomes determined “to seek, discover and win the England of his dreams and reading, the England he had quickly seen was the most poetic, the most innocent and enduring of Englands, in a secret campaign. At the end he believed he did” (Desai 164). He was jubilant at the freedom and privacy he had won for himself in this free and private land. “It was something he was visiting for the first time in his life, yet he had known it all along – in his reading, in his daydreams – and now he found his dreams had been an exact, a detailed, a brilliant and mirror-like reflection of reality. English literature! English poetry! He wanted to shout and, instead, raised his arms to the sky, clasped them, in pagan worship, in schoolboy excitement” (Desai 166). On the other hand, Adit, who was more excited planning the

tour, ends up feeling disoriented and annoyed due to the cold reception by his in-laws, especially his mother-in-law, Mrs. Roscommon-James, who treats him rather differently. Mrs. Roscommon-James finds it intolerable when her son-in-law, Adit interfere her in kitchen along with his other Indian friends: “It was evident she was thinking that all she had heard about the filthy ways of the Asian immigrants was correct” (Desai 131). Adit is annoyed, loses his control and develops such a hatred for England that he starts suspecting everything English to be abusive and discouraging: “...he stood staring, not at one of the posters he so delighted in but at a piece of *Nigger, go home* graffiti on the walls that had previously nearly skidded off the surface of his eyeballs without actually penetrating. Now he is screwed up his eyes and studied it as though it were a very pertinent sign board” (Desai 177).

Out of depression and nostalgia for his homeland, he starts dining at shabby Indian restaurants with his wife, listening to Indian music etc. He suffers from a crisis of identity and his depression begins to affect his professional life and his efficiency. He feels depressed of “Mrs. Roscommon-James’ sniffs and barks and Dev’s angry sarcasm” (Desai 172) as well as from the fact that “Sarah had shut him out, with a bang and a snap, from her childhood of one-eared pandas and large jigsaw puzzles” (Desai 172). He says, “My mother-in-law hates and despises me. They make fun of the life I lead and the ideals I profess. Therefore I am angry. I am hurt” (Desai 172). These transitory moods of annoyance are new to him and “...faced with one, he was unable to deal with it – he merely stood still and felt his leaden feet sink in as though in quick-sands” (Desai 172). Like Adit, any immigrant at such moments would tend to retreat to his own culture and past in search of his lost individuality. The distance of years from his country of origin gives Adit a better perception and his disliking for his country recedes and replaced by nostalgia. The fascination towards England is over and his rootedness to the England is proved

zero. “The ferocity of his growing nostalgia broke that stone dam that had silenced him for so long” (Desai 178) and though uncertain of the bright future in India, he decides to return. He feels, “whatever it is it will be Indian, it will be my natural condition, my true circumstance. I must go and face all that now” (Desai 198). He decides to abandon the burden of his ‘half-English pretence’ (Desai 198) and to go ‘home’. Dev, who initially blamed everything English, finally decides to stay and firmly establishing his ‘roots’ in England and reap a rich harvest and Adit, who felt so much oneness with the English initially, is leaving England for India. When Adit and Sarah bid him goodbye, Dev stood silent, watching, for the most complex feelings and conflict within and at last, he calls out, ‘Bye-Bye Blackbird’! In the novel, Desai has depicted the continuous arrival and departure of the immigrants, in spite of inevitably unfavourable circumstances. She writes: “...England’s green and gold fingers had let go of Adit and clutched at Dev instead. England had let Adit drop and fall away as if she had done with him or realized that he had done with her and caught and enmeshed his friend Dev.” (Desai 223).

The most prevalent themes in Desai’s novels are existential uncertainty, alternation, exile, torment of uprootedness and cultural alienation that is drawn directly from her own experiences of living with Indian immigrants in London. She remarks: “This has brought two separate stands into my life. My roots are divided because of the Indian soil on which I grew and European culture which I inherited from my mother.” (qtd. in Vyas and Mehta 202).

Desai’s novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, incarcerates another type of alienation as R.S. Sharma says, “the tension between the local and the immigrant blackbird involves issues of alienation and accommodation that the immigrant has to confront in an alien and yet familiar world.” (35). The novel explores the complex dilemma of alienation by portraying immigrant’s attractions as well as repulsions towards the host land.

Dev comes to London to pursue his studies but as the plot develops, he is completely shattered and finds himself isolated due to the silence and hollowness of London city that disturbs him and makes him uneasy. He feels like an alien, insecure and unidentified in London from both the Indians like his friend Adit, who is completely enchanted by London and English people, who lack sympathy and do not recognize their neighbours and behave like strangers. His anguish is expressed rightly by Desai:

Dev ventures into the city...The menacing slither of the escalators strikes panic into a speechless Dev as he swept down with an awful sensation of being taken where he does not want to go. Down, down and farther down – like Alice falling, falling down the rabbit hole, like a Kafka stranger wondering through the dark labyrinth of a prison...Dev is swamped inkily, with a great dread of being caught, step in the underground by some accident, some collapse, and being slowly suffocated to a worm's death, never to emerge into freshness and light. (Desai 59)

Dev is tormented sensitively and mentally, trapped between approval and disapproval, between patriotism and cosmopolitanism. Out of the sense of alienation, his conception and perception of new country are at inconsistent due to the experiences he gets and starts comparing and relating everything to India. In London he daydreams of prevalence of an Indian empire, where the roles between the two cultures- Indian and English- can be reversed:

Let history turn the table now. Let the Indian traders come to England- the Sikhs and the Sindhis with their brass elephants and boxes of spice and tea. Let them take over the City... Then let them spread over the country the Sikh with their turban and swords and Sindhis with their gold bars and bangles. Let them build their forts along the coast, in Brighton and Bristol and Bath. Then let our army come across,

our Gorakha and our Rajputs with the camel corps and elephants of Rajasthan... No one shall cook stews any more, or bangers and mash. Let us feed them all on chilli pickles, *tandoori* chicken and *rassum*. Let all British women take to the graceful sari and all British men to the noble dhoti... (Desai 63)

Kalpana S. Wandrekar observes different phases of Dev's alienated status:

The bewildered alien, the charmed observer, the outraged outsider and thrilled sightseer all at once in succession. Dev's experience in England makes him neurotic because he is unable to attach meaning to his experience. He is aware of this state of chaos and confusion in him caused by the outside pressure. (41)

As the novel reaches at the edge of climax, Dev slowly and steadily adapts himself to the new environment and takes his final decision not to return to India and not to lead the way of the masses there. His determination to stay in England is expressed:

I am here, he intoned, as an ambassador. I am showing these damn imperialists with their lost colonies complex that we are free people now, with our own personalities that this veneer of an English education has not obscured, and not afraid to match ours with theirs. I am here...to interpret my country to them, to conquer England as they once conquered India, to show them, to show them. (Desai 122)

On the contrary, his friend Adit Sen, a young man from India lives in England with his English wife, working in England as a commoner at Blue skies, is happy with his job and feels a sense of cultural kinship with new land. Although, this intimacy with new land does not demolish the sense of own cultural identity, he admires England for its fertile, lavish and flourishing landscape. At times he even groans: "O England's green and grisly land, I love you

and only a babu can” (Desai 128). Dev bitterly reacts to everything in England, the landscape and the habits of people, while in the beginning Adit defends and appreciates England:

I love her. I'm so happy here. I hardly notice the few drawbacks...I'm happy here. I like going into local for a pint on my way home to Sarah. I like wearing good tweed on a foggy November day. I like the convent garden opera house- it has a chandelier like a life of fireflies, when I stand under it, I feel like a millionaire. I like the girls here- I like their nylon stockings and the way their noses tilt upwards, and I used to like dancing with them. I like stamped pudding and treacle. I like- I like thatched cottages and British history and reading the letters in The Times.  
(Desai 19-20)

However, scenario changes in the last part of the novel after the visit of Sarah's parents. Adit secretly starts being nostalgic about Indian food, music and friends: “A sudden clamour was aroused in him, like a child's tantrum, to see again an India's sunset, its wild conflagration, rose and orange, flamingo pink and lemon, scattering into million sparks in the night sky” (Desai 174). As he left house for work “the shuffle of his feet, the lurch of his shoulders and the sideways look of his eyes out of an enclosed, darkened face exactly resembles the looks and posture of those Indian whom Adit has so despised- the eternal immigrants who can never accept their new home and continue to walk the streets like strangers in enemy territory, frozen, listless, but dutifully trying to be busy, unobtrusive and, however superficially, to belong” (Desai 177). Even when he thinks of a brief visit to India, the images of Indian food, dress and music are predominant in his mind: “When I have a whole month of leave saved up. I'll go. My mother will cook *hilsa* fish wrapped in banana leaves for me. My sisters will dress Sarah in saris and gold ornaments. I'll lie in bed till ten every morning and sit up half the night listening to the

shehnai and sitar” (Desai 49). Suddenly Adit started feeling himself as a stranger in England, and realizes alienated from the English people, as he frankly admits to be “a stranger, a non-belonger” (Desai 180) in England. He begins to compare with bitterness the colours of festivals and celebrations India with the thinness and drabness of celebrations in England. “He longed with pain to see the fireworks and oil-lamps of a Diwali night again, to join in a Holi romp of flying coloured water and powder and leaping to the music of drums. Instead, he trudged tiredly up three flights of stairs to Bella’s and Samar’s flat...to celebrate Bella’s birthday” (Desai 180). Once he confessed to Sarah about his pathetic and unreal stay in London:

I can’t live here anymore. Our lives here – they’ve been so unreal, don’t you feel it? Little India in London. All our records and lamb curries and sing-songs, it’s all so unreal. It has no reality at all, we just pretend all the time. I’m twenty-seven now. I’ve got to go home and start living a real life. I don’t know what real life there will mean. (Desai 198)

Adit takes a U-turn to return to India with his wife, on which Sumitra Kurketi comments:

Ironically, notwithstanding all his appraisal...He realizes that England can provide him neither of these (liberty, individualism) wherever he goes, he becomes a victim of racial discrimination and apartheid and is constantly regarded as...a second grade citizen...an intruder. (qtd. in Bhattacharya 37)

In the novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* it is not Dev or Adit, who suffers most with the sense of alienation, but Adit’s submissive wife Sarah. As Meenakshi Mukherjee writes:

The most successful characterization in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* is not that of an Indian, but of an English woman who has cut herself off from the mainstream of English life by marrying an immigrant Indian. Sarah Sen is a typical Anita Desai character-

complex, hypersensitive and intelligent- who can claim kinship with the introverted heroines of her two earlier novels, *Cry the Peacock* and *Voices in the City*. (qtd. in Anita Singh 65)

By following her heart and marrying an Asian, Sarah has violated the norms of English society for which she is always subject to taunts of not only her colleagues but even of young pupils of the school where she works. She always tries to avoid any queries regarding her husband and personal life but her compeers, like Julia who is a teacher in her school, take a wicked pleasure in asking such questions. Julia comes out with typical British superciliousness embarrassing sarcasm, which horrifies Sarah to the core:

But to display her letters from India, to discuss her Indian husband, would have forced her to parade like an impostor, to make claims to a life, an identity that she did not herself feel to be her own, although they would have been more than ready to believe her...She had stammered out her replies, too unhappy even to accuse them of tactlessness or inquisitiveness and, for her pains, had heard Julia sniff, as she left the room, “if she’s ashamed of having an Indian husband, why did she go and marry him ? (Desai 38-39)

Sarah also undergoes the torments at the hands of her pupils, who started ignoring her and taunting her with the words like, “Hurry, hurry, Mrs. Curry” (Desai 36) and “Where’s the fire, pussy cat?” (Desai 34) Whenever she goes for shopping she evades going to the nearby stores, instead she prefers going to big supermarket where no one is aware about her Asian associations and she would be able remain an unidentified customer. Such incidents started affecting her day-to-day life, as in spite of all her precautions, she cannot balance between pretension and reality, resulting into schizophrenia. In England she is not at peace for she is tired



of putting on fakeness and wants genuineness that would hopefully come only when she leaves England. She wants to be a real and genuine person indifferent about English or Indian.

Sarah's problems are more intricate for she has married to a person whose cultural background is completely different from her own and whose race was once ruled over by her own. Even though living in a foreign country for long time, Adit proves to be a typical Indian male who dominates his wife and even though Sarah belongs to the advanced West, she is basically a woman easily manipulated and controlled. As Adit remarks once, "...These English wives are quiet manageable really, you know. Not as fierce as they look - very quiet and hard-working as long as you treat them right and roar at them regularly once or twice a week..." (Desai 31). Many a times Sarah's desires are condemned by Adit and lead her to feel suppressed and losing her own self in her own country. Adit is least bothered about the convenience of this English wife, which is clear from the following: "...Wash up, Sarah, dear and go to bed and don't mind me when I fall over the cat...unable to part with the warmth of shared experience and shared humour, leaving Sarah to pick up empty cups and glasses and full ash trays and yawn her way to bed..." (Desai 29).

Sarah always tries her best to remain a sincere wife for she wish to sustain her martial life. Out of all wives in Anita Desai's novels, she is the best in understanding and supporting her husband. When her husband realizes the hollowness of his existence in England, as a cooperative wife, Sarah understands him well and knows how to handle him:

She could not tell what effect the smaller refusal or contradiction might have on him... She dreaded such a reaction. Rather she would sacrifice anything at all, in order to maintain, however superficially, a semblance of order and discipline in her house, in her relationship with him. His whole personality seemed to her to have

cracked apart into an unbearable number of disjointed pieces, rattling together noisily and disharmoniously. If she allowed this chaos to reflect upon their marriage, she knew its fragments would not remain jangling together but would scatter, drift and crumble. (Desai 195)

Sarah has the similar feeling of alienation as her husband and Dev, even worst. She resides in a two-folded irreconcilable social and cultural world that will never meet and that split her. She gets herself alienated from her own society for marrying an Indian and remains an outsider in the Indian society for being an English. Although she is not a physically deracinated person, her condition is uncertain. She does not belong anywhere and feels herself to be an outsider and an alien. Her predicament is not that of finding new roots but it is that of deracination and hence deep-seated. At the time of her departure, Sarah is sad to leave: "It was her English self that was receding and fading and dying, she knew, it was her English self to which she must say good-bye" (Desai 215).

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