A point is reached where one must escape and if one can’t do so physically, then some other way must be found. And I think it is not only Europeans but Indians too who feel themselves compelled to seek refuge from their often unbearable environment. Here perhaps less than anywhere else is it possible to believe that this world, this life, is all there is for us, and the temptation to write it off and substitute something more satisfying becomes overwhelming. . . . [Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, “Myself in India”, in The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English, Ed., John Thieme, 1996, p. 855]

People all over the world suffer Diaspora as an inevitable condition in their lives commonly. Consequentially, they acutely and sharply experience nostalgia and cultural divide. This has been the experience of the Jews in Europe and the Blacks all over the world. The Westernized Indian experiences it in India.

And the Indian who emigrates to Europe, England or America experiences Diaspora and the consequential cultural divide. A Westernized Indian longs for the company of another Westernized Indian, while staying in India because of passing through cultural hiatus. A village boy experiences cultural divide when he uproots himself from the peaceful village environment and transplants himself in a city of great hustle and bustle and cutthroat competition. This is what happens to Anita Desai’s protagonist Hari in the fiction, Village by the Sea. The painful experience is nostalgia.
Diaspora, disorientation, reorientation, nostalgia and cultural divide run together. Anita Desai does not study any one of these - - Diaspora, disorientation, reorientation, nostalgia and cultural divide - - in isolation. The loss of the past is painful. Equally painful are Diaspora and nostalgia and cultural divide.

Incidentally, one could argue the point with the definition of nostalgia as severe homesickness, sorrowful longing for conditions of the past age, and regretful or wistful memory of earliest time. Thus nostalgia is a substitute gratification and carries a stigma in its excess, whereas reminiscence is just a recollection of some past event. In this context the definition as presented in Everyman’s Encyclopedia is worth recording here for it is a comprehensive definition of the term [III Ed., vol. ix, 1949, p.781]

[Nostalgia is a] return home, or homesickness. It is sometimes an early phase of melancholia, but is usually a psychic manifestation merely. It varies in intensity from a sentimental inclination to think fondly of a homeland to an uncontrollable desire to return and a settled dislike of one’s present surroundings. It is very common among people who have previously dwelt in agricultural and pastoral districts where the inhabitants are inclined to be clannish and intolerant of innovations. The cause of the condition is undoubtedly the realization of the change of circumstances and the absence of familiar people and impressions.

This feeling of nostalgia, and the acute sense of cultural divide, arising out of Diaspora can be tided over if there is adjustment and accommodation to new conditions of life but of course without losing one’s distinct identity. Incidentally, William Carlos
Williams makes a pointed observation, which is cited here [Quoted in Robert Bone, “Ralph Ellison and the Uses of Imagination”, Tri Quarterly, vi (1966), 86]:

We live only in one place at one time, but far from being bound by it, only through it, do we realize our freedom. We do not have to abandon our familiar and known to achieve distinction; rather in that place, if only we make ourselves sufficiently aware of it, do we join others in other places. . . .

With such a background study, it is fit and proper to identify the male characters of Anita Desai Hari, Adit and Dev as acutely and sharply experiencing cultural divide. Anita Desai projects Hari of The Village by the Sea, and Adit and Dev of Bye-Bye Blackbird as the wandering heroes experiencing Diaspora, disorientation, reorientation and nostalgia, and suffer from racial or class prejudice and experience acutely and sharply cultural divide.

The hero goes out alone to confront the unknown. He learns to find truth and name that truth. He discovers that he can be his own self and also establish community with the majority race based on the principle of assimilation. He explores new ideas and new avenues. He turns stoic by going about alone, enjoying a certain autonomy and independence. The hero begins a new life in the new environment at a new level as Dev in Bye-Bye Blackbird does. For one thing, the wandering hero makes the radical assertion that life is not primarily suffering; it is an adventure. This is the spirit that governs Hari’s meanderings in Bombay in The Village by the Sea and Dev’s life in London in Bye-Bye Blackbird. In such a life there is uniqueness, importance, and intense vitality. There is that distrust of orthodox solutions and direct opposition to conformist norm.
The hero perforce chooses to be radical and not conservative in his life patterns. There is always the ripple effect in the life of the wandering hero. He experiences aloneness for a while, but sooner or later, if he so desires, he develops better relationships, ones that are more genuinely satisfying because they are based on respect for that journey. Of course, when he steps outside consensus reality, he always faces perpetual isolation. This is precisely the case of Dev in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* when he strikes healthy relationships with Emma, and thereby he begins to take roots in England and he shakes off his loneliness. And Sarah makes the decision to leave the world of the known for the unknown.

Hari of *The Village by the Sea* resolves this dilemma by returning to his village after turning into a self made boy-hero, and Dev in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* by assimilating the British culture and deciding to take roots in England notwithstanding the racial prejudice of the British against the blackbirds like him. With such a background study one examines Hari as a hero who finally emerges as a mature and self made boy-hero. The family of Hari is downtrodden and poverty-stricken. Lila the elder girl is a classic homebound female, attending to her sick mother, her two younger sisters Bela and Kamal and to the needs of her irresponsible drunken father and the hardworking Hari.

Lila takes care of the family ably and astutely and in a responsible manner. She attends to all the household chores without a grimace on her face. She tolerates her father who is given to bouts of drinking. But Hari is not prepared to tolerate his father’s irresponsible attitudes and approaches. In the following dialogue one is able to detect the character and nature of Hari [The Village by the Sea, 1992, p. 15]:
Hari knew exactly what she [Lila] meant, but he did not like to tell her so. He did not feel like talking. He never did talk much and always preferred to think things out very slowly and carefully before he did. So he went on eating his dry bread and chillies.

“Father’s still lying there, asleep. He sleeps all day. He will only get up at night and go straight to the toddy shop”, Lila said, almost crying.

“Let him”, said Hari.

“Hari, he will kill himself drinking the toddy those wicked men make and sell”.

“Let him”, Hari said again, chewing.

“And mother? And Mother?” cried Lila.

“And us? What about us? Who will look after us?”

“He does not look after us”, said Hari, spitting the end of a very sharp chilli. *We look after ourselves, don’t we?*[My Emphasis]. . .

This dialogue projects Hari as one governed by the desire to be autonomous, independent, venturesome, bold, and assertive. Though a boy-hero he has the makings of a responsible outward bound adult. A little later the dialogue between Lila and Hari proceeds further and it reveals the grit, determination and iron will of Hari and that his hope of a bright future lies in his venturesome and bold shifting of place from the fishing village of Thul to the Bombay, the large and bustling city of opportunities. The textual passage runs thus [*The Village by the Sea*, 1992, p. 16]:

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“What can I do?” he mumbled. “I’m doing what I can”.

“I know”, said Lila, with tears beginning to tremble in her eyes.

“But don’t you think we have to do something more now, Hari?” she pleaded.

This made Hari stop chewing, put away the remains of his lunch and stare at her while he thought of a way to answer her and reassure her.

“Something will come along, Lila”, he said at last. “The boys in the village say a factory is to be built in Thul and everyone will get jobs there. Perhaps I will get one too”.

“When?” cried Lila.

“I don’t know. Not now, not for a long time. In the meantime - - in the meantime I’ll look for work. The next time the de Silvas come from Bombay I’ll ask them if they can take me back with them and give me work.” This was an idea he had but never spoken of before. He was quite surprised to hear the words out loud himself. So was Lila. . . .

This passage underscores the fact that Hari has a firm conviction that wandering into Bombay alone will lift him and his family from penury and want. Hari reasons out that the sufferings that he, Lila, Bela and Kamal, and his sick mother were passing through mainly because his father has shirked the responsibility of running the family and taking care of the health of his mother and educating and feeding his children properly and well. Therefore, in his frustrations and disappointments, Hari wishes that
his father is dead and gone. The textual passage is worth quoting here [The Village by the Sea, 1992, p. 16]:

They [the drunken men returning home, which included Hari’s father also] made so much noise that all the stray dogs of Thul woke up on hearing them and howled in alarm and protest. Lila and Hari, who knew their father was amongst them, tried to shut out the sounds by covering their heads with their pillows. Lila hated and feared the noise so much that she cried to herself. Hari did not cry but he bit his lip and thought, “Maybe a poisonous snake will bite him [his father]. He may step on one and be bitten, there are so many of them and it is dark. Then he would die”. He did not say that in fear, he said it with hope, as if he wished that was what would happen. . . .

It ought to be stressed that Hari, the wandering boy-hero is pragmatic, and dynamic. Anita Desai projects Hari with these distinct properties thus [The Village by the Sea, 1992, pp. 32-33]:

They began to whisper to each other - - they shared a bed and a little later, when they heard a low groan from the mother in her room, Hari hushed them and they fell silent and were soon asleep. While Hari lay awake, listening to the deep, even breathing and the deeper, louder breathing of the sea outside, he thought about the boats that sailed there so freely and could go to Bombay, to Africa, to Arabia if he liked. If only he could sail away in one of them - - even if only to Bombay. Bombay! He stared out of the window at the stars that shone in the sky and wondered
if the lights of the city could be as bright, or brighter. It was a rich city: if he could get there, he might be able to make money, bring home riches, pieces of gold and silver with which to dazzle his sisters. No! He told himself, closing his eyes. That was a foolish dream. He could not afford dreams; he must be practical and think out a scheme [My Emphasis]. . . .

Later on, Biju, the rich fisherman of Thul awakens thoughts of a prosperous life in Bombay, which alone can help him and his brother and sisters to shake off their poverty and rise to a better state of living. The progressive business endeavours of Biju kindle the hopes, aspirations and ardent desires in Hari to venture out to Bombay to strike betterment in life. The textual passage is [The Village by the Sea, 1992, p. 35]:

He [Hari] saw now that there were two or three possibilities. Even if all he could do now was to fish and sell coconuts, later on he would be able to choose between a factory job, a job on a big fishing boat like Biju’s, or a job in Bombay if someone helped him to go there. Although it excited him to think that life held so many possibilities, it also frightened him. The men in Thul had never had to make such choices; they had never had to consider anything beyond fishing and farming along these shores. Now that was not enough. Hari saw that like Biju, although on a different scale, he would have to make a choice no one else in the village had made before.

How? Who would help him? He walked along silently, worrying. . . .

He finds answer to his worry as to who would help him to go to Bombay in the arrival of the de Silvas at Thul from Bombay. He helps them in buying, milk, bottles of soda water, eggs, and fish. He serves as the errand boy of the de Silvas. Mr de Silva as
he prepares to depart to Bombay invites Hari to go over to Bombay, where he promises him to get a good job. And the fire of hope of a visit to Bombay, the city of opportunities is kept alive and ever kindled by this promise of Mr. de Silva. The text reads thus [The Village by the Sea, 1992, p. 39]:

Mr. de Silva leaned out of the window and gave Hari some money and said, “Good fellow, you did a good job of the car. If you ever come to Bombay, I’ll give you a job as a car-cleaner,” Hari did not, could not smile. He took the money and stood silently as the car bumped its way down the sand path and disappeared into the coconut grove.

Hari, the young boy-hero, bent on a wandering visit to Bombay is filled with hopes and aspirations of a bright future. Not only that he realistically views life from all possible different angles and is convinced that a job in Bombay alone could save him and his family. Not only that, it will pave the path to gain affluence and help him see through the marriages of his sisters in a decent fashion. The textual passage is worth quoting [The Village by the Sea, 1992, p. 46]:

He [Hari] knew he could never earn enough in Thul to help his whole family. He would have to go to Bombay. Bombay was a great city, a rich city, a city crowded with people who had jobs, earned money and made fortunes. He had to get there somehow. How? When? That was not clear to him [My Emphasis]. . . .

The opportunity comes when Adarkar, the man from Alibagh, requests the people of Thul to go over to Rewas from where he would take them in a boat to Bombay where they could meet the Chief Minister and petition him against the designs of the
factory builders. Hari reaches Rewas in a bullock cart, thanks to the good-hearted cart driver who never took any money from him for the ride from Thul to Rewas. Adarkar, the man from Alibah, musters a great number of people and Hari joins the crowd. The text runs thus; [The Village by the Sea, 1992, p. 71-72]:

Let down at the Rewas pier, he was astonished to find it teeming with people. He had not thought so many would be going to Bombay. He had thought he was doing something terribly adventurous - - in fact, he found himself trembling with excitement and fear - - but there were men and boys of all ages and sizes, dressed in their cleanest clothes, calling and laughing and shouting as they crowded the length of the pier that led into the flat, coffee-coloured sea where fishing boats bobbed up and down wildly, waiting to be loaded. . . .

After the sea journey they all landed soon in Bombay. Hari reacts to the sight of Bombay thus [The Village by the Sea, 1992, p. 73]:

He [Hari] was silenced by awe when he saw the city of Bombay looming over their boats and the oily green waves. He would have liked to stand and stare as he disembarked from the boat at the Sassoon docks, aching and stiff from the long ride in the jam-packed boat, but there was no time, no leisure for that. . . .

A little later Hari and others were in the streets of Bombay. Once again Hari is wonderstruck at the sight of the busy and bustling Bombay. The text reads thus [The Village by the Sea, 1992, p. 74]:
And now they were out through the gates and on the street and in the midst of the terrifying traffic. In all his life Hari had not seen so much traffic as he saw in that one moment on that one street. In Thul there was only an occasional bus driven down the main road of the village to the highway, and very rarely a single dusty car. . . . But here there was everything at once as if all the traffic in the world had met on the streets of Bombay - - cycles, rickshaws, hand-carts, tongas, buses, cars, taxis, and lorries - - hooting and screeching and grinding and roaring past and around him. . . .

Soon Hari finds himself left alone in Bombay. His attempt to meet Mr. De Silva proves to be a failure as the watchman at Mr. De Silva’s houses refuses him entry. He gains a petty job as the cook’s assistant at Sri Krishna Eating House, the meanest and dirtiest restaurant, in Bombay. At the restaurant he has to work with two other boys from Tamilnadu. In their midst, Hari experiences the cultural divide, which is the condition of life open to any displaced wandering hero. It is worth to quote [The Village by the Sea, 1992, p. 93]:

Later he [Hari] helped the two boys knead great hills of dough in their pans and this was hard work and made them grunt and sweat. They [the Tail boys and Hari] did not speak to each other as they worked. When the boys finally did say something to each other, Hari realized it was in Tamil, a language he did not know. Nor did they seem to know any Hindi or Marathi, the two languages he knew, so there was silence between them. . .
With the work at Sri Krishan Eating House and with the training in watch making and watch repairing at the hands of Mr. Panwallah, Hari emerges as a contented boy-hero with some savings. Mr. Panwallah’s two observations on Hari decidedly and conclusively project Hari as a willing learner and as a self-made youth who can change not only his life but also that of his sisters and brother. This first statement runs thus [The Village by the Sea, 1992, p. 129]:

“You are lucky”, Mr. Panwallah twinkled at him, sinking back into his chair.

“You are young. You can change and learn and grow. Old people can’t, but you can. I know you will. . . .

The other statement reads thus [The Village by the Sea, 1992, p. 129]:

“Yes, you can manage now”, he [Mr. Panwallah] said.

“You will manage all right - - I can see I don’t have to worry about you any more”. . . .

With built in confidence, and with the makings of a self-made man, Hari, the boy-hero returns to Thul during Diwali with the maturity that is gained only by a hero. The message then is [The Village by the Sea, 1992, p. 155]:

“Adapt - -that is what you are going to do. Just as birds and animals must do, if they are going to survive. Just like the sparrows and pigeons that have adapted themselves to city life and live on food leftovers and rubbish thrown to them in the streets instead of searching for grain and
insects in the fields”, he [the birdwatcher] explained, “so you will have to adapt to your new environment. . . .

And to better appreciate Anita Desai’s fiction, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, a brief study of ethnicity and ethnocentrism becomes necessary. Broadly speaking ethnicity is concerned with a group of people distinguished by common, cultural, and frequently racial characteristics. The members of most ethnic group have a sense of group identity, and the larger culture within which they live, recognizes them as a distinct aggregation. A number of internal and external forces tend to keep ethnic groups united and reinforce their cultural distinctiveness. But then the recommendation in all advanced countries is to adopt the salad bowl philosophy. Prejudicial treatment of members of an ethnic group by members of the larger culture of the majority group restricts interaction between the groups. Restrictions, codified or unwritten are laced by the major group on smaller ethnic groups. This leaves the ethnic groups at a great disadvantage when compared with what is enjoyed by the majority group. Feelings of racial and cultural superiority sometimes work toward preserving ethnic groups. Members of an ethnic group take up residence in special areas and attempt to exclude members of other groups.

Linguistic, religious, and moral differences between an ethnic group, the majority and larger culture group persist. But then, prolonged mingling of ethnic groups almost inevitably results in an eventual combination of groups into a new group that is a cultural and racial composite of previously separate ethnic groups. At this point, the pointed observation of Arthur Mann is worth mentioning here [“From Immigration to Acculturation”, in Luther S. Luedtke’s *Making of America*, 1988, p. 75]
Plainly, every ethnic group has had a history of its own, shaped by place of origin, area of settlement, time, circumstances, and relations to others. . . .

At this juncture a brief review of ethnocentrism becomes necessary. Ethnocentrism is the tendency of human groups to judge external phenomena with reference to attitudes and values that are specific to the group. The American sociologist William Graham Sumner as an outlook in which one’s own group is the centre of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it has defined it. Ethnocentrism usually takes the form of wariness and distrust of outside groups and a belief in the unquestioned superiority of one’s own people.

Ethnocentrism, then, is characteristically a human and ubiquitous attitude influencing judgments about outside ethnic groups and the members of those outside ethnic groups. Cultural differences especially tend to intensify ethnocentric ideas. This is probably one reason why conflict between ethnic groups is frequently and exceptionally bitter and extensive when racial distinctions are concerned.

Ethical dualism is one remarkable characteristic of ethnocentric beliefs. For instance, destruction of property or lives of others is almost always considered criminal within a group, but it is applauded when it occurs in the course of inter ethnic group conflicts. Also remarkable is the tendency to endow whole groups with characteristics usually ascribed to individuals. Thus, the other ethnic group characterizes one ethnic group as slovenly and slow-witted.

Furthermore, ethnocentrism helps to justify actions thought to be in the group’s best interests. Sometimes these actions take the form of armed conflict or the systematic persecution of other ethnic groups, such as the persecution of Jews, Poles, and others by
the Nazis, who tried to justify themselves by using ethnocentric - - pro-German an anti-Semitic - - arguments. Individuals of different ethnic origins and in fact different ethnic groups act in their own self-interest. The attitudes and beliefs that are part of ethnocentrism facilitate that particular ethnic group’s coordination, and help to justify activities that benefit that particular ethnic group, and ensure that particular ethnic group’s long range stability.

Ethnocentric attitudes are an integral part of cultures and subcultures and are a direct result of the fact that the individual’s experience is limited to only one culture, nation, or region. Some reduction in the intensity of ethnocentrism accompanies more extensive communication between groups. But as long as cultural and regional differences exist, ethnocentric attitudes and beliefs will prevail the ethnic groups that have suffered displacement, disorientation, resettlement and reorientation - - Diaspora. Yet again, they have experienced nostalgia, and cultural divide.

These - - the Diaspora - - displacement - - Verschiebung --, disorientation, resettlement, reorientation, nostalgia, and cultural divide, denials, deprivations, degeneration, exploitation, and dehumanization -- have been the common denominators in the lives of Dev and Adit in Bye-Bye Blackbird. Dev to begin with, is not able to accept the cultural divide He turns furious at British manners and customs. This is cryptically distilled by Anita Desai in the opening paragraph of the fiction, Bye-Bye Blackbird thus [1985, p. 5]:

He [Dev] wondered if it [the watch] had died in the night of an inability to acclimatize itself. . .
While preparing the hot tea to shake off the cold weather “he looked at the matting of cats hairs on the inside of the tea cozy with distaste filling his nostrils” [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 7]. Dev has come to England to study at the London School of Economics. Adit points out to him that it is not easy to gain admission at the London School of Economics and that in England Dev cannot bribe his way up and gain admission. Sarah joins them soon and has her cup of tea and enquires about Bruce, the cat, who is in heat.

Dev tells her that Bruce has jumped through the window and is gone. The dialogue admirably captures the taste of the English for pets, whereas the Indian mind is not willing to accept animals inside the house. This is the beginning of Dev’s taste of cultural disparity. The dialogue is quoted here [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 9]:

“Where’s Bruce?” she cried. “Did you let him out, Adit? You shouldn’t have, you know how he is these days”.

“I let him out”, Dev confessed unwillingly. But how is he these days?”

“On heat”, she said.

“Oh, I didn’t know. I picked up the tea cozy and he reared out like a cobra”.

Sarah smiled at his simile and sat the tea cozy on the teapot.

“But it’s full of cats’ hairs”, Dev protested.
“They make very good insulation”, Sarah told him lighting herself a cigarette to go with her cup of tea.

“What a house! You keep pets for insulation?” . . .

This is a classic instance of cultural divide. Dev makes sincere preparation to go to England to join the London School of Economics. The text reads thus [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 11]:

It had been an education begun under compulsion by the black-frocked Jesuits of St. Xavier’s School in Calcutta, at the chalk-scrawled, ink-grooved desks of the brawling classrooms. But soon it had become a compulsive, a thing of habit and instinct, conducted half-consciously under the slowly ticking electric fan of the summer holidays and by the moth battered lamp on the veranda at night. In those hours this world had been constructed for him, a paper replica perhaps, but in a sense larger than life, so that what he no saw and touched and breathed was recognizably the original, but an original cut down to size under control, concrete, so that it no longer flew out of his mind and hovered above him like some incorporeal, winged creature . . .

Dev found that life in London was dissimilar to the life in India. Back at home he could assume arrogance and superiority to the rest however disagreeable and unpleasant. But here he has to indulge in acquiescence. He feels that he is a stranger. And he has the taste of disorientation and Anita Desai narrates it thus [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 12]:

But here [in London] surrounded by the easy informal Sunday people, smiling to themselves at the thought of their Sunday roast and amiably talking of horses and dogs, and the Labour Government, he found easy to lose this self consciousness, to think only of what lay outside and around him, and concentrate comfortably on the six pence and shillings, the half crowns and farthings that Sarah laid out an counted for him.

As the outsider in England, Dev realizes at every step the contrastive features of India and Britain. For instance, the Mall of a Himalayan hill station stands in sharp contrast to the Mall in the High Streets of London suburbs. Dev turns disconcerted at the insulting cry of the British boy when he, Sarah, and Adit wait for the bus in a cluster. The boy’s insulting language only reflects the racial prejudice of the British towards Indians [Blackbirds]. And the textual passage makes interesting reading [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 14]:

“Wog?” said a damson-cheeked boy in a brass-buttoned blazer to him [Dev] Only under his breath but, just before he leapt aboard the bus, “Wog!” he said again quite loudly.

Once again, Anita Desai subtly captures the cultural differences that mark India and Britain, and how these differences are tinged with racial prejudice [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 22]:

Saturday night was ushered in with that manic beat of drum, trombone, and electric guitar. In a steaming dance hall, the Pakistani stood with his back to the wall, pressed in by his countrymen, mugs of beer in their hands. He watched with soulful, romantic eyes the blond girls in
their short, tight skirts stomp and twists and scribbles about the crowded floor, and he said, “My religion forbids me to drink, or smoke, or touch a woman. But here in this country, what am I to do? I also do the things I see other men doing”, and then he was, on the floor, frightened clasping a girl by her waist and moving his feet hesitantly and self-consciously, out of step with the quick, brisk music. The audience on the carpet whistled and made ribald comments on Pakistani fitters and landladies’ daughters.

Sarah is identified with everything Indian much to her discomfort. Her friends foresee the day when she will leave England permanently with Adit to India. The point that is made here is that because Sarah has married Adit the Indian she is disowned by the other British. And this is indicative of the racial prejudice entertained by the British against the Asiatic. The significant and relevant passage from the text makes interesting reading [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 36]:

“Well, I [Miss Prim] don’t see myself slaving away in this crummy school forever and forever. Let the Head find out about my teaching when the examinations come around and the kids tell her I never made them open their arithmetic book once in all the year, and I’ll be happy to be see on my way. Adventure, adventure! Isn’t that right Sarah? “Course you’re the adventurous one really. Still waters run deep, eh? You’ll desert all one horrid, foggy day and make off for sunny India, I know”.

Sarah put down the tea pot and said, as quietly as she could, “I don’t know. Why do you say that?”
“Why? Well your husband isn’t going to stay here forever, is he?” Julia shouted aggressively...

In a subtle fashion Anita Desai traces the cultural divide though a taste for dress modes and distaste for particular kinds of food thus [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 41]:

“Oh no”, cried Sarah in dismay. She dreaded Indian sweets. She dreaded meeting young Ms. Singh dressed in pink or parrot green salwar kameez, and always, even in the coldest weather had two half moons of perspiration showing under shining satin armpits. The thought of her breaking into this cat-quiet kitchen with a jingle of glass bangles, bearing a plate of rich, silvery sweets, made Sarah shrink with dread. . . .

The remark of Old Mr. Miller to Adit underscores the cultural divide [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 78]:

Remarkable memories you Orientals have. . . .

Dev soon faces the harsh actualities of life in England. He finds that he is dead weight on Adit and Sarah. The text reads thus [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 99]:

Occasionally - - as when he stepped into the bathtub and found a row of nylon underclothes dripping down on him from the shower rod, or when an animated conversation came to a guillotined end as he entered the drawing room - - had the unhappy sensation of being the fifth wheel on the carriage. . . .

In spite of his Bachelor’s Degree from the Indian University he is not able to further his studies or get even a menial job. Adit tells Dev that In England one has to
learn to adjust to the developing circumstances. Otherwise the Indian will find himself in dire straits. What Adit ignores are self-respect, honour and dignity. But one thing he truthfully underscores is that the education in India does not make the individual suit the job requirements. The text reads thus [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 102-103]:

The truth is we babus get it neat. People like the Singhs manage to find a place in any society, even if it is on the bottom rung of the ladder. At least they have a trade, they are useful - - even the British recognize that and admit it. But not us. We haven’t studied for any profession; we want to gate crash into one. We haven’t the time, money or patience to acquire one in a school, we want to grab and learn in a week what others take three years to master. Cheek, that’s what. It’s the age old babu dilemma - - executive temperaments linked with worthless qualifications. . . .

Though the speech of Adit is marked by truth, yet it is deprecatory in tone and tenor. And in his frustration one hears the cry and lamentation of Dev the immigrant unable to gain a footing in a foreign country. To quote the text [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 103]:

Dev held his head in his hands. “I can’t go to college, not now. I want freedom, not restriction. I want enterprise not discipline. I want money. I want life. But I don’t want to take a secretarial course. I don’t want to take a correspondence course in radio engineering or social service or any bunkum. I just want a job, that’s all - - a real paid job. I can’t sit around like this any longer, Sen”. . . .
And Dev with deep regret and nostalgia contrasts India with England. He came to England with a venturesome spirit. He was disillusioned. He felt helpless. He wanted a job and he could not get one. All these get projected in the following textual passage

*Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 104*:

He [Dev] was slowly, regretfully letting drop and melt away his dreams of adventure, seeing now quite clearly that he had left the true land of adventure, of the unexpected, the spontaneous, the wild and weird, for a very enclosed part of the world, a pigeonhole in which it was necessary to find an empty and warm niche before one was pushed over the ledge into the sea that lapped the island’s stony shores. That small warm niche, in the beginning so scorned and despised became more allusive the more it was desired and pursued. . . .

What Dev disliked most was the immigrant’s sheepishness and abject loss of self-respect. He remarks to Adit thus *Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 27*:

The trouble with you immigrants 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. . . .

But when Dev begins to wander about in London, observing its various attractions and allurements, a slow change creeps into his attitude. The textual passage runs thus *Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, pp. 95-96*:
And so he [Dev] walks the streets and parks of the city, grateful for its
daffodil patches of sunshine. . . . He is intoxicated to think that of all the
long programs of music, theatre, cinema, and art exhibitions that he sees in
the papers, he can choose any to go to any day at all. . . . It is a strange
summer in which he is bewildered alien, the charmed observer, the
outraged outsider and thrilled sight-seer all at once and in succession. . . .

In his uncertainty, Dev develops a schizophrenic attitude to England. He is
agonized when he has to face “tumult inside him in the middle of the night and shadows
him by day” [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 96]. Ultimately, however, Dev loses self-
control and is caught under England’s spell. He changes place with Adit, whom he
derided as “Boot-licking toddy” and “Spineless imperialist-lover” [Bye-Bye Blackbird,
1985, p. 21].

Dev is envious of Adit’s high station in life. And Adit informs Dev that it has not
been an easy climb for him to gain a position of pelf and power. He has had to sweat
and to labour to reach the position that he has reached. He remarks thus [Bye-Bye
Blackbird, 1985, pp. 104-105]:

“Yes, I’m sitting pretty”, said Adit, patting his dressing gown draped
stomach with a self-congratulatory gesture. I’m very content as I am, but
I know I’ll be Director one day. My employees are very pleased with me
- - they see it, recognize drive and flair and imagination when they see it,
you know. But”, he said fixing Dev with a stare, “remember I have also
had to work in a post office in Coventry, to begin with. Not as a postman,
ever did I descend to that, but I did work in the sorting office, during the
Christmas season. A perfectly reasonable thing to do, of course, even collegians do it... But I’ve had my ups and downs, as they say. The post office was one of the downs...

Then there was that camping equipment business... Then I did a stint in an Indian agency office that handled things like sandals from Kolhapur and ash trays from Moradabad, but hadn’t come to England to work in Little India, so I went on searching - - till I found my little job at Blue Skies. What a relief it was to have a desk of my own, a secretary to make me tea and the feeling that I had found something I would like to make permanent at last. I moved in with the Millers, and a lovely room they gave me, and then I met Sarah. It was luck, yard. And I wish you [Dev] the same. Without it, England isn’t worth living in...

Taking the cue from Dev tries to get a footing in England. His sincere attempts to get and accept even menial jobs end in failure. One such instance is the unfortunate interview that he has with the person who runs a cemetery. The owner of the cemetery places an advertisement in The Times, which reads [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 105]:

Vacancy for a young man of initiative in well-established concern facing expansion. TED... 

Dev reads the advertisement and with great hope hurries to the address given. The text reads thus [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, pp. 105-106]:

A walk drawn out into slow motion by the drip-drop rain. Long rows of trees weeping down his neck. High walls and dense shrubbery making
his errand more and more obscure and, somehow, sinister. Moments of disbelief when the newspaper had to be taken out and another look taken at the strangely indefinite address before he could continue. Miles of high railing, dense damp greenery within, till he arrived at the wrought-iron gateway, immense and forbidding, and letter in a black arc over it that at last revealed the reason for the discretion, the obscurity of the address.

He had arrived at a cemetery.

When Dev confronts the person concerned, he finds that he is suffering from cold, which is quite a typical British ailment. His manner of medicating himself, and his dress to ward off the cold appear quite strange to Dev, the Indian. And this is again a subtle manner by which Anita Desai marks the divide between the British and the Indian. The passage from the text is worth quoting here [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 106]:

In the silent, ivy-shrouded office in the lodge, he found the advertiser - - no granite dove or marmoreal angel, but a red-cheeked, purple-nosed man, small and rotund, nursing a horrendous cold with Vicks inhaler, Kleenex, scarf, nose-drops and hot water bottle. While Dev felt steadily stranger and stranger, as though he were being magically transformed into a creature with wired bones and plaster wings, fit for some silent realm other than this one, rudely rent as it was by coughs, sneezes, and sorts, the manager - - as he called himself - - seemed too wrapped in his cold to find Dev or the situation in the least bit strange.

A little later Anita Desai marks the religious barrier that prevents Dev being offered the job. In a subtle manner Anita Desai draws the attention of the perceptive
readers that religion is the strong base of Western culture and the Orientals have only one way of negotiating it and that is through conversion. It is worth quoting the textual passage here [Bye -Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 108]:

“Dead right! You’re a smart lad, you are. Now tell me briefly about yourself. Education?”

Dev licked his lips again - - they were extraordinarily dry. “St. Xavier’s School, Calcutta. St. Xavier’s College, Calcutta. B. A. - - Eng. Literature. No experience.

“Ahh”, beamed the little man, growing more and more jovial as Dev shrank and shriveled. “Mission College, eh? Does that mean you are a Catholic?”

“No”, said Dev, deciding to leave. “Hindu”.

“Oh dear, oh dear”, lamented the little man. “Not Catholic? Not even Christian?” . . . I am sorry. Dear me, I ought to have mentioned it at once, oughtn’t I? We simply must have a Catholic, or at least a High Church man. It’s public relations, you see? It wouldn’t do, no. I’m afraid it wouldn’t do to have a Hindu gentleman in this job. . . .

On his arrival in England, Dev pours out his feelings of disgust, to Adit and Sarah, at the Western ways of living, which are quite new and strange to him. Nothing seems to interest him. He hates everything - - English food and food habits, the love of the English for curios and pets, English dress modes, and in fine English conservatism, traditions, and customs. But ironically he changes his mind to stay back in England. In
his sick reverie, Dev reveals his mind contrastively thus [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 108]:

I am here, he [Dev] 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, he proselytized, to interpret my country to them, to conquer England as they once conquered India, to show them, . . .

Lies, lies, admitted Dev, cravenly, for he was growing sleepy. All I want is - - well, yes, a good time. Not to return to India, not to marry and breed, go to office, come home and go to office again, but - - to know a little freedom, to indulge in a little adventure, to know, to know. . . .

This is the spirit of a wandering hero. A little later Dev expresses his wish for a condescending attitude from the British towards the Indians, so that he could continue to stay on in England. The textual passage makes interesting reading and it is quoted below [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 163]:

“It’s not the same at all”, Dev snapped. “You people are entitled to your own land and eventually Socialism will divide it up into neat green lots for all of you - - or perhaps, just brick and concrete ones.

But I’m not asking for so much. I’m only asking to be allowed to enjoy and admire without being kicked in the pants and told, “Wog, keep off the grass”. . . .
Ironically Adit hates everything that is of India and Indian. He is in great love with everything English. He pours out his feelings of disgust at the thoughts that stream across his mind concerning India. Sarah and Dev listen to his long harangue against India, which is quoted in extenso, for it projects the mind of the Indian who is ashamed to call himself an India and one who suffers from Anglo-phobia [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 129]:

Then Adit said, “One would travel from Bombay to Calcutta and from Kashmir to Cape Comorin and not find two consecutive miles as rich and even as all the land here”.

His voice sounded strange. Some glanced to see who had spoken, but no one disagreed. Like speechless animals, they breathe audibly.

“There would be miles and miles of desert instead. There would be trees without fruit or even leaves. The cattle would be starved, their skeletons lying around the rocks. Vultures wheeling in the sky. And sun, sun, sun”.

Still no one spoke. Their cigarettes made idle, curvaceous replies of smoke in the clear air.

“Either that - - or flood. Everything blotted out by mud and water. Mud huts, cattle, crops - - all swept away, frowned. Then cholera and typhoid”.

“And here [in England] there is no death at all. Everything - - animal, vegetable, mineral - - is alive, rich and green forever”.

When Adit spoke again, as if compelled by pressure of their silence, his strange voice cracked open harshly, like an empty nut, brittle with pain.
“It seems unfair, yard”, he said. “Nothing ever goes right at home [India] - - there is famine or flood, there is drought or epidemic, always. Here, the rain falls so softly and evenly, never too much, never too short. The sun is mild. The earth is fertile. The rivers are full. The birds are plump. The beasts are fat. Everything so wealthy, so luxuriant - - so fortunate [Italics as in the Original]. . . .

But soon Adit’s infatuation for everything English disappears. The catalyst is the Indo-Pakistan riots, and the partition effected in a partisan fashion by the British to keep the sub-continent divided always. He turns furious against England for its pro-Pakistan attitudes. The text reads thus [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, p. 183]:

“The bloody BBC!” one highly wrought student screamed. “Always partisan, always prejudiced. These British - - they always sided with the Muslims - - now it’s out in the open, you can see it quite clearly”.

“Here’s the Hindustan Times, just come!” “Here let me read it out”. A roar went up.

“Ninety-seven Patton tanks destroyed!” they cried in exultation. “Boo to America! Boo to Britain! Boo to Big Powers”. “Our jawans”, exulted another voice. “God, what I’d give to be with them now, on the banks of the Ichhogil Canal, lobbing bombs right into Lahore!” . . .

This passage clearly captures the Indian ethnic emotions and it is understandable. It is salutary that Indians wherever they are, they are not to give up their separate Indian identity, but embrace the Mainstream culture of the place where they have domiciled. The anti-Indian and pro-Pakistan attitude of the British at once awakens
thoughts of India and fills him with nostalgia, and the ironic longing to return to India.

Adit expresses his nostalgia thus [Bye-Bye Blackbird, 1985, pp. 183-184]:

The ferocity of his growing nostalgia broke that stone dam that had silenced him for long and he began to tell Sarah of this nostalgia that had become an illness, an ache. She listened intently, gravely . . . His torrential, often incoherent words constructed for her a vision of a deep veranda with round white pillars - - “Roman pillars?” she murmured, and he replied, “Colonial, I should think” . . . He [Adit] talked of the buffaloes in the yard, of the pigeons that were kept on the rooftop, of the puja season in Calcutta when prayers were conducted in the house every evening and visits were made from one private community altar to the other, everyone dressed in the newest clothes and fed on the richest of sweets . . .

Thus, Anita Desai projects Hari of The Village by the Sea, and Adit and Dev of Bye-Bye Blackbird as the wandering heroes experiencing Diaspora, disorientation, reorientation and nostalgia, and suffer from racial or class prejudice and experience acutely and sharply cultural divide.