CHAPTER - III
ALIENATION OF UPROOTED INDIVIDUALS

Alienation is a modern human condition. In the Encyclopedia Britannica, the modern man has been described as "anonymous and impersonal in an urbanizing mass, uprooted from all values, yet without faith in the new national and bureaucratic order" (270).

V.K.Gokak describes alienation as "disorganization of one's sensibilities, a loss of identity, and an estrangement from one's surroundings and its accepted values" (14).

Trying to define the otherwise elusive concept of alienation in concrete terms, an eminent psychologist Frank Johnson has observed:

In its use as a general concept, scientific term, popular expression and cultural motif, alienation has acquired a semantic richness and confusion attained by few words of corresponding significance in contemporary parlance. (3)

Elaborating it further, especially with reference to the confounding situation of the modern man overwhelmed and overawed by the impact of science, technology and the fast process of urbanisation, as also the
influence of the latest theories of existentialism and the spectre of a nuclear holocaust always haunting the psyche.

Another distinguished scholar and psychologist Erich Fromm has presented a more detailed and deeper analysis of the concept of alienation. Dwelling further upon the idea of distance as used by Frank Johnson, he opines:

By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which a person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the centre of his world, as creator of his own acts...... The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, is experienced as things are experienced, without being related to oneself and the world and the world outside, productively.(11)

The usual consequences of being "alienated" are the developing of tendencies of fear psychosis, paranoia, disillusionment, desperation, frustration, inferiority-complex, suspicion, amnesia, dystopia, rootlessness, etc. Alienation also results into the emergence of emotions of self-hate, self-deprecation, self-persecution, isolation, loneliness and
feeling completely disconnected and disjointed from "the self" and from the social cultural world around, sometimes to such an extent that it becomes very difficult to resist the tendencies of suicide enveloping the mind of an individual.

Anita Desai's third novel Bye-Bye, Blackbird (1971) has a different theme from the earlier two novels. It explores, in the main, the immigrant psyche vis-a-vis a new foreign culture and the consequent problems of adjustment, belonging, roots, past etc. According to Anita Desai: "of all my novels, it is most rooted in experience and the least literary in derivation" (83).

Cultural alienation is the most dominating and major theme in the novel Bye-Bye Blackbird. Two cultures come together. India versus England encounter is East-West concord and discord in her novel. This theme of East-West encounter refers to the conflict and reconciliation of two cultures.

Anita Desai, an expert in delineating the lacerated psyche portrays the ontological insecurity, alienation and anguish of uprooted individuals in Bye-Bye, Blackbird.
The novel acquires added significance as it examines the question of East-West encounter and cross-cultural relationships. Also it captures the confusions and conflict of another set of alienated persons. R.S.Sharma opines: "the tension between the local and the immigrant black bird involves issues of alienation and accommodations that the immigrant has to confront in an alien and yet familiar world" (71).

Anita Desai’s delineations of this problem is prevalent in most of her works. She remarks her condition as: “This has brought two separate strands into my life. My roots are divided because of the Indian soil on which I grew and European culture which I inherited from my mother” (24).

In most of her works one finds the character trying to adjust with either the place or the society or the self. Bye-Bye, Blackbird is mainly woven round two groups of characters, viz, Adit Sen, his English wife Sarah, and Adit’s Indian friend Dev; and the two Indian couple – Jasbir-Mala and Samar-Bella. A careful reading shows that there has been no problem in the process of deconstruction, reconstruction and rehabilitation of Samar, a doctor and his sweet wife Bella; Jasbir, and Anaesthetist and his good solid Punjabi wife Mala. They migrate from India to Clapham, a city in England. They start living. They enjoy their week ends. They visit
clubs and coffee Houses. They do their chosen jobs. Neither their sensitivity nor Sanskars nor the local conditions create any distance and distaste in their rehabilitation at Clapham in England. The problems arise with the rehabilitation of Adit, Sarah and Dev, the new arrival with the view to studying in the London school of Economics. Initially the focus of the novel is on Dev who comes to London to pursue his studies. As the plot develops, we find him turning into a completely disillusioned man. The immigrants are not at all happy with their life in England. Dev exclaims as he pulled out his watch on his bed: “When Dev pulled out his watch from under his pillow he was disgusted to find it was barely five o’clock. He wondered if it had died in the night of an inability to acclimatize itself” (BBB-5).

The inability to acclimatize is in a sense Dev’s own problem. He feels alienated in London from both Indians and English men. There is lack of sympathy in Englishmen, who do not, recognize their neighbours and behave with them like strangers. The silence and hollowness of London disturb Dev and makes him uneasy and alienated. He finds a street heavily populated, and yet utterly silent and deserted. He finds himself insulated and isolated. He realises that the Indian immigrants rush to the West and in the process miss badly their own mother land. He feels extremely suffocated in the Tube Station and considers himself, “like
a Kafka stranger wandering through the dark labyrinth at a prison" (BBB-57).

He found it extremely difficult to adjust himself with the new surroundings. He gives a picturesque description of London:

"Super markets with their pyramids of frozen food packets, delicateness with their continental fruits and wines and cheeses, the clothes shops with their waxy, surprise-eyed models in windows starred with gloves and lace handkerchiefs, the pubs and fish-and-chips shops the welter of high, aristocratic perambulators and hairless, pudding faced, lollipop stoppered babies, the well-groomed dogs on leashes, the trim nylons on the woman's stout legs, the red umbrellas and blue mackintoshes, the drizzle and the sunshine, the high prices and the easy trade.(P-14)

Dev's contact begins from Adit who has settled in London with an English wife. Dev's interactions with Sarah makes him realize the cultural differences between the foreigners and himself. He is confronted with the major problems of adjustment in a foreign land. The cultural differences expand as Dev moves out in search of a job. He undergoes various
experience and cultural shocks. The difference between expectation and reality disturbs him and makes him feel self-conscious. He has come to England not for a permanent but a temporary stay to have a degree from London School of Economics and then to work as a teacher in India with the show of a foreign degree. He does not like the Indians being called 'wog', and the London docks having three kinds of lavatories Ladies, Gents and Asiatics. He finds it difficult to adjust with silence and emptiness of it — the houses and blocks of flats, streets and squares and crescents — all. To him English people appear as a bunch of exhibition, flaunters of their sex, their prowess and haters of the blacks. He sees English life all regimented. He sees all iron that is all dull and cold. And he himself wonders why he is there.

Dev never wants to live in a country where he is insulted and unwanted. He wants to go back to India as an 'England returned' teacher. He thinks that it is a pity for him to have come all the way to London for a proper education. He calls Adit, his friend a 'boot-licking toady' and a "spineless imperialist-lover." "You would sell your soul and your passport too, for a glimpse at two shilling, of some draughty old stately home" (BBB-19).
He finds the climate in London extremely difficult. He further finds that the neighbours are rather silent. He thinks:

If this were India...I would by now know all my neighbours—even if I had never spoken to them I'd know their taste in music by the sound of their radios. I would know the age of their child by the sound of its howling. I'd know if the older children were studying for exams by the sound of lessons being recited. (BBB-56)

In London, the situation is different. There everyone is a stranger and lives in hiding. Searching for an identity in an alien culture, Dev feels lost and suffers from alienation. The feeling that no one cares for him is dormant at the back of his mind. They live silently and invisibly which would happen nowhere in India. He would like history to turn the tables so that the Indian traders would come to England. He thinks:

Let them take over the city, to begin with—let them move into cheap side and Leaden hall and Cornhill. Let them move in to Thread Needle street and take over the bank... the Sikhs with their turbans and swords and the Sindhis with their gold bars and bangles. (P-61)
Dev becomes a victim of alienation as his conception and perception are at variance with the experiences he gets. He compares and relates everything to India. A situation on scenery brings to his mind either a semblance or difference that exists between the two countries. This is another cause for his alienation.

Dev is so much attached to his country and wants the host country to be his: “Let all British women take to the graceful sari and all British man to the noble dhoti” (BBB-62).

The experiences he gains at the streets of London is so much that even he thinks of reconsidering his idea of entering London school of Economics. He is in two minds as to whether he should continue to be in London or go back to India:

There are days in which the life of an alien appears enthrallingly rich and beautiful to him, and that of a home body too dull, too stale to return for ever… he feels he can never bear to be the unwanted immigrant but must return to his own land, however abject or dull where he had, atleast, a place in the sun, security, status and freedom.

(BBB-86)
The real crisis in Dev's identity is made amply clear in these words. Through Dev, Anita Desai captures the psychic journey of an Indian immigrant. The conflict between the imaginary world created in the Indian immigrant through his colonial education and reading and the reality that confronts him is highlighted: “It is not the unfamiliarity rather it is the gap between the expected and the immediately received that keeps disturbing him” (BBB-71).

The first interview that Dev takes turns out to be a flop. It tells him something about the importance of being not an Indian or a Hindu. Before taking him, the interviewer wants to know about his background. The moment he learns that Dev was not a Christian he tells:

Not a Catholic? Nor even Christian?… I am sorry… We simply must have a Catholic, or atleast a High church man. It’s public relations… I am afraid it wouldn’t do to have a Hindu gentleman in this job. (BBB-108)

Dev asks himself why he is there wasting the remnants of his father’s money, and not studying politics, philosophy and economics. In fact he has the answer to all these questions. He says that he is there to interpret his country to the British, and to conquer England as they once conquered India.
To disentangle from the influence of one’s own culture which has become part of his consciousness is not easy for an immigrant. One is tempted to evaluate the alien culture with the measuring rod of one’s own. Hence Dev cannot understand the western culture where every one is a stranger and lives in hiding. Anything that goes against one’s familiar way of life will create a cultural conflict. He goes through different phases of the bewildered alien, the charmed observer, the outraged outsider and thrilled sightseer all at once in succession.

Caught between acceptance and rejection, expectation and reality he is perfectly aware of the schizophrenia that is infecting him like a disease to which all Indians abroad are prone. His deviation from the purpose of further studies and attempting to find a job could be looked upon as an extreme or hysterical symptom of the general disorder in his character. In his attempt to break geographical and cultural bondage, Dev instead of achieving success bargains for another kind of exile. Kalpana S. Wandrekar’s observations aptly sum up Dev’s alienated status:

Dev’s experience in England makes him neurotic because he is unable to attach meaning to his experience. He is aware of this state of chaos and confusion in him caused by the outside pressure. He
realized that he is losing balance... symptoms of schizophrenia are obvious when Dev falls ill, (152)

This type of analysis is based on the tenets expounded by Erich Fromm in his book, *The Sane Society and The Fear of Freedom*. Anita Desai herself confesses in her article, about schizophrenia: "Their (Immigrants) schizophrenia amused me while I was with them and continued to tease me when I returned to India. I wrote it in an effort to understand the split psychology, the double loyalties of the immigrants" (24).

The author comments on Dev’s mind as:

The other part is something he cannot explain, even to himself, for it is only a tumult inside him, a growing bewilderment, a kind of schizophrenia that wakes him by day... In this growing uncertainty he feels the divisions inside him divided further and then redivided once more. (BBB-99)

The author further comments on his mind thus:

He is running fever and sees upon a wall; a barrow pilléd with such fruit as can only be seen in an Indian market – pomegranates and guavas... Beyond the prime walls of
Laurel Lane, surely his own family bustled as they have bustled had they known him ill – he saw faintly, but surely, the figures of mother and sisters of servants and relations, in the veranda, on the terrace, murmuring, laughing, moving so close to him, yet quite apart from him, divided by white wall that were melting into grey streets, grey lanes, grey squares that bridges over a river, a sea of black water; Kalapani. (BBB-139-140)

The severance of natural ties brings in to sensitive minds such disease as schizophrenia. The traumatic conditions explain the stresses associated with the breaking up of the natural ties. The great turmoil in his mind splits him.

Interestingly enough, his encounter with the servant girl comes as a revelation to Dev which makes him discover and have his adventures alone and unaided. Dev, the Indian was determined to integrate himself with the new milieu:

"to seek, discover and win the England of his dreams and reading, the England he had quickly seen was the most poetic, the most innocent and enduring of England, in a secret campaign. At the end, he believed he did". (BBB-168)
Dev takes his final decision not to return to India and not to lead the way of the masses there. He slowly and steadily adapts himself to the new environment. Carol Pearson's observation is significant:

...many who have learned to embrace their independence and even solitariness find later that they miss human connections. They have become capable of experiencing intimacy at a new level because they have developed a strong enough sense of self that they are not afraid of being swallowed up in the other. (72)

Dev shocks one and all when he bids good-bye to Adit and Sarah at the end of the novel. Thinking momentarily of Sarah and Adit on their journey to India, he murmurs, as a kind of parting salute to them and also as a prayer for himself: "Make my bed and light the light, I'll arrive late tonight, Blackbird, bye-bye" (BBB-230). Thus Dev reconciles to his lot in England.

Adit Sen, a young man from India, lives in England with his English wife Sarah. Unable to find a decent job in his own country in spite of a degree from British University, Adit had returned to England and settled down there for the last few years. After coming to England Adit worked as a teacher, and finally accepted a little job at Blue skies. He is happy with
his job. Fed on English literature in school back in India and exposed
directly to English life and manners for years, he now feels a sense of
cultural affinity. This closeness, however, does not obliterate the sense of
his own cultural identity. He also faces identity crisis in the novel. He
appears as a romantic admirer of England in the beginning. He finds it
difficult to notice drawbacks in the English system. For him, India meant
everything that is bad:

When I'm there... I take these things for granted and
again I only notice the laziness of the clerks and the
unpunctuality of the buses and trains and the beggars
and the flies and the stench and the boredom... Then I'm
mad to get back to England and the nice warm, Pubs
and pick up a glass of Guinness and eye the girls and be
happy again. (BBB-49)

Adit appreciates the landscape of England. For him England is
fertile, luxurious and prosperous. He says:

Here the rain falls so softly and evenly, never too much
and never too short. The sun is mild. The land is fertile.
The rivers are full. The birds are plump. The beasts are
fat. Everthing so wealthy, so luxuriant – so fortunate.

(BBB-129)
At times Adit even groans: "O England's green and grisly land, I love you as only a babu can" (BBB-130).

Adit’s friend Dev frequently finds fault with him for his attachment towards England and having no thought for his native land. But scenario changes in the last part of the novel where Adit as a family has come back to his place recently after a short visit to his in laws in the country side.

He secretly longs for Indian food, music and friends. His longing suddenly grows intense during the latest visit to Sarah’s parents and Adit, from that time onwards, feels stifled and starved in the alien land. Something draws Adit back to India. A sudden clamour was aroused in him, like a child’s tantrum; to see again an India’s sunset. Adit thinks and visualises of India thus:

When he lay in Sarah’s bed, that night, it was not large, unhurried owl’s cry that he heard, but the raving of peacocks and jackals that make the Indian night loud with reminders of the emptiness, the melancholy of everything. (BBB-178)
Even in the outspread hair about Sarah's shoulders he could see the Indian landscape. As he left the house for work:

The shuffle of his feet, the hunch of his shoulders and the side ways look of his eyes out of an enclosed, darkened face exactly resembled the looks and posture of those Indians whom Adit had so despised - the eternal immigrants who can never accept their new home and continue to walk, the streets like strangers in enemy territory. (BBB-181)

Adit's wife could notice the attitudinal changes of him. He continued to talk about everything Indian, of the puja season in Calcutta and other things.

September, the month of anniversaries and celebrations gives Adit ample opportunity to recollect the celebrations in India. Once a year on their wedding anniversary, the Sens used to visit a glamorous restaurant. It is raining outside, but Adit asks Sarah to wear a sari, because he wishes to see her as an Indian bride. At a deeper level, he cannot accept her as one of his own without denying her true English identity, he likes to treat her as a Bengali girl, as he tells her in his first meeting with her:
You are like a Bengali girl. Bengali women are like that – reserved, quiet. May be you were one in your previous life. But you are improving on it - you are so much prettier. (BBB-73)

Even when he thinks of a brief visit to India, the images of Indian food, dress and music are predominant in his mind:

When I have a whole month of leave saved up, I'll go. My mother will cook hilsa fish wrapped in banana leaves for me. My sisters will dress Sarah in saris and gold. I'll lie in bed till ten every morning and situp half the night listening to the shehnai and sitar. (BBB-48)

This represents Adit's conscious as well as unconscious strategies to regain his Indian identity to cope with his inner sense of alienation.

Adit longs to go back to India. He frankly admits to be "a stranger, a non-belonger" in England. He accuses his English wife, Sarah of xenophobia. The hypnotic charm of his English education and English wife being over, he is fortunately able to extricate himself from the quagmire and go back to his home land. The novelist comments: "England had let Adit drop and fall away as if she had done with him or
realized that he had done with her, and caught and enmeshed his friend Dev" (BBB-228).

Sumithra Kukreti comments why Adit took a "U" turn to return to India:

Ironically, notwithstanding all his appraisal... he realises that England can provide him neither of these (liberty, individualism) wherever he goes, he becomes a victim of racial discrimination and apartheid and is constantly regarded as... a second grade citizen...an intruder.

(45-46)

Adit even expresses his desire that the child that Sarah carnes in her womb should be born in India. He feels he has become nameless. The questions torment him, who is he? Where is he? He is no longer Mr. Sen but a label – "wog", "Asiatic", or "Indian – Immigrant". He gets visions as the one who is a psychic case:

He had dreadful visions of himself in the white shirt and shuffling slippers of a lunatic’s garb at an asylum, an outsider not only by virtue of his colour but by an imagination run amuck.(BBB-219)
This type of obsession may be the symptom of schizophrenia in Adit. He feels himself as a stranger in England, and realizes alienated from the English people. He takes a boat back to India with his wife. He points out that Pakistan’s attack on India is the main reason of his departure from England, but in reality it is due to his alienation from English people and their ways of life.

Sarah, the next important character in the novel also faces identity crisis. Sarah marries Adit because: "...he seemed to have so much to give her – so many relations and attachments, pictures and stories, legends, promises and warnings" (BBB-206).

Sarah lives in a dual world – the two social worlds that do not meet; the two incompatible cultures that split her. Sarah, the English wife of Adit, is one character who suffers the most from alienations. Sarah gets herself alienated from her society through her marriage. Her intercultural marriage does not offer anything grand and fabulous. By marriage she has become nameless, she has shed her name as she has shed her ancestry and identity. By marrying an Indian, she has "lowered" her position among her fellow-country men. She remains an outsider in the Indian community because she is English. Hers is a dual loss of identity. She does not belong anywhere. She is not a physically uprooted person.
Yet her condition is precarious. She lives in a familiar environment. Her identity crisis arises out of the conflict between her identity as an English woman and her role as an Indian wife. She carries her role of Mrs. Sen a little uneasily. She is highly self-conscious of her status and spends most of her time in introspection.

A major factor which goes into the evolution of Sarah’s character is her love and fascination for India. Her image of India is an exotic one. It is the image of a tourist’s India – a land of tigers and snake-charmers. Adit has of course, contributed a lot to this image. Initially while Adit disdains India and wants to be a true English man. But Sarah who disdains to be addressed as an Indian changes from her English ways. She cooks Indian food for Adit, reads books about India and listens to sitar music. She annihilates her English self to become an Indian. The departure to India is a departure from one part of herself.

She also finds a kind of change that has come over Adit and is puzzled by her husband’s bewilderment. She begins to have a clean idea of her miserable life:

It was as though she had chosen to be cast out of her home, her background, and would not be drawn back to it, not even by the husband ... She listened to the stream
rush and an owl cry and felt herself cut loose from her moorings and began to drift, round and round, heavily and giddily, as though caught in a slow whirlpool of dark, deep water. (BBB-170)

The matters become still worse when we see that even Adit was unable to apprehend the real reason of her anguished loneliness. He sat back silent, shocked by that anguish. Regarding Sarah’s crisis, Dieter observes:

An anguish, if seemed to him, of loneliness—and then it became absurd to call her by his own name, to call her by any name: she had become nameless, she had shed her name as she had shed her ancestry and identity. (137)

Sarah has no assurance either in her own homeland. She is not very eager to visit her parents. It is merely duty rather than feeling that makes her meet them. The division in herself can be clearly seen in her monologue:

In the centre she sat, feeling the waves rock her and then the fear and the questioning began: who was she... Both these creatures were frauds, each had a
large shadowed element of charade about it... Her face
was only a mask, her body only a costume. (BBB-38)

Her dilemma is not that of finding new roots but it is that of
uprootedness and hence deeper. She finds herself an alien and a
stranger. Her own people, like Mrs. Miller insult her:

What about you Mrs. Sen? Have you no intentions of
starting a family – or do you think it will not to in view of ... she stopped letting silence make a series of long, straight
dashes towards Adit. (BBB-93)

She is a masochist. It is her way to find unity with the out side
world. There are many ways in which union with the outside world can be
sought in order to have a sense of belonging. They include the
masochistic passion (submissions) and the sadistic (domineering) one.
Sufferers from these try to establish symbiotic relationships. The ultimate
result of these passions is defeat only because no amount of these
passions brings a sense of identity.

At the time of her departure, Sarah is sad to leave the place:

It was her English self that was receding and fading and
dying, she knew, it was her English self to which she
must say good-bye. That was hurt – not saying good-bye to England, because England would remain as it was, only at a greater distance from her... English, she whispered, and then her instinctive reaction was to clutch at something and hold on to what was slipping through her fingers already. (BBB-221)

All the three leading characters in Anita Desai’s novel face identity crisis. It is self alienation of these characters that brought to focus. The cultural interactions of India and England, is delineated through the images and the mind of the leading characters.

As a matter of fact, the novel is about Indian immigrants living in England. The Indian characters define themselves in terms of their reaction against the alien environment. All the Indian types are present - the Madrasi, the Bengali and the Punjabi. We also have the inevitable Swami selling yoga, the third-rate musician and his woman with the inevitable pan-box. There are also the expected English characters – the Millers and the Roscommons with their unconcealed dislike for the Asian immigrants. The sentimental English woman, Mrs. Moffitt whose ambition is to start an Indian club and arrange weekly get-togethers is to
spiritualize the materialistic English. The temperamental Indians behave the way the Orientals are supposed to behave.

The English and the Indian immigrants do not see each other, and that they only see what they want to see – stereotypes of each other, coloured by prejudice, conditioned by false notions of oriental and occidental characteristics – and they naturally fail to see the human beings behind the stereotype. The immigrants behave like temperamental children, loud, noisy, boisterous, quarrelsome, lacking in delicacy, and deficient in love of privacy. The spiteful Millers’ attitude even irritates Sarah. She feels hurt by the rudeness of her countryman towards immigrants and exclaims: “When I think of all the Millers of England, I could leave at once” (BBB-93).

There is no problem in the rehabilitation of Samar, a doctor and his sweet wife Bella, Jasbir, an anesthetist and his good solid Punjabi wife Mala. Krishnamurthi, is another minor character who hates going back to India, but wants to start fishing business in south India. These people lead happy – go-lucky life in England and they don’t have the feeling of alienation.
The uprooted individuals Adit and Dev have a constant identity crisis and suffer from cultural and social alienation throughout the novel.

On the eve of departure, Adit becomes a romantic and an optimist once again. He sees himself in the glorified role of a cultural ambassador carrying a message of goodwill from West to East.

The major symbol is that of the black-bird which is a migratory bird symbolizing the coloured immigrants in England who lead an insecure life, not knowing when their right to be there would be questioned.

As known, Anita Desai has made a place for herself in immigrant writing. Her cross cultural background has added to her first hand experience as an “outsider” or the “marginal” in another dominant society. Baumgartner’s Bombay (1988) is one of the successful novels of Anita Desai. When Anita Desai was asked why she had chosen to write a novel about a German in Bombay in an interview, she replied:

... And it was when I saw this Austrian Jew in Bombay –
I actually saw the man pottering around the streets picking up scraps for his cats – that I began to imagine his past. And that gave me the key to open that German world.(P-24).
In this novel Anita Desai pursues the solitary life of Hugo Baumgartner as he flees Nazi Germany and tries to find a home in a politically- torn India struggling to carry on after British rule. He is a homeless and nationless man. He has no where to go to regain his lost identity. He is the same in his native soil and the alien one, an outsider a nowhere man in every sense. He is a prototype outsider, and alien in his own land.

In Germany he had been dark, his darkness had marked him the Jew, der Jude. In India he was fair, and that marked him the firangi. In both lands the unacceptable.

(HB-20)

Hugo suffers a double alienation: from his native Germany, and from India. Alienation from his native land is not only a matter of geographical and cultural isolation but also a problem of linguistic estrangement. Elaine Y.L Ho opines:

German is Baumgartner's first language, the language of his identity and cultural filiations. In the course of the novel, this Germanness, or what remains of it, is placed in relation to various language system – Hebrew and language of India – which encode the values of the different cultures that Baumgartner encounters. The
disharmonies that ensue are often rendered as miscommunication or an inability to communicate. Thus, Desai interweaves Baumgartner's German origin and his subsequent alienation from the cultures and societies he encounters. (96-97)

Spending his childhood in Berlin with the strained relations of his parents, Hugo arrives in Calcutta in spell of his business. He meets Habibulla here and on his advice, he comes to Bombay and becomes a partner in the business of furniture with Chiman Lal and finally he is stabbed to death by Kurt, a German neurotic boy. Thus the entire journey of Baumgartner from Berlin to Bombay unfolds multifarious aspects of cultural interaction and his personality. Disenchanted Baumgartner remained throughout his life a wandering Jew, a ‘firangi’. He lived in doubt and distractions in his quest for identity.

The psychoanalytical nature of his alienation and introversion is a challenging phenomenon of our civilization, something that Freud quite appropriately refers to in his essay civilization and its Discontents. As a child, Hugo has constantly experienced the fear and paranoia of being Jewish. At a Christmas party in school he is over whelmed by the strange and awkward sense:
...that he did not belong to the picture-book world of the fir tree, the gifts and celebrations... (and that) he did not belong to the radiant, the triumphant of the world.

(BB-36)

While in Germany he is comparatively of a darker skin than the radiant Aryans, in India he is considered fairer than native Indians. Hugo's experience in the Jewish school merely strengthens his protracted sense of fear, alienation and anxiety.

The repetitive and tortuous violence to which the young Baumgartner's sensibilities have been subjected over the years has simply nurtured in him the degenerative feelings of fear and self-contempt. One can undoubtedly see the continued impact of the Nazi propaganda on Hugo's mind during his residence in India, especially in the Interment camp.

Anita Desai's inside revelation of the character invites a wonderful parallel with George Eliot who also displays the inner threads of human psyche:

Men, like planets, have both a visible and an invisible history. The astronomer threads the darkness with strict deduction, accounting so far every visible one in the
wanderer’s orbit; and the narrator of human actions...
would have to tread the hidden pathways of feeling and
thought which lead up to every moment of action and to
those moments of intense suffering which take the
quality of action.(202)

Anita Desai’s prime concern is how to reveal the identity of
wandering Jew from Germany. Baumgartner, a wandering Jew, she says:
sensed...smelt the Germany in him like a cat might smell another and
know its history, its territory” (BB-21).

Hugo sometimes in a fit of his fear - psychosis shifts from his
present to his childhood memories. His urge to escape into a world of
dream and memory of his childhood becomes a source of pleasure for his
tense nervous system, but his leaning upon past memories creates an
urge in him to escape the dreadful reality of his social existence. When
he fails to effectuate his identity in the society, he recalls his past
memories and gets solace from them. His memories from his childhood
also constitute the formative influences on his personality. As a child, he
lives with an authoritarian father and a loving and over protective mother.
The harshness and the strained relations of his parents leave permanent
scars on an innocent mind of the child. He feels an over powering sense
of insecurity. The strange things, the agonies and sufferings and the strained relations of his parents create in him sensibility of fear and an introvertive attitude. Hugo and his mother feel the need for looking after each other with stricken concern.

His father's affluence as a dealer in quality furniture gradually wanes. Prompted by the Teuton who had taken over his father's home and business, he migrates to India and fetches up in Calcutta of the pre-war and pre-partition period, starts timber business and plunges headlong into the subterranean world of Calcutta. After reaching the shores of India, he engages himself in exploring his identity as a man in India. In Bombay, he is again disillusioned for his mistaken identity as European in spite of his inclination to accept India as his home.

To the couple living on the platform, as refugees coming from a drought hit village, Hugo is a mere non-entity. The woman, as she scourged vessels by the roadside considers Hugo simply "as a lump in grey pants", a nobody, and an old man with an empty bag. The watchman generally ignored him or had only a faint smile but with a twist of distaste at the corner of his mouth. After fifty years in India, the land was familiar to him, but: "the eyes of the people who passed by glanced at
him who was still strange and unfamiliar to them, and all said: Firangi, Foreigner" (BB-19).

As a matter of fact, Hugo is haunted by the pre-war India. Till now, under the process of shaping and reshaping, Baumgartner develops his personality. He now indicates the manner in which an individual adjusts to his physical and social environment. Amidst his continuous bafflement and obsession, he now perceives radiance inside his mind by which he desires to put an end to all man – made barriers, for the natural citizenship of a man:

He realized it only now: that during his constant wandering, his ceaseless walking, he had been drawing closer and closer to his discovery of that bewitched point where they become one land of which he felt himself the natural citizen.(BB-63)

He shows here the feeling of compromise and reconciliation. As he looks at India, he also expresses his concern for growing poverty and violence in Calcutta and in Bombay. In spite of his observation for filth, dirt, whirring and biting of mosquitoes in Calcutta and in Bombay he desires to accept India as his home. The only thing that obsesses him is the insecurity of his mother in Germany. However, he is hopeful for
persuading his mother: "...to accept India as her home. It was becoming clear to him that this was only possibility, there was no other. It was why he plunged into it with such urgency" (BB-94).

Different kinds of sufferings, bafflement and disillusionment provide him an insight and self-confidence for a compromise and reconciliation with his present condition. But the breaking out of war again baffles him. The post-war India depresses him. He often has the nostalgia. His dream country Germany makes an inroad into his mind. As a prisoner in the internment camp he feels highly insecure. Horrified and disconcerted he even works for his future existence. When he compares himself with other prisoners in the camp, he feels insecure and finds no future of his own. But somehow, he escapes secretly the imprisonment of the camp and comes to his flat in Hira Niwas. Here, he feels at rest and once again lives in his present and undergoes the realization of belongingness: "So many years now it is my home and I have a place for everything, my cats including" (BB-144).

He sees now no possibility for returning to Germany and therefore he would have to accept India as his permanent residence. In India, the "immigrant – resident" syndrome takes him over. Hugo understands that
the difference in colour and language throws him out of the orbit of normal existence. "Most People" as R.D Long expresses it:

Most of the time experience themselves and others one or another way that I shall call egoic. That is, centrally or peripherally, they experience the world and themselves in terms of a consistent identity, a me - here over against a you - there, within a frame work of certain structures of spaces and time shared with other members of their society.(210)

The remembrance of his mother is both melancholic and comforting. Lying on his divan in his flat with a sleeping - sickness, he tries to read the cryptic messages of his mother on card: "Do not worry, my rabbit, I am well, Are you well, my mouse and do not worry – I am well" (BB-215).

This message from his mother gives him peace and soothes his tensed mind. He is no more worried for his identity; he finds no distinction between Germany and India. He now fully ceases to think and to look at anything:

Germany there, India here-India here, Germany here...

They fell away from him into an abyss. He saw them
falling now white shapes turning, turning there going
grey as the distance widened between them and him.
(BB-216)

India once existed as an exotic myth in Baumgartner’s imagination.
His romantic imagination of India as the birth place of Gitanjali gets
shattered the moment he lands in India. He thinks India to be inscrutable:
"was it not India’s way of revealing the world that lay on
the otherside of the mirror? India flashed the mirror in
your face, with a brightness and laughter as raucous as a
street band. You could be blinded by it. But if you
refused to look into it, if you insisted on walking around to
the back, then India stood aside, admitting you where you
had not thought you could go. India was two worlds, or
ten. She stood before him, hands on her hips, laughing
that bloodstained laugh: Choose! Choose! ,(BB-85-86)

Baumgartner starts for India from Venice, a city which is associated
with the name of Marco Polo. But contrary to his expectations, what he
finds upon his arrival is not only an enigmatic India but also an India which
is harsh and violent: “Baumgartner felt his world not merely opening up
but torn open, hacked open to the Eastern light”. (BB-88)
His experience is similar in many respects to that of Rudyard Kipling:

I find heat and smells and oils and spices, and puffs of temple incense and sweat and darkness and dirt and lust and cruelty, and above all, things wonderful and fascinating innumerable. (Qtd. in Birkenhead 63)

"Bewilderment" and "fascination" are not only terms that characterise Baumgartner's initial emotional response to India, they are also part of a practice of representation. It is through such initial emotional and aesthetic experience that the western man first encounters India, tries to apprehend it, forms images of it establishes and articulates his relationship with it. He discovers India in its climate, dress, food habit, landscape, colour of the skin, sights, sounds and smells.

In Calcutta he faces a lot of problems, communal and other related violence. His Muslim business associate from the pre-war years, Habibullah, advises him to go to Bombay: "Bombay had no war no famine, Bombay is good city, Sahib, very good for you" (BB-169).

Though Habibulla is born and brought up in Calcutta, suffers insecurity and fears in his own homeland due to communal tension.
There is no safety whether one is a Hindu or a Muslim. As a reviewer Ranjita Basu puts it:

Neither a Hindu nor a Muslim, neither an Indian nor a Pakistani, he is the classic outside whose life is rocked by divisive forces he can neither comprehend nor identify with.(6)

Baumgartner lingers on in Calcutta to mourn his mother's death in the Nazi camps. His Muslim business partner then puts him in touch with the Hindu merchant Chiman Lal. He finally decides to leave Calcutta for Bombay. On reaching Bombay Baumgartner finds Bombay to be intimidating him with its affluence and westernization. It was Habibullah's friend, Chiman Lal, who helps him to settle in; but Baumgartner could not understand why he has taken up a homeless foreigner. The brief years of comparative prosperity as Chiman Lal's friend and business partner ends when Chiman Lal dies and his son refuses to recognize the claims of the old Jew. To the young man, 'the left over' European was beneath notice. He receives a more severe jolt at the hands of his friend Chiman Lal's son. The boy dismisses him without giving a thought to his father's association with Hugo in public and private life. When he asks for the race horse the boy demands the legal proof. Hugo feels deprived of faith.
and confidence in his relationship and tells: "your father and I-it was just an understanding, a friendship" (BB-206).

Frustrated with life and with himself he loses interest in life. So Hugo is almost reduced to penury but managed to feed himself and his cats and lives out his life in the back lanes of Colaba. His last home is very close to the spurious Taj Mahal hotel, where he has spent his first weeks in India before the war.

In India initially he felt alienation and loneliness surround him from all directions. He feels disappointed to find Habibullah reluctant to give back Baumgartner his former business. He feels miserable and deceived by an old business associate, as the timber business is his livelihood. He considers the partition of India adversely affecting his existence. To accept India as his permanent residence is also a form of withdrawal from the harsh and unbearable facts of life in his own country. The more Baumgartner tries to forget his own origin, his own country and the people, the more he finds himself involved with them. There is always a clash between his inner longings and outward pretensions. He pines for his childhood country and family where he could satisfy his sense of belongingness but outwardly he poses that he does not need the pack. He keeps a distance from other Europeans in Bombay, because their
queries remind him of his past, his Jewish background, and the humiliating circumstances from which he tried to escape. He prefers Indian acquaintances because of their ignorance about his identity and the circumstances under which he had to leave Germany. He feels more at ease with them.

His alienation from India springs chiefly out of his failure to establish a linguistic rapport with his locale and milieu. His linguistic incapacity brings about the disintegration of his socio-psychic self. He wanders in vain for a signboard in a familiar language. Thus Hugo Baumgartner is an alien in his own land. A marooned and castaway self washed ashore Colaba by the fatal tide of his life, Baumgartner has been disowned and abandoned by his own country Germany. His frantic quest for roots is indeed a journey from one state of void to another, from nowhere to no where. Hence, Baumgartner belongs neither to the west nor to the east. His is a case of double alienation. Baumgartner does not view his confinement in the camp as alienation and imprisonment. He takes it as freedom and belongingness:

Baumgartner and others in the Jewish quarter had good reason to feel thankful for the protection of the British-run camp, however sick with sorrow over the fate of their relations or of Germany, however restless and frustrated
and bored by the lifeless monotony of the camp. At least it was a refuge, even if temporary. (BB-132)

Gisela and Lotte were twin dancers at Prince's in Calcutta when Hugo first meets them. Gisela claims that her roots were in Russia, "a Czarina" fled from the Red's as Lotte sarcastically pokes at her credentials. Gisela possesses indomitable resilience and enterprise that points her out as one of fortune's favourites. During the war she vanishes with a Raja and makes a dramatic reappearance with Julius exploiting the vulnerable Indian artists promising them international fame. But Lotte's choice of her survival over quality of life, of myopic practicality over the visionary makes her a spiritual drifter, happy to cling to passing straw to keep her afloat: Kanti first, and Hugo next, after Germany could no longer be home to her. Her philosophy seems suspended on the one word 'compromise' for life otherwise becomes appallingly unbearable, to women like Lotte in a society split by the gender difference, where men are centralized, marginalizing women to the Zone of non-existence. Moreover Loomba opines:

In patriarchal society, women are spilt subjects who watch themselves being watched by men. They turn themselves into objects because feminity itself is defined by being gazed upon by men. (162)
Lotte succumbs to her lot submissively accepting the existing order of things in society. Gisela, on the other hand, is the empowered female dominating the male, thereby subverting the social order. Being an immigrant Gisela does not feel very much alienated and uprooted as Hugo Baumgartner and Lotte. Lotte, like Hugo, also feels like an exile in Bombay: "Mostly I am alone, All alone" (BB-203).

Lotte marries Kanti in order to acquire an Indian identity. Marriage is not a panacea for the cultural as well as psychological situations. Lotte who is lively and aggressive, fails to identify with the country of her adoption by marriage. Her joy is expressive not only of her relief at having found an old acquaintance amid the alien faces, but also of security of having a fellow country man nearby. Lotte has been very intimate with Hugo and often visits him to get relieved from the boredom and loneliness with which she is suffering. When the novel opens one finds Lotte as the only other foreigner – "firangi" – known to be on intimate terms with Hugo who is murdered now and she has been called to identify the victim by the police.

Both Hugo and Lotte are the isolated characters, who are now old and console each other. During such moment, Lotte used to confess to Baumgartner that they should have gone back to their country long back
instead of living here as isolated foreigners. Even after staying here for such a long time, both of them feel isolated and cut off from the mainstream of Indian life. After the death of Baumgartner, Lotte remains an isolated figure, totally broken after losing her oldest friend. Both of them are solitary foreigners in India and are uprooted from their own culture. Lotte's company was a source of consolation and was like an oasis in a desert:

It was only Lotte who kept him in touch with the German tongue – but that was not why he went to see her. He saw Lotte not because she was from Germany but because she belonged to the India of his own experience; hers was different in many ways but still they shared enough to be comfortable with each other, prickly and quick-tempered but comfortable as brother and sister are together. (BB-150)

Hugo, Lotte, Lily, Julius and the German boy Kurt also feel uprooted and have problems like, loss of personal identity, the sense of homelessness and the fear of insecurity. They represent the condition of modern man who, according to Edmund Fuller, “suffers not only from war, persecution famine and ruin, but from inner problem… a conviction of isolation, randomness, meaninglessness in his way of existence” (3).
Kurt, a young German whom Hugo meets at Farrokh's cafe is a drug addict with a weird imagination. He suffers acute alienation cultural as also psychological. Hugo who is isolated but contented with the mild pleasures of old age, tries to befriend the young man in order to overcome his loneliness. Hugo meets his tragic end at the hand of this mad and isolated German youth who murders him for a few pieces of silver.

Desai has brilliantly portrayed the dilemma of 'uprooted individuals' through these novels. The experience of exile which begins as a condition of living often becomes a condition of mind as in the case of Hugo. Cultural displacement makes them alienated and lonely inspite of their assays of adjustment.