

12.0 objectives**12.1 Story line of the Novel****12.2 Symbolism in *Bye Bye Blackbird*****12.3 Let Us Sum Up****12.4 Key Words****12.5 Books Suggested****Answers**

12.0 OBJECTIVES

The students will,

- Learn about the story line of the novel *Bye Bye Blackbird*.
- Acquire the discussion on the use of various symbols by the novelist.
- Understand Anita Desai's uses of atmosphere, landscape and nature symbolically to evoke the feelings of her characters.
- Recognize the vivid symbols and their importance in the novel.

12.1 STORY LINE OF THE NOVEL

This novel is divided into three parts: arrival, discovery and reorganization and third part Departure. The story is about Indian immigrants. The novel is set in 1970 and there are three main characters. First one is Dev who goes to London to pursue higher studies and he wants to go back to home country after receiving the foreign degree. Second character Adit Sen who is Bengali. He is living In England for quite some time and he has convinced himself to be satisfied with his lifestyle. The third character is Adit's wife Sarah who is British and resilient lady. Dave arrives in London to earn foreign degree and he dislikes various types of derogatory remarks because of his color and race. His annoyance becomes more acute by behavior and attitude of Adit and Sarah. Adit is contented with British life and Dev observes public display of affection which is forbidden in India and he always feels contempt. However, there is a certain kind of kindness and love for Dev which prevents Adit from showing any disrespect for young guest who is never serious about pursuing his academic degree. Sarah is reserved and timid character. She is never fully adjusted with her own life and always remains indifferent to those who want to make her comfortable. Sarah has a hidden fascination for India. The story takes a major turn when trio visits a village close to Winchester. Here Adit sen

lives a retired life and he is very excited about this tour while Sarah is not. Dev accompany them in a state of indifference towards the land. They travel there with two Indian friends one is Punjabi accompanied by his Punjabi wife Mala. Another is Bengali with his English wife Bella. They are there to enjoy peaceful life of Winchester. For next six days nothing happens dramatically. A remarkable change in the behavior of Adit and Dev appear by the time they come back London. Dev spends a week in a country side in cool and calm atmosphere where he is struck by the simplicity of the local people which makes him realize that there is more in England than in its arrogance. He realizes that he can't survive more with his father's money and his friend's generosity for a long. Thus, he starts a job hunts and a bitter experience helps him to become mature. Adit plans tour at his old father in law's farm. There is lack of warmth or affection in Sarah's father. Here, he finds himself incompatible with foreign relatives and even with his wife Sarah. He also witnesses a nastic quarrel between his Bengali friend Samer and his English wife bella where Samer confesses that he is forced to behave in a different way that is away from normal behavior. Here Adit Sen feels depression and suffers from nostalgia. He takes his wife to Indian restaurant, listen indian music etc. His state of mind begins to reflect upon the professional life affecting reputation he had earned by the virtue of efficiency. In between comes the news of Indo-pak war. Adit and his friend show their long distance patriotism. Finally, Adit declares to his wife Sarah that he wants to go back to India and asks for Sarah's consent. However, she is expecting their first child; Sarah accepts his proposal as a committed wife. She leaves her job offer and starts packing. The novel ends at Waterloo railway station from where Adit and Sarah starts their onwards journey Adit helps Dev to get the job in the company where he was working. And also offers clapham flat in which the couple used to live.

12.2 SYMBOLISM IN *BYE-BYE BLACKBIRD*

The novel begins with Dev's experiences on his first day in England. He realizes the difference between his country and England and realizes that, unlike India, England is a hostile country. The first lesson Dev learn is that he has to do his work since nobody does anything for anyone. When goes to the kitchen to make tea and opens the window to get fresh air, he knocks down "a starving potted plant". It is very symbolic. He opens the window to feel the freshness of London, but in the process he knocks down Adit who is like "a starving potted plant", starving for his country, particularly for the food and people of his native land. He does not belong to London and is therefore like a "potted plant" struggling to survive in the new place.

While making tea, Dev decides "to lay out tea cups for everyone" and is "amused to find each one fo a different colour and design". Three different types of mugs represent the three members of the house who are different from each other. Adit is an Indian based in London, his wife Sarah, an English woman. They belong to two different countries. Their

attitudes towards life are totally different. Their different personalities are symbolically reflected in their clothes. Adit is a colorful man. He is an open and joyful person, while Sarah's dress reveals opacity, solitude and simplicity.

During the conversation, Adit and Dev talk about Indian attitudes to the west. The following reaction from Adit is highly suggestive:

“Approaches! Do you think you can get into an English college by sending the Principal a basket of mangoes? All you can do is fill in the form and pay the entrance fees. There’s no such thing as bribery here, you know”

This commentary is highly symbolic and speaks of the typically Indian attitude towards the west. The Indians believe that everything in the West is exceptional and that all the people present are honest and superior to the oriental ones. It also reveals the current state of education in our country, where corruption is rampant and manipulation, rather than merit, is the main qualification.

Adit's conditions are symbolically represented through the image of a dog. He appeared as a homeless person like a dog in the garden. The dog suddenly stops playing and turns to go home, in the same way; Adit also gets up and turns to go home. The dog is symbolic in another way. It is very loyal to its master, as is Adit in his adopted country. Not only Adit, but all Indians living in England generally accept whatever happens without any acute reaction:

“...their heads and hands a sleeping limpness, it made them creatures of laze, of lazy acceptance”

Bhangra's dance sequence in the novel is quite suggestive. As they watch the dance, all the Indians in the room feel that they happily enjoy the freedom and beauty of their country. They feel this way because they nurture the joys of their country, freedom and security. But a voice is heard demanding “Wrap it up, your blighters, where d’you think you are, eh?”

All the Indians in the room feel as if they were asked this question, and so they sit “stiff and straight, rubbing their eyes, coming out of a dream”. When Dev comments on the scene sarcastically, they “shush” him because they have not been able to overcome the feeling of insult as yet.

Indians are unwilling to give up the small materialistic gain they make abroad, even if they have to sacrifice their ego or self-respect. This symbolizes the cowardice and selfishness of the Indians.

Sarah and Bella do not participate in the discussions because they do not speak the same language. Indians and even their husbands do not bother to include them in the discussion. This symbolically suggests that the gap between the two cultures is so wide that there can only be a superficial adaptation between the two cultures. Even after about three years of marriage, Sarah cannot speak or understand Hindi, while Adit often speaks English. It symbolizes their attitudes towards the other country. Although not very interested in India, she suffers terribly from an inferiority complex and considers English to be much superior. He

doesn't want to talk about Adit with any of his English friends and colleagues because he knows that the British look down on the Indians and unconsciously sometimes feel the same way. The situation is symbolic in another way. Show that Adit and Sarah do not have a true understanding or relationship.

Sarah does not tell Adit about her feelings and tensions because there is an internal gap between them. Do you think you need the company of your friends and people, because together they can give you pleasure and happiness? It grew with your ideas and your values and therefore you can understand it. But when asked to visit one of her friends, she abruptly replies "no". Her refusal symbolizes her unconscious feeling of shame on having an Indian husband. Furthermore, she considers herself inferior to her compatriots because she is the wife of an Indian.

Sarah's search for her lost identity as an individual symbolizes the selfishness of a woman in general. Every woman, whether British or Indian, constantly searches for her identity because from the beginning she is known by someone's name, with her father or husband. She plays so many different roles entire life that she gets lost in the process. There's nothing left that she can call her own:

"They were roles-and when she was not playing them, she was nobody. Her face was only a mask, her body only a costume. Where was Sarah? Staring out of the window at the chimneypots and the clouds, she wondered if Sarah had any existence at all...."

Dev's assessment of his neighbors in London is that people live behind closed doors and windows with curtains. He believes: "... Here everyone is a stranger and lives in hiding. They live silently and invisibly. It would happen nowhere in India." This extraordinarily different attitude towards life symbolizes the difference between the two cultures. The British are introverts, while the Indians are extroverts. It also shows that the British avoid sharing their joys and sorrows with others, while the Indians are the exact opposite of them in this matter. Dev's remark about the British habit of having pets is also symbolic:

"Of course, they do keep pets. I know which houses keep what pets" (59). This suggests that because the British are afraid of mixing with others, they keep pets for some company. It also symbolically communicates that, unlike Indians, their relationship with anyone in any field is not very secure. Their married life is so unsafe that only pets, who are always with the owners, offer them safe relationships.

Adit's outburst of anger towards Sarah when her cat puts her nose to the rice and doesn't mind changing it is very symbolic. It shows that although he is well adapted to the new life, his Indian way of thinking has not changed at all. This also symbolizes the difference between eastern and western cultures, which is the main cause of the lack of harmony between them.

Dev is disillusioned with some of the normal everyday realities of London life. For example, people's attitude towards the male-female relationship, especially their physical appearance, upsets them. It

indicates that although Dev admires London, he is essentially an Indian in most of his ways and attitudes. His comment: "There are things one wants to keep in dark-for privacy" symbolizes the Indian attitude towards sex and male-female relationship. Also, It also suggests that her unconscious mind maintains her attraction to London in the dark and doesn't want people to know.

While wandering around the market, the brilliant Russian icons attract Dev's attention. He remains enchanted in front of the icons for quite some time. When he asks the man for the price, he gets no response. He insults Dev when the latter asks about the cost again. The episode is symbolic and plays an important role in changing the mind. The golden icons are the symbol of British society and life. When Dev is attracted to the glitter and wants to be part of it, he is rightly rejected. He is rejected because he is an Indian immigrant and therefore an inferior person. Of course, he is more obsessed with the idea of loving this type of life that is denied him.

Anita Desai repeatedly uses nature symbolically in this novel. At Mrs. Roscommon-Jame's house, the first night of their holiday is very symbolic for Adit, Sarah and Dev. The night becomes an apt symbol of the hidden darkness of mind-the secrets of mind or heart which can be seen in the light of the logical mind symbolized by the moon. In the stillness of the unconscious, Dev's desire to stay in London grows stronger, and he feels as if he were an unanchored ship, light and free to move. In the calmness and darkness of the atmosphere, he is able to mark the flow of the stream of his desire clearly. He is relieved of the conflict which has been disturbing him for some time.

Anita Desai repeatedly uses nature symbolically in this novel. At Ms. Roscommon-Jame's home, the first night of their vacation is very symbolic for Adit, Sarah and Dev. The night becomes an appropriate symbol of the hidden darkness of the mind: the secrets of the mind or heart that can be seen in the light of the logical mind symbolized by the moon. In the quiet of the unconscious, Dev's desire to stay in London is strengthened and he feels that it is an anchored ship, light and free to move. In the calm and darkness of the atmosphere, he is able to clearly mark the flow of the current of his desire. He is relieved of the conflict that has bothered him for some time.

Sarah's marriage to an Indian interrupts her from her British background, but she is still English in many ways and this conflict is symbolized by her dream. She dreams of not belonging to any solid place; rather she is living a mobile life that is very dirty. Her awareness of uncertainty and her conflict suffocate her.

In part III of the novel, Adit and Sarah go to India. Here, think about the dramatic change in the situation. Previously, it was he who had to return to India, but now Adit returns to India and remains. He feels: "Somewhere, at some point that summer, England's green and gold fingers had let go of Adit and clutched at Dev instead." London gives him a new sensation: "the rapture of a victory." Dev is occupying the same apartment that previously belonged to Adit, it is the symbol of the

continued charm of India for London. When he goes to his apartment, he murmurs:

“Make my bed and light the light,
I’ll arrive late night.
Blackbird, bye bye”

These lines are highly symbolic. Adit returns to India after living in London for many years, and then Dev greets the Indian immigrant. Adit also recited lines quite similar to these:

“Pack up all my cares and woe,
Here I go, singing low,
Bye-bye blackbird.
Where somebody cares for me,
Sugar is sweet and so is she,
Bye-bye, Blackbird”.

This suggests that Adit, who previously believed he belonged to London, finally hails the Indian inferiority complex and the belief that he is a stranger to England.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-1

Select The Appropriate Option:

1. “Bye Bye Blackbird” was published in.....
1970
1971
1972
1973
2. The author had divided the story totally into_____parts
One
Two
Three
Four
3. What is the name of first part?
Arrival
Revelation and perception
Abandonment
4. What is the name of third part?
Arrival
Discovery
Recognition and Departure
5. “Bye Bye Blackbird” highlights the idea of.....
Feminism
Racism
Patriotism
6. Adit sen hails from.....
Delhi
Bombay
Calcutta
Madras

7. Who cooks in Adit's house.....
 Dev
 Adit
 Sarah
8. He is offended for being called a "wog". Here he refers to.....
 Dev
 Adit
 Samar
9. Even the toilers in England are divided into three sections, one for women, another for gentlemen and third section is for.....
 General
 The Asians
 Black people
10. Dev tells that he comes here to study at theschool of
 Economics
 London
 Oxford
 Cambridge

• **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-2**

Discuss the symbolism in *Bye Bye Blackbird* in detail.

12.3 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have studied the story line of Anita Desai's "Bye Bye Blackbird" that explores the lives of the outsiders seeking to forge a new identity in an alien society. In the second part of the unit we also discussed the use of vivid symbols by Anita Desai in the novel. Anita Desai uses atmosphere, landscape and nature symbolically to evoke the feelings of her characters, thus revealing her hidden tumult or mental attitudes.

12.4 KEY WORDS

Symbolism: An artistic and poetic movement or style that uses symbolic images and indirect suggestions to express mystical ideas, emotions, and states of mind. It was originated in the late 19th century in France and Belgium, with important figures such as Mallarmé, Maeterlinck, Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Redon.

Immigrant: a person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country.

Multicultural: relating to or containing several cultural or ethnic groups within a society

Nostalgia: a sentimental longing or wistful affection for a period in the past.

12.5 BOOKS SUGGESTED

1. Desai. Anita. *Bye. Bye, Blackbird*, Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, 1995
2. Desai, Anita, 'The Book I Enjoyed Writing Lost'. *Contemporary Indian Literature*, X111. 4, 1973.
3. Mukharjee, Meenakshi , *The Theme of Displacement in Anita Desai*
4. Kamala Markandeya. *World Literature written in English* (Vol. 17, No 1. April. 1978)

ANSWERS:

1. 1971
2. Three
3. Arrival
4. Recognition and Departure
5. Racism
6. Calcutta
7. Adit
8. Dev
9. The Asians
10. London