



# **Mapping the Spatiotemporal Fault Lines: (Dis)Location of the Immigrants in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* of Anita Desai**

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**Abstract:** Immigrants are deracinated culturally, geographically and psychologically through pangs of estrangements, the constant flux between the emotions, self and the other and quest for identity in the host culture. In the discourse of diaspora, spatial and temporal aspects push the narrative forward. The diasporic works of Anita Desai weave complex interlaces of relations, memories and ambiguities of the characters dealing with the themes of negation and affirmation of the immigrants who are putting in arduous efforts to fit in apart from acetate to cultural and social norms of the society. The juxtaposition of the complexities of identities with the intersection of ‘Arrival’, ‘Revelation’ and ‘Perception’ unfolds the spatiotemporality of the narrative structure of the novel *Bye Bye Blackbird*. This paper will be of qualitative and exploratory based on the critical framework of spatiotemporality represented in the diasporic narratives of Anita. By employing the theory of spatiotemporality, this research paper will unveil the fault lines of the novel. Furthermore, the research paper intends to explore the flux found in the narratives to showcase the experiences of the characters in the novel.

**Key Words:** Anita Desai, Diaspora, Flux, Identity, Immigrants, Space, Spatiotemporality

## **Introduction**

Anita Desai, an Indo-Anglican diasporic author, traverse the encounters and the experiences relating to adaptation to new culture and environment of the immigrants in the foreign land through her novels. Her diasporic novels such as *Cry, the Peacock* (1963); *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) and others resonate the themes of alienation, quest for identity and belongingness, nostalgia, cultural conflict, existential crisis and displacement. Anita Desai’s novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971), a classic diasporic novel, delves into the complexities of the characters with a special focus

on Adit, Dev and Sarah to unveil the spatio-temporal dislocation experienced by them by employing her skillful narrative and writing techniques. The interpolation of characters in the novel with reality and experiences, creation of flux or fault lines of spatiotemporality and weaving together the complex relations, nostalgia and cultural conflict inflate the author's expertise in the field of diaspora.

Space and time are interconnected to each other; an integral part of understanding the universe according to Einstein and any work of literature in the Humanities field. The concept of space and time which together formed can be referred to as 'spatiotemporal' depends on the observer or reader's frame of reference in the narratives. Time shapes the mind and experience of an individual experienced in the different spaces. Time as perceived by Kant is absolute and subjective, for Newton as absolute and objective, for Berkeley as relative and subjective and for Lucretius as relative and objective. Mark Curries opines time as "a universal feature of narrative". In a narrative of literary domain, space, time and plot are interwoven which Michael Bakhtin famously conceptualizes this as "Chronotope". Time and also be referred to as 'temporal' in literature. The spatial and temporal relationships can be understood from the narratives and the specific literary development.

### **Methodology and Framework**

This research paper is qualitative and exploratory in nature with the aim to explore spatiotemporality in the diasporic work of Anita Desai *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. The framework of spatial theory, 'thirdspace', will be used as a lens to analyse this paper and to reflect the flux in the narratives of the novel.

### **Representation of Spatiotemporality and Narratives**

The term spatiotemporality encompasses the concept of space and time. The social and cultural structures that it includes are inextricably linked to the rich and multidimensional idea of space. While the people who live in it are a byproduct of that society, society itself may be thought of as an object. Together, they create spatiality that is constantly in flux. Space, an eclectic term, is a symbiotic and dynamic entity that is inseparable from the objects it contains. Space is a complex and multifaceted concept branching out into ideological space, literary space, psychological space and topological space. Ideological space refers to the mental space shaped by the societal dynamics, power, culture of a place and values and belief system of individuals influenced in the physical space. Literary space refers to how place, region and people's experience and ideologies contribute to literature and results in evolution of a meaningful text to be read and explored. Literary space can be considered as a powerful space for bringing out the ideologies related to social, political or culture in the form of text. The psychological space refers to how physical spaces, impacted culturally and socially, influence an individual; an individual's interaction with

people and place and the experiences perceived in that space and time reflecting their behaviour, thoughts and feelings consciously and subconsciously. The topological space refers to the structure and organization of physical space which is further classified according to the social, cultural, political and economic basis; which can further augment or act as a defiance to the power dynamics of the place.

With the spatial turn in humanities, with the coming of human geography and behavioural geography along with the surfacing of behavioural economy the question of identity got circumscribed in the ambit of discourses of region, place and economy.

“Geography matters. The fact that processes take place over space, the facts of distance or closeness, of geographical variation between areas, of individual character and meaning of specific places and regions – all these are essential to the operation of social processes themselves. Just as there are no purely spatial process, neither are there non-spatial social processes.”

- Doren Massey in Spatial Division of Labour.

An interdisciplinary field of research within the humanities known as "spatial theory" aims to investigate the effects of social, cultural, economic, and political elements on a person's experiences depending on their location and area. It has developed from a variety of academic fields, including sociology, geography, and anthropology, all of which analyse how people interact with their physical settings. In addition, spatial theory looks at how power structures and social hierarchies are affected by space within a particular culture. First Space, Second Space, and Third Space are the three separate categories that make up the idea of space. This study examines Edward Soja's hypothesis of the third space, which he describes as a combination of the first and second spaces. Soja contends that the third space develops into a distinct and important domain as a result of its connection to human experiences and perceptions influenced by factors including hierarchy of power and cultural influences. The third space, according to him, is a fully inhabited place that is both real and imagined, physical and virtual—a world that includes both organised individualism and group experiences and agency. A third space is a disputed and negotiated area where dominant and subaltern cultures overlap and interact (Bhabha. The third space functions as a zone of perpetual flux within this complex and dynamic society, leading to a shift of identities and cultural areas.

Anita Desai, an Indian diasporic writer, delves into the themes of alienation, quest for identity and belongingness, nostalgia, cultural conflict, existential crisis and displacement in her novel “Bye Bye Black Bird.” The novel centers around the characters of Dev, Adit, and Adit's wife Sarah who is a British, and explores the challenges that they

face as they traverse both physical and cultural dislocation. The novel investigates the difficulties of the characters' assimilation process of getting soaked in a different culture in a foreign land; and the pain and loss of breaking away from one's own emotional ties and cultural roots. Desai expertly intertwines the themes of belonging, identity, and cultural displacement to construct a powerful and intriguing narratives that explores the complexities of cultural integration and the struggle to find a sense of belonging in a foreign land. Through the experiences of her characters, Desai sketches a vivid portrayal of the challenges faced by those who find themselves in a fixture between two cultures; apart from the psychological and physiological toll experienced by an individual.

Desai presents a compelling analysis of the effects of dislocation on human experiences in her book *Bye-Bye Black Bird*. She also explores how emotional ties, cultural ties, and cultural adaptation shape how an individual perceives themselves within the confines of a foreign country like England. Adit and Dev, two characters in the stories, have very different experiences; Adit believes he has assimilated into and is comfortable with English culture and way of life, whereas Dev experiences marginalisation and abuse when he is treated poorly because he is a person of colour, demonstrating his incompatibility with English culture and way of life. The psychological struggle that Adit experiences throughout the book is whether to adopt English ways, which would usurp his identity in a foreign country, or to return to India, where he would be able to maintain his individuality and live with pride and tranquilly rather than having to fight every day to prove his identity to the locals. Adit bids goodbye by rejecting the phony acceptance of culture he had encountered while living in England. The book "*Bye Bye Black Bird*" by Desai explores the concepts of cultural identification, belonging, and the psychological effects of living abroad. The difficulties of cultural integration and the importance of emotional ties to one's loved ones and cultural roots are highlighted by Adit's struggle to maintain a sense of self and identity while dealing with the reality of the circumstances he faced. This struggle causes him to experience physical space flux.

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Viewing the character of Adit from a 'third space' point of view, Adit's identity was in constant flux as in he found it difficult to place or rather situate himself between the first space that is the real space and second space that is the imagined space. He ends up adopting a hybrid identity as he is not able to fit himself within the cultural norms of England. (Bhabha) The hybrid identity owned by Adit is due to the intersection of different cultural backgrounds, experiences and language. The hybridity as Bhabha defines is embodied in 'third space'. Third space results in production of new meanings and identities due to the ambiguity of blurred boundaries of culture and identity; thereby characterizing cultural, social and political identities with the idea of discovering self in the physical space.

Third space with hybridity as an element of an individual allows to traverse between the defined categories and classifications. By situating Adit's entity and identity in the spatial concept- "Third Space," Anita Desai highlights fluidity, intricacies, distortions or flux in Adit's identity which cannot be categorized or defined as he is in a constant state of mental shift while he questions his identity of self with respect to the English culture and their ways of living. Thus, Desai through the character of Adit showcases how 'Third Space' reflects the way in which a cultural concepts and dynamics of power shaped by social, political and historical forces of a society in a physical space or place defines an identity of an individual leading to constant shift in the psychological and physiological manner and creating fault lines in one's identity with respect to a place as a result of it.

Anita Desai reflects Dev's character being in 'third space' through his spiritual agony and alienation he feels at various moments in life throughout the novel. In one episode, the feeling of trauma, alienation and loss of self-identity is exhibited in the tube station in London which is vividly sketched in the novel. For him, the lines of first space (environmental schism) and second space (sense of dislocation) are blurred, thereby the boundaries of 'third space' (scission with the physical space with losing of identity) is blurred as a result of it. The pandemonium and the mayhem in a confined tube results in feeling caged, defenceless and vulnerable, thereby, reflecting Dev's psychological state of mind in the real and imagined spaces. Dev's conflict with the real space (England) and the imagined space (reconciliation of self-identity) reflects his state of mind in the 'third space'. He continues to struggle just like Adit and tries to revive his identity by amalgamating the self with the English culture resulting in sense of displacement and dislocation with the surrounding culture and mannerisms with a profound impact on the spiritual and the emotional self. The sense of loss in terms of cultural identity, and spiritual and social belongingness lacking in England act as powerful agents for his innate desire to return back to India. Anita Desai's brilliant use of symbolism and imagery throughout her novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* is prominent which mirror the themes of alienation, quest for identity and belongingness, nostalgia, cultural conflict, existential crisis and displacement. Overall, Dev's experiences in London reflect the emotional and psychological trauma and challenges which dislocates him from the physical space in terms of social and cultural roots thereby creating fault lines in one's own self-identity and in the experiences in London. The quest for identity constantly and finding the sense of belongingness is a painful and distressing process due to alienation and dislocation created by the cultural and social flux as experienced by Dev. The flux between the space and time can be understood from this scene of the novel. The sense of dislocation or displacement in England for Dev are well reflected in the novel where the surroundings for Dev becomes the 'third space' due to exposure, experience and feelings.

Sarah, an English woman, has a cross-cultural marriage with Adit, an Indian. She is seen adopting the Indian ethics, values, morals and culture in order to make her husband happy. She further wears saree, an Indian attire; Indian jewellery; cooking Indian food and restricting oneself from intermingling with any English association in London. This reflects the character's usurping of one's identity as an English woman, thereby suffers from despair, loss of belongingness, loss of identity as an individual and alienation even though she has a partner. Looking from the theoretical point of view, 'third space', Sarah consciously blurs the real space (England and its culture) with the second or imagined space (her identity as an individual), to obtain a third space (acceptance of partnership in marriage with Amit) where she is miserable and broken-hearted as an individual and as a woman; and has no true sense of who she is psychologically and physiologically in the lived space of England.

The English environment (Real space) and the cosmos of immigrants (imagined space) are reflected in the novel appear to be disengaged. The real space or the physical spaces inhabited by the characters who are immigrants reflect the disconnection with the culture. The interaction and absence of communication with the characters Dev, Adit and Sarah are well reflected in *Bye-Bye Black Bird* which mirrors the quandaries that the immigrants (Dev and Amit) face in London. Additionally, the novel highlights the cultural divergence of the two different cultures (India and England), with the immigrants consciously and subconsciously holding on to their own societal and cultural traditions and grappling to helm through the societal norms and expectations of the English society. The partition between the Indian cultural and the English culture is thus reflected through the communicative and linguistic differences where the characters Dev, Adit and Sarah in the novel struggle with adopting each other's culture, beliefs, customs and traditions.

## Conclusion

Space, thereby, is not a neutral entity but rather a product of social relations and human practices produced as a result of perceptions and experiences of an individual in the lived spaces. Through the lens of spatial theory, colonization of mind can be viewed as a process of psychological-spatial domination where the colonizers or English society reflected in the novel of Anita Desai endeavour to govern and exploit the different spaces and assets of the colonized. From a psychological point of view, colonization can conceivably observed as an encumbrance of the colonizers' spatial practices and ideologies produced due to social, historical and political forces on the colonized people, par amounting to a sense of dislocation, displacement, and loss of identity. Such practices and ideologies shape the social, cultural and political dynamics of the society through influences and create fault lines

in the narratives of a literary text as seen in *Bye-Bye Black bird* and in the characters experiencing them in the physical spaces.

To conclude, Anita Desai's novel *Bye-Bye Black Bird* when analyzed through the spatial theory reflects the dynamics of relationship between the characters and their experiences in lived space that is, in India and London. Viewing from a spatiotemporal perspective, the characters are in constant flux not only psychologically by physiologically. Looking from a spatiotemporal perspective both space and time in the narratives when examining the various themes explored in the novel by the author are interconnected to each other. The physical and mental spaces inhabited by the characters governed by the agents of power in Centre reflects how their physical and mental states change over the period of time and in space relating to the different spaces. When the characters Dev, Adit and Sarah are in constant flux, it indicates how their identity and as an individual are not static but also in motion and constantly evolving with relation to time and space in the different environment through lived experiences and its perceptions. Thereby, through the lens of 'third space', we can decipher the evolution at a psychological level through expression of emotions and thoughts just like Dev's, Adit's and Sarah's psychological experiences; and at a physiological level too as in the characters' decision to either stay in London or return back to India. Furthermore, this constant flux in the physiological and psychological level in the narratives of *Bye-Bye Black bird* is regulated by both space and time in which the characters subsist. Thereby, viewing the characters and the narratives of the novel from a spatiotemporal perspective results in discovery of constant changes in both physical and mental spaces, and that these changes are influenced by the spaces they locate themselves and the time period they exist in.

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