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Mahakavi Moyinkutty

Vaidyar

Mappila Kala Akademi

Kondotty,

Pin: 673638

India

Ph: +91 483 2711432

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## **Mobility, Identity, and Belonging in a Globalized World: Understanding the Modern Nomad in *Bye-Bye Blackbird***

**P. Preethika Jenifer  
Dr. V.S.Shakila**

This paper examines the themes of mobility, identity, and belonging in Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* through the lens of modern-day nomadism, focusing on postcolonial migration and globalization. The paper explores how characters like Dev and Adit experience cultural displacement and identity crises as they navigate life in a foreign land, drawing parallels to the challenges faced by contemporary digital nomads. By analyzing the psychological and emotional impacts of constant mobility, the paper reveals how these characters, much like digital nomads, struggle with feelings of loneliness and rootlessness. Furthermore, it investigates their search for belonging and stability in an ever-changing, globalized world. The study highlights how Desai's portrayal of migration resonates with the experiences of those living a transient, mobile lifestyle in the digital age. Finally, the paper provides insights into the existential and emotional challenges that come with both modern and traditional mobility.

**Keywords:** Mobility, Identity, Belonging, Postcolonial Migration, Digital Nomadism.

### **Introduction**

In the contemporary globalized world, mobility patterns and identity construction have been greatly affected by globalization. People often move across several cultural environments, resulting in

multifaceted identity constructions. This is a common occurrence in many societies where individuals move for education, work, or self-improvement, and in the process, develop a hybrid identity. As noted by scholars, “The quest for identity and alienation are the central concerns of Anita Desai’s works,” highlighting the relevance of these themes in contemporary literature (Krishnan).

The emergence of digital technology has produced a new mode of mobility referred to as digital nomadism. Digital nomads use technology to work and travel remotely, living a way of life that combines work and discovery. This transformation mirrors the larger trends of work culture and individual liberty. As one author explains, “Digital nomads are symbolic of the contemporary liquid society in which individuals are continuously ‘on the move’” (Reichenberger). This new mobility disrupts conventional meanings of work and home, presenting us with a new vision of identity and belonging.

Anita Desai’s *Bye-Bye Blackbird* is a powerful study of mobility and identity themes. The novel tracks characters who struggle with cultural dislocation and a quest for belonging in a new country. Desai’s presentation of these experiences is rich in psychological and emotional insights into migration. As has been noted in a study, “Desai tackles the issue of displacement and the cultural identity in the novel” (Zagade). This renders the novel a good case study for exploring the intricacies of identity within mobility.

While literature has previously examined themes of identity and migration in Desai’s writing, little research has drawn on these themes to explore the new phenomenon of digital nomadism. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining *Bye-Bye Blackbird* as a product of contemporary mobility. Recognizing the similarities between classical migration stories and contemporary patterns of digital nomadism can enrich our understanding of identity construction in a global world. This stance provides a new reading of Desai’s writing and adds to the wider debate on mobility and identity.

## **Aim**

The primary aim of this paper is to explore the interconnected themes of mobility, identity, and belonging in Anita Desai’s *Bye-Bye*

*Blackbird* through the lens of modern nomadism. It examines how characters like Adit and Dev navigate the loss of cultural roots while attempting to establish a new sense of self in a foreign land. The study also illuminates the psychological weight of balancing individual freedom with wanting stability in the fast-moving, globalized world.

### **Objectives:**

- To examine how characters like Adit and Dev experience cultural displacement and identity crises as they attempt to establish themselves in a foreign land.
- To research the psychological and emotional impacts of constant mobility, including loneliness, homesickness, and tension between past and present.
- To observe the ongoing search for belonging and stability in a globalized world, highlighting how characters grapple with finding their individual selves within the demands of globalization.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study employs Postcolonial Theory and Mobility Studies to analyze Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. Postcolonial Theory provides a lens to examine the cultural alienation and identity struggles experienced by characters navigating between Eastern and Western cultures. As noted by Krishnan, "The quest for identity and alienation are the central concerns of Anita Desai's works" (Krishnan). This theoretical paradigm aids in deciphering the intricate aspects of cultural hybridity as well as the psychological effects of colonial history upon personal identities.

Mobility Studies provides insights into the imagery of movement and migration in the novel. The physical and emotional journeys of the characters mirror global mobility patterns and quests for belonging. According to Reichenberger, "Digital nomads are symbolic of the contemporary liquid society in which individuals are continuously 'on the move'" (Reichenberger). While the novel is pre-digital nomad, the characters' experiences resonate with contemporary types of mobility and underscore the eternal nature of these themes.

## Methodology

The study employs a comparative textual analysis of character development, dialogue, and symbolism in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. The approach enables close reading of how characters such as Adit, Dev, and Sarah navigate cultural displacement and identity crises. For example, Adit communicates his feeling of dislocation by saying he is “a stranger, a non-belonged” in England, “hunted out by the black sensation of not belonging” (Desai 206). Such narratives are crucial towards comprehending the emotional and psychological aspects of migration. The research further entails thematic classification of mobility, displacement, and identity crisis.

Through the identification of repeated motifs and themes, the study emphasizes how Desai skillfully depicts the immigrant experience through its subtle mechanisms. This technique also takes into account the symbolism present in the novel, such as the very title, describing England’s waving goodbye to an Indian “Black Bird,” depicting the marginalized identity of immigrants. By employing this approach, the paper seeks to offer a holistic view of the intricate dynamics of mobility, identity, and belonging in the context of postcolonial migration.

## Discussion

### I. Cultural Displacement and Identity Crisis

In *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Anita Desai investigates the subtlety lived by Indian immigrants to England, in part through the lives of Dev and Adit. Adit, initially enthusiastic about British culture, becomes more disillusioned as he encounters deeply ingrained racial prejudices as well as alienation. He expresses his discomfort, noting that he has the feeling of “a stranger, a non-belonged” in England, “hunted out by the black sensation of not belonging” (Desai 206). This kind of attitude showcases the internal conflict between his Indian identity and requirement to be incorporated in British culture.

Dev, on the other hand, comes to England with his critical view of British culture and struggles to adapt to the new situation. He is particularly disturbed by the silence and desolation of London as “utterly silent, deserted a cold wasteland of brick and tile” (Desai 63).

His experiences define the challenges immigrants have in adapting the cultural heritage to the situation in a foreign land.

These narratives highlight the broader theme of cultural displacement, illustrating how immigrants grapple with maintaining their cultural identities while attempting to integrate into a new society. As noted by Krishnan, “The quest for identity and alienation are the central concerns of Anita Desai’s works” (Krishnan 124).

The cultural consequences of displacement are movingly illustrated through the characters’ states of isolation and identity crisis. Adit’s initial excitement about British life gives way to disillusionment upon realising the reality of his being an outsider and pining for his home country. He broods over his circumstances, declaring, “his own education, his ‘feel’ for British history and poetry, fell away from him like a coat that has been secretly undermined by moths” (Desai 177). This simile suggests the decline of his adopted identity and the emergence of his indigenous cultural connections.

Sarah, Adit’s English wife, also faces an identity crisis as she struggles to accept her place in a cross-cultural marriage. She finds herself outside of her own society, which results in a feeling of invisibility and loss of self. Desai details Sarah’s internal struggle: “Sarah feels the two selves in her, the English self and the Indian one, are only frauds; each had large shadowed elements of charade about it” (Desai 34). This dualism highlights the psychological cost of balancing two cultures without belonging to either.

These character analyses emphasize the emotional and psychological burden of cultural displacement. As Zagade remarks, “Desai deals with the theme of displacement and the cultural identity in the novel” (Zagade 44). The representation of Adit and Sarah’s lives presents a complex exploration of the psychological effect of existing between cultures, and it points out the severe feeling of isolation that can develop as a result.

## **II. Psychological and Emotional Impact of Mobility**

The psychological strain of mobility is a central theme in Anita Desai’s *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. Living in a foreign environment disrupts the characters’ sense of stability and belonging, leading to deep

emotional distress. Adit Sen, who initially celebrates the opportunities of living in England, gradually confronts the harsh realities of cultural dislocation. He is in conflict with his mixed identity, divided between the beliefs of his Indian culture and the demands to obey British standards. As Desai outlines, “Adit felt the suffocating weight of London’s silence. it seemed to push down on his shoulders, cold and leaden, as if the city itself resented his presence” (Desai 128). This passage is able to convey the physical and emotional isolation that most immigrants feel, capturing the alienating effect of existing in a space that won’t allow them to be fully accepted.

In the same vein, Dev, who comes to England with critical opinions about Western existence, soon finds the emotional price of migration. Although he is resistant to British culture at first, he also becomes caught up in the contradiction of yearning to connect and shunning assimilation. Desai continues, “Dev gazed out at the rainy gray street, a place where footsteps rang without answer, where eyes met without seeing, and saw how utterly alone he was” (Desai 89). This encapsulates the profound feeling of dislocation and psychic fragmentation that results from being in a foreign cultural environment. As Dev struggles with the emotional emptiness of his new existence, his identity is fractured, mirroring the psychological weight of rootlessness.

The psychological effects of displacement go beyond simple loneliness to a deep feeling of rootlessness and cultural dislocation. For Adit, his early infatuation with British culture slowly gives way to an awareness that he will always be regarded as an outsider. He thinks bitterly, “No matter how English I try to be, they see my skin before they see my heart” (Desai 154). This acknowledgment of his perpetual outsider status emphasizes the emotional price of trying to belong in a society that considers him perpetually foreign. As Reichenberger points out, “Mobility without acceptance can intensify feelings of alienation, creating a psychological chasm between the individual and the host society” (Reichenberger 100). This observation emphasizes the emotional price of residing in an area that is indifferent or hostile to one’s cultural heritage.



Sarah, Adit's English wife, also grapples with the psychological burden of cross-cultural marriage. Though back in her homeland, she finds herself disconnected from her own culture as she seeks to straddle the gap between her English origins and her husband's Indian identity. Desai conveys this tension: "Sarah felt herself slipping into a shadow world, neither wholly English nor fully Indian, a ghost in her own home" (Desai 112). This rich imagery captures the internal disintegration that may follow cross-cultural unions, where identity is fluid and indeterminate.

Furthermore, the psychological impact of cultural dislocation is not limited to individual identity but extends to interpersonal relationships. Adit and Sarah's marriage becomes a microcosm of the broader cultural tensions at play, as their differing cultural perspectives create emotional distance. As one critic notes, "Desai's characters often find themselves psychologically exiled, caught between conflicting cultural expectations" (Krishnan 127). This feeling of psychological exile deepens the affective burden of mobility, rendering the quest for belonging both agonizing and evanescent.

### **III. Search for Belonging in a Globalized World**

In *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Anita Desai represents the quest for belonging as an overarching struggle of her immigrant protagonists, mirroring the larger conflict of living within a foreign culture. Adit Sen, the main protagonist in the novel, at first attempts to adopt British society. He tries to remove himself from Indian origins to accommodate the British life so that it will provide him with a feeling of belonging. But as Desai puts it, "Adit felt the crushing weight of London's silence. it seemed to press down on his shoulders, cold and leaden, as if the city itself begrudged him" (Desai 128). This vivid imagery conveys the mental weight of being a constant outsider in spite of attempts at assimilation. His yearning to be accepted comes to gradually materialize as profound emotional conflict once he understands that real belonging entails not merely territorial movement but a sense of connecting emotionally.

Dev, another key figure, comes to England with a more cynical perception of Western society. While Adit adapts, Dev resists assimilation and holds onto his Indian heritage, but he too is at a loss.

His alienation is evident when Desai states that he is “a ghost walking through the streets of London, unseen and untouched” (Desai 89). This metaphor draws attention to the psychological price of cultural dislocation, where lack of significant attachment can create an overwhelming feeling of invisibility and isolation. Dev’s path reveals the internal struggle of immigrants who refuse to be assimilated yet are severed from both their homelands and host countries, leaving a psychological emptiness hard to fill.

Desai also highlights the importance of personal relationships and community in countering the loneliness of being in a foreign country. Adit’s marriage to Sarah, an Englishwoman, is an effort to bridge cultural gaps. Yet this relationship is filled with misunderstandings and unspoken tensions. Desai captures this nuance, by writing, “They spoke the same language, yet their words often missed each other, like ships passing in the night” (Desai 117). This metaphor highlights emotional space that may be present even in very close relationships, where cultural disparity puts obstacles in the way of real comprehension.

In addition, the novel emphasizes the significance of ethnic communities as spaces of refuge where immigrants can momentarily flee the alienation of the host society. For Adit, social events with other Indians serve as a reassuring reminder of his heritage. Desai writes these experiences as “fragments of home, recreated in the cold gray of England” (Desai 134), underlining the psychological comfort these relationships bring. These experiences enable immigrants to reassert their cultural identity, providing a feeling of belonging that goes beyond territorial boundaries.

Scholarly research reinforces this view by highlighting the emotional of psychological support provided through culturally grounded social bonds. As Krishnan points out, “Cultural networks serve as emotional anchors for displaced individuals, offering them a sense of stability in an otherwise disorienting environment” (Krishnan 127). They not only dispel loneliness but also enforce the collective identity of the immigrant group, permitting them to overcome the hassles of cultural displacement more comfortably.

Ultimately, Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* portrays the search for belonging as a deeply personal and often conflicted journey. For characters like Adit and Dev, the path to belonging is marked by emotional upheaval, cultural negotiation, and the constant struggle to reconcile their past with their present. This nuanced portrayal reflects the broader immigrant experience, where the quest for belonging is as much about self-acceptance as it is about finding one's place in a foreign land.

### **Findings**

The reading of *Bye-Bye Blackbird* shows that the novel depicts the great psychological and emotional struggle of immigrants, especially the issue of belonging in a foreign land. One major observation is that the characters feel cultural displacement not merely as geographical dislocation but as profound psychological dislocation. For Adit, the early thrill of being in England gives way to reality as he grapples with being an eternal outsider, even as he tries to fit in. Desai conveys this tension, adding that Adit senses "the suffocating weight of London's silence, as if the city itself resented his presence" (Desai 128). This line conveys the alienating effect of being in a foreign culture that quietly resists complete acceptance. Likewise, Dev's trajectory illustrates the emotional emptiness that results from refusing assimilation without achieving a sense of identification with the host society. For as Desai describes, "Dev felt like a ghost walking through the streets of London, unseen and untouched" (Desai 89), conveying the deep isolation of immigration. These observations highlight the sophistication of cultural displacement in which belonging is not a function of geographical location but an intensely emotional and psychological condition.

*Bye-Bye Blackbird* also presents a strong parallel to the overall themes of mobility and migration, linking classic postcolonial exile to elements of contemporary nomadism. Though the characters aren't digital nomads in the literal sense, their struggle is relatable to the psychosocial hardships of today's global roamers. Both struggle with feelings of rootlessness, cultural disorientation, and an urge for some fixed identity within a fluid environment. As Reichenberger points

out, “Mobility without acceptance can intensify feelings of alienation, creating a psychological chasm between the individual and the host society” (Reichenberger 100). This observation is consistent with the lives of Adit and Dev, who find it difficult to balance their cultural identities in a setting that provides economic opportunity but emotional isolation. Moreover, the novel emphasizes the significance of community as a unifying force, a temporary source of belonging in a foreign environment. This is reminiscent of the contemporary digital nomad’s use of international networks and virtual communities to fight off loneliness and keep connected while forever on the move. In this sense, Desai’s characters can be seen as precursors to the digital nomads of today, grappling with similar challenges of cultural dislocation and identity fragmentation.

## Conclusion

This paper set out to explore the themes of mobility, identity, and belonging in Anita Desai’s *Bye-Bye Blackbird* through the lens of modern nomadism. The analysis revealed that the novel captures the psychological and emotional complexities faced by immigrants as they navigate the challenges of living in a foreign culture. Central figures such as Adit and Dev capture the inner struggle between assimilation and cultural retention and capture the effect displacement has upon one’s identity. Adit’s story captures the heavy heart of seeking to become a part of a society that quietly resists full incorporation, and Dev’s refusal to be assimilated underscores the loneliness attendant to rejecting the host country. The research also emphasized the vital contribution of community and interpersonal life in supplying an illusory feeling of belonging in the face of cultural displacement. These conclusions reveal that searching for belonging is an internal, perpetual endeavor with personal conflicts combined with the outer pressure of cultural expectations.

The findings of this analysis have implications that go beyond the particular context of postcolonial migration to speak to larger questions of mobility and identity in a globalized world. As societies become increasingly interconnected, the issues of cultural adaptation, identity maintenance, and emotional belonging grow more pertinent. The novel’s depiction of immigrant struggles captures the psychological

toll of mobility, insisting that authentic belonging is more than a matter of physical presence or economic security. It demands a profound emotional identification with place and community, an identification which can be hard to establish in an era of accelerating global change. It is an outlook that is especially relevant to contemporary nomadism, where subjects may nevertheless experience the same rootlessness and cultural dislocation despite the technical interventions of a globalized era that can provide virtual versions of connection. In this sense, Desai's work serves as a precursor to contemporary discussions about the emotional and psychological impacts of global mobility.

Future research could expand on the themes explored in this paper by examining other literary works that address the intersection of migration, identity, and belonging in the digital age. For instance, comparing Desai's portrayal of cultural displacement with more recent narratives about digital nomadism could provide valuable insights into how these experiences have evolved over time. Furthermore, a consideration of the virtual community's role in lessening feelings of isolation and cultural loss may provide a new vision for the immigrant experience of the 21st century. Research may also address the gendered nature of mobility, including how women specifically deal with the cultural displacement differently than men. Such an inquiry would not merely enrich our perception of mobility and identity within an age of globalism but further enhance the complex understanding of cultural adaptation's psychological effects.

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### **P. Preethika Jenifer**

Full time Ph.D Research Scholar  
PG & Research Department of English  
The Standard Fireworks Rajaratnam  
College for Women, Sivakasi

India

Pin: 626123

(Affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai)

Email: jeniferpackian@gmail.com

Ph: +91 9003635984

ORCID: 0009-0005-7392-2131

&

### **Dr. V.S.Shakila**

Assistant Professor  
PG & Research Department of English  
The Standard Fireworks Rajaratnam  
College for Women, Sivakasi

India

Pin: 626123

(Affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai)

Email: shakila-eng@sfrcollege.edu.in

Ph: +91 9566652222

ORCID: 0009-0009-0761-6290