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DISTORTION OF MULTICULTURALISM AS ENVISIONED IN ANITA DESAI'S BYE BYE BLACKBIRD.

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has broken the barriers among the countries and made immigration a necessity in the present scenario. Developed countries were in need of labourers at less cost. Developing and underdeveloped countries seek opportunities for labour which are not found in their native countries due to overpopulation, economic instability, cut throat competition, poor work conditions, latent deep rooted corruption, abject poverty, low per capita income etc. Immigration takes in its trail differences in race, colour, religion, culture, language etc., which have given birth to the term multiculturalism.

KEYWORDS: Anita Desai's Bye Bye Blackbird, Globalization, poor work conditions.

1.INTRODUCTION:

Multiculturalism has



evolved from the international immigration. It has been considered a solution to the problems arising from cultural diversity. It has been proposed to help people of different cultures live peacefully side by side and promote the welfare of immigrants as well. It not only advocates the co existence of cultural differences in a society but also demands recognition and respect for the minority cultures from the host countries.

The need for immigration was understood by the western countries and they turned it to their advantage with the concept of Melting Pot.

It meant assimilation of cultures with that of the host countries. It implied the blend of cultural differences in race, religion, colour, creed, language etc., to form a new whole. It was not only possible but also undesirable. And the concept of Melting Pot lost its hold on the immigrants.

Since immigration is unavoidable, the new concept of multiculturalism is advocated by the socialists to balance the demands of both the natives and the immigrants.

Multiculturalists have made it clear that every single political society contains more than one

culture. Severing their beliefs from the immigrants and getting them amalgamated into the culture of the host country mean killing their self. It slowly has led to the demise of assimilation of cultures.

Multiculturalism was viewed initially as a human policy for accommodating the migrants from the non speaking English nations in Europe. The host countries framed liberal democratic policies to accommodate and retain the immigrant minority groups in their countries. Genuine multiculturalism requires the recognition and due place for the minority communities in the polity i.e., in the political voice of the society. That kind of public recognition is an assertion that minority cultures in a society are desirable and they have a special place in the country's history and identity. It is expected to

make adjustment in law favourable to the minority communities. There should be provision for special privileges for the minority communities. The next step should be a move towards self governance, a right to govern themselves.

The political policies have been only in principle but not in practice because cultural diversity has not been approved by the majority. As a result, there have erupted community clashes everywhere. Some States have resorted to 'ethnic cleansing'. The policies have been framed in some States in such a manner that they insist on forcible assimilation.

Some of them have not discouraged cultural diversity. They are not for assimilation but for toleration. Toleration doesn't imply approval or respect for the beliefs and practices of the diverse groups. It implies only non interference.

In addition to toleration, the policies guard the minority communities from unfair treatment in the name of race, religion, colour, language, gender etc., in all the fields including education and employment.

Besides the public recognition for the minority communities, individual liberty should be ensured in a multicultural society. It means that the law should recognize the equal moral worth of every individual and preserve their rights. It emphasizes the replacement of passive toleration by the active policy that guarantees the minority communities positive recognition and assistance. The law could ensure antidiscrimination measures and legal exemptions.

Multiculturalism has been a political and social movement. History can provide the superficial, sociological and political implications pertaining to the said movement. But literature is closer to life and probes into the invisible implications of multiculturalism. And so, literary works are chosen to study the impact of multiculturalism in the life of people, both the majority and the minority communities in the countries.

The novel, *Bye Bye Blackbird*, focuses on multicultural policy of England to get 'the others' and 'the outsiders', unskilled and uneducated labourers, to work for them to attain economic prosperity. People with different cultures, backgrounds, religions, mentalities, histories, languages etc., flocked to England, a land of material prosperity and great opportunities. The immigrants were inspired to migrate to meet Britain's post war shortage of labour lured by its expanding economy and the portrayal of Britain as a fertile land. The people of different kinds lived in groups in a particular locality and practiced their culture-customs, languages, rituals so on and so forth. These diverse groups retained their cultural identities in England.

The immigrants, who reached England after 1960, caused some serious problems for the whites. The whites feared that these immigrants might pose a threat to their freedom; they brought out stringent multicultural policies to curtail the freedom of the immigrants. They were discriminated in the name of colour, race, religion and nationality and were paid less. The aversion of the English against the Asians was obvious as they considered them primitive, savage, fanatic, violent, unrefined, underdeveloped and conservative. Their contempt found expression in labeling them 'others' or 'outsiders'. The English assumed supremacy of power and the Asians became the victims and silent sufferers.

Anita Desai has pictured the life of the Asian immigrants in England. They are called 'blackbirds', and are marginalized, humiliated, dislocated and rejected by the whites. Alienation, emptiness and barrenness are the feelings experienced by 'the others'. Adit, the protagonist of the novel, *Bye Bye Blackbird*, has been fascinated and duped by the glitter and pecuniary benefits of England. Adit loves England head over heels.

"... I feel like a millionaire." He has made a comparative study between the drawbacks in India and the advantages in England. He has chosen to stay on in England; because, he likes 'the freedom a man has here; Economic freedom! Social freedom!' He has been making compromise for the sake of enjoying material comforts in Britain. The fascination of Adit for a seemingly superior culture is indicative of the colonial hangover. Though Dev, his friend, rightly points out the discriminated treatment of the whites against the Asians, Adit doesn't mind '... being at the bottom of the ladder' in his office knowing well that he can never get to the top, 'because there'll always be an Englishman there'. He has found it a 'land of opportunity'.... He compliments,

'Oh, I think gold, Dev, gold.

I see gold-everywhere-gold like Sarah's golden hair.' (21)

He makes the confession, 'I love it here. I'm so happy here; I hardly notice the few drawbacks'.

Adit, like other fans of the whites, has developed utter disregard for the values of Indians. They have been indifferent to Indian culture. They have not realized the intrinsic value of multiculturalism that fosters equality among all cultures. They dote upon England and eulogize the culture of England despite the humiliation they have been subjected to. They have been lured towards the English because of the merits of the English, their industry, their discipline, their hard work, their honesty, punctuality, their regard for cleanliness etc. They have undermined the native culture because of the undesirable practices of the Indians, their laziness, unpunctuality, dishonesty, corruption, dirt etc.

Dev, Adit's friend, is a foil to Adit. He, enamoured by the literature of England, reaches England with a great dream of studying at the London School of Economics. He has been powerfully drawn towards London for higher studies as the paper replica of London in books, 'imprinted itself so finely, so imperially on his mind'. He has yet to learn that the bookish picture of London has mesmerized him but the reality has embittered him.

Dev couldn't admire the British people, whose indifference and aversion to the immigrants, have shocked him. The socio cultural problems, he has encountered in London, have robbed him of his happiness. The cultural shocks have upset him and created a feeling of insecurity in him.

Indian ways of life are explicit but those of the English, implicit. The 'closed doors' signifies the lack of concern of the English towards their neighbours. Unlike Adit, Dev seems to be proud of Indian culture which cares for fellow beings. The sorrow of an individual is not his own but that of his neighbours too. It doesn't mean that they are inquisitive about the life of others. It is their readiness to share the suffering and burden of their brethren; because Indian culture is accommodative. The individuals need not fight their own battles alone as they have an army of champions to stand by them.

The whites have not had liberal minds. They are rigid and lack concern and compassion for others, especially the immigrants. There, in India, which is multi religious, multilingual and multicultural, is equality and security for minority cultures. But the imperialistic attitude of the British doesn't allow them to understand the meaning of multiculturalism, which respects diversity, and promote equality.

Dev has been shrewd enough to find out the reason for the immigrants' submissiveness. The English could subdue the minds of the colonized with the education recommended by Macaulay. It has showed the hegemonic attitude of the British and the servile attitude of the immigrants. Dev represents that class as he aptly remarks that he won't be a Macaulay's Bastard'.

It has been disgusting to Dev who has become a victim of the racial onslaught. The Indian immigrants have discriminated on the basis of colour and race even by the whites whose economic status may not be high. Dev has had a bitter experience at an icon booth by a natty young man, in charge of the icons, refused to tell the price of Madonna and Child. In answer to his question, he has mentioned to Dev, 'oh, very much. I wouldn't even name the price to you'. (72)

Those words have been enough to shatter the self image and self confidence of Dev to pieces. He has stood there dumbfounded; impotent rage has mounted within him. It has been searing within him as in a cauldron. He has learnt a little later that the pedlar has judged his financial status by his appearance and dress.

Dev has met with the imperialist insolence on the face of Christine Langford, a friend of Adit's wife, Sarah. Dev is shocked to learn the reservation of the well paid jobs for the whites. When he has seen the advertisement, 'Coloreds need not apply' has infuriated him. Menial kinds of jobs are relegated to the immigrants. The ad 'Factory hands, color no bar' has filled his heart with bitter feelings. The cemetery employer has regretted that he has not made it clear to Dev in the beginning of the interview that the job of 'Public Relations Officer' to canvass the comforts of the cemetery is not for the Hindus and reserved only for the Catholics or at least for the Christians of any denomination.

The racial discrimination is very acute in London. The mother in law of Adit, Mrs. Roscommon James has not hesitated to justify it. She has casually admitted the non availability of decent jobs for the immigrants. 'There are many people with right complexion, of course, but not for Indians.' (146)

The criterion, that has been more important for jobs, is color and race, and not qualification and competency. The hegemonic British might have thought of the immigrants less intelligent.

Adit, who has sung the glory of England, has decided to return to the land of famine or flood or drought or epidemic always. Mother country sentiments have mounted up in his heart and drawn him powerfully towards it.

Adit has become practical and he doesn't like to idealize their life in India. He anticipates the problems like war, communal differences, famine and anarchy. But the pretentious life he has been leading in England has become unbearable to him. He is, Spartan like, ready to face the adverse circumstances in India. He strongly believes that his should be born in India.

Adit, who thought of himself Half English, throws away his pretension, the mask of being happy in England. He is ready to face the stark reality at home. On the other hand, Dev could develop tolerance, overlook the taunts of the foreigners, cool down his temper and remain happy in England. He doesn't exalt the foreigners as Adit has done but strikes a compromise with them to stay on in England.

Anita Desai's *Bye Bye Blackbird* pin points the disgust of the English people registered in their minds through the false despicable account of Indian customs propagated by the colonizers against the Indians. Their imperialistic attitude developed by their power to colonize other countries for centuries together has developed antipathy towards the immigrants. The submission of the immigrants, the lure towards the riches of England and the lack of will power to set right the backwardness of the mother country have placed them in a subservient position in England and given them the experience of the brunt of racial prejudices.

CONCLUSION

There has been a silent revolution against multiculturalism among the majority community and the resultant events demonstrate the failure of multiculturalism. Several charges have been leveled against multiculturalism. It is for diverse cultures and distinct identities; but it does not give room for cohesion and shared identity that every society needs. It will weaken the collective identity.

The constitutional principles are not observed by the majority. The inherent prejudices of the privileged sections have cost the suffering of the underprivileged. The strong conviction of the equality of all kinds of people is yet to be created in the minds of people of all countries. The traces of casteism, community leanings, unobserved secularism, corruption in politics, valueless education, unprincipled and aimless people etc, need to be transformed to render multiculturalism meaningful.

Though multiculturalism advocates tolerance, mutual love, respect, equal rights and equal opportunities for all people including those of the minority cultures, people's selfishness, arrogance, egoism, hunger for power and wealth have blunted their sense of others' rights.

Discriminations can be completely wiped out and equality, promoted by implanting humanitarian values in the minds of human beings only through education. It demands the utmost attention of the educationists and policy makers to impart values to the younger generation through curricula and create an equitable international society.

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