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Failure of Reconciliation in the Contact Zone: Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay*

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By

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Letter of Approval

This thesis, entitled, "**Failure of Reconciliation in the Contact Zone: Anita Desai's**

Baumgartner's Bombay," submitted to the Central Department of English by Deepa Raut,

has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee:

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Abstract

In *Baumgartner's Bombay*, Desai fuses multicultural strands in artistic fashion. Her Indo-German parentage provides the novel a transparent sincerity whereas her own expatriate experiences create for her a synthesis. Hugo Baumgartner, a German Jew, comes to India to survive the holocaust. The plot of the novel has a quest-motif in which the principal character, Hugo tries to establish his identity in an alien culture. He makes sincere but ceaseless efforts to come to term with Indian culture throughout his life. He learns to speak Hindi, befriends Indians, earns his living in India, wears Indian cloths -- adopt Indian way of life but in return, he is always cheated, mistreated and abused. His quest for 'home,' for safety, security and identity, which runs through emptiness and isolation, ends tragically, in failure, frustration and disgust. Baumgartner is forced to live the life of seclusion and withdrawal. The only company is that of cats that he nurses and loves. Accepting but not accepted becomes Hugo's fate in India. Even after staying for fifty years he remains a *Firanghi* – a foreigner. The failure of reconciliation and the tragic isolation leads Baumgartner to death. Baumgartner, throughout his life, sails in the same boat of isolation in an alien country; with the memories of his parental home, that he left some fifty years ago, and the dreams of a cultural new home, which remains only a dream.

Contents

I. Anita Desai, Indo-English Novel and Expatriate Sensibility

Anita Desai an expatriate Indian women novelist is a wonderfully subtle writer who achieves her powerful and poignant effects by stealth rather than by direct action. Writing for her is a process of discovering truth, a necessity to think, to feel, to realize since she writes as instinctively as she breathe. As most promising creative writer of modern life in all its complicated aspects, Desai, with a dozen of novels so far and collections of short stories, had added a new and significant dimension to the Indian English novel.

What distinguishes Anita Desai from other writers is her preoccupation with the individual, and his inner world of sensibility, the chaos inside his mind. Like her contemporaries Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, she does not focus on social, political, economic, cultural problems alone. Concerned exclusively with the personal tragedy of the individual, Desai brings cultural, social, political and economic aspects in order to show how individual life is conditioned and above all tragic. Her forte is the "exploration of the interior world, plunging into the limitless depth of the mind, and bringing into relief the hidden contour of the human psyche" (Asnani 143). Her fictional milieu is mostly overcast by shadows and half shadows, mist and fog, a world half revealed and half concealed, partly real and partly fictitious. Her central theme is the "existential predicament of an individual which is projected through incompatible couples, acutely sensitive wives, and dismal, callous, un-understanding, ill-chosen husbands" (Asnani 144). Desai's fiction seems to assuage both the traditions of American and English novel. As a result:

> Her fiction takes its form and tone from polarities, opposites, and
>
> irreconcilables. Oddity, distortion of personality, dislocation of normal
>
> life, recklessness of behaviour, morbidity of temperament, and malignancy

of motive, these together with the profound poetry of disorder, radical

forms of alienation, maladjustments and contradictions – seems to have

been preserved as the best of both the great traditions. Like her American

counterpart, Desai sees more deeply, darkly, privately, and like her

English counterpart, her emphasis is on an appropriation of reality, with

the high purpose of bringing order to disorder, by reflecting the anomalies

and dilemmas of the unexampled territories of the life in the new world.

(Asnani 144-45)

This aspect of Desai's fiction undoubtedly adds a new dimension to the Indian-

English novel. Turning inward, her fiction grapples with the intangible realities of life,

plunging into the innermost depths of the human psyche to fathom its mysteries, the inner

turmoil, the chaos inside the mind. Desai transmutes authentically her culture's (Indian)

uncertainties, its complexities, and its paradoxes. Her imagination is horrified by the

emptiness of modern life. Clearly differentiating between 'truth' and 'reality',

she takes truth as synonymous of art, not of reality. She finds no discrepancy between

truth and art: "reality is merely the one-tenth visible section of iceberg that one sees

above the surface of the ocean. Art the remaining nine-tenth of it lie below the

surface. That is why it is more near truth and reality itself. Art does not merely reflect

reality, it enlarges it" (Replies1).

Her writing is an effort to discover, underline and convey the significance of

thing. Desai does not believe that literature ought to be confined within reality not that it

has further debt to society beyond the point of its being truthful, for it is not expected to

execute reforms, lay down laws or lead the people. Desai uses stream of consciousness

technique, flashbacks, and interior monologues in her novels. She does it with a view to

capture the 'prismatic quality' of life. As a result of this eminent use of flashbacks and stream of consciousness technique, the form of Desai's fiction becomes coincident with consciousness, "it soaks over the entire work, the plot being not same discernible separate story but the vision from which it is told, so that the discreteness of character or traditional pattern of story are thrown overboard" (Asnani 147-48). Next to the exploration of underlying truth and the use of stream of consciousness technique, it is style that she emphasizes. By style, she means the conscious effort of uniting language with symbol, and word with rhythm. Without this unity, language would remain a dull and pedestrian vehicle. As Bruce King quotes in *Contemporary Novelists*, Desai says:

> I search for a style that will bring it to vivid, surging life. Story action and drama means little to me except insofar as they emanate directly from the personality I have chosen to write about, born of their dreams and wills. One must find a way to unite the feeling inners the outer rhythm, to obtain certain integrity and to impose order on chaos. (Henderson 238-39)

Primarily interested in explaining the psychic depths of her female characters, Desai may be said to be doing something unique among the contemporary Indian English novelists. She lays no special emphasis on the plot construction, on the well-made novel with the traditional notion of having a beginning, middle, and an end. Whatever action there is in her novel, is part of the integral whole composed of the human psyche, the human situation and the outer and inner rhythms. She makes no bones about the selection of the theme when she says, "My novels don't have themes at least not till they are finished, published or read, do I see any theme. While writing I follow my instinct, I follow flashes of insight and somehow come to the end and look back to see pattern of footprints on the sands" (Replies 4).

Books, as she rightly thinks, are born of a single image, which the writer finds has stayed with him when countless others whirled past and away. The impressions, ideas, images, even lines and phrases that tend to drift through her mind and occupy her subconscious, all begin to unite into a rhythmic pattern. Then she realizes that she has got the material for a book. In Desai's concept of the form, pattern, rhythm, perspective or the singleness of visions is of utmost value to the novel. She does not plan this out to begin with and has only a very hazy idea of the pattern, the rhythm. But it works itself out as she goes along, naturally and inevitably. She prefers the word 'pattern' to plot or plan for it is more natural and intuitive. She only relies on flashes of vision or intuition:

> One can only feel one's way by intuition. Intuition is silent. Also one must have the critical sense to know when something threatens to cloud his vision. One must avoid such thing, discard them. Writing is not an act of deliberation, reason or choice. It is a matter of instinct, silence, compulsion, and waiting. (Replies 5)

The most prominent feature of Anita Desai's art is the delienation of character. She is primarily interested in the portrayal of female protagonists as living in separate, closed world of existential problems and passions, love and hates, fear and aspiration. They are dynamic, always growing and changing, viable and mutable. They are portrayed as engrossed with the present, look backward in time, and visualize future as well. To quote Bruce King "Desai's stories explore character through inaction: usually there is wastage of the self, false choices, illusions, lack of will" (Henderson 239). As a writer, Desai is interested in peculiar and eccentric characters rather than everyday, average ones:

> I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated, or been drives[sic] into some extremity of despair and so turned against the

general current. It is easy to flow with the current, it makes no demands, it costs no effort. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out the great no; who fights the current and struggle against it, they know what the demands are and what it costs to meet them. (Indian 224)

As regard to the autobiographical element in her novels, Desai believes it to be inevitable. But she knows the clear line of demarcation between the materials drawn from real life and the one from imagination:

In countless small ways the scenes and settings certainly belongs to my life. Many of the minor character and incidents are also based on real life. But the major character and major events are either entirely imaginary or an amalgamation of several characters and happenings. One can use the raw material of life only very selectively. (Indian 225)

Since Anita Desai is a very careful meticulous artist and since she can speak German, Bengali, and Hindi beside English quite fluently, the choice of medium is very important for her. An idea or an image, according to her, is seldom vital enough to set anyone on fire, to write there must be a passion for language as well, a familiarity and ease with the words and also a conception of them as perpetually growing, changing, renewing themselves and appearing in fresh and delightful forms. Her comments as to why she writes in English is:

My language (of the novels) is English and I find it answers all my needs. It is rich and flexible, supple and adaptable, varied and vital. I think it is even capable of reflecting the Indian character and situation. I think I have learnt how to live with the English language, how to deal with the problems it creates mainly by ignoring them. (Indian 226)

In her novels, Desai achieves that difficult task of moulding the English language and idiom to her purpose without self-conscious attempt of sounding Indian. Thus, known for her sensitivity in the structuring of the patterns of her novels, integrity of artistic vision, imaginative mind, keen observation, sharp awareness, and competent craftsmanship, she has become a much sought after writer, sought after by publishers and readers alike.

Since the encounter between east & west, especially India, on the one hand and Britain, America and Europe on the other, is a recurring theme in indo-English literature, Anita Desai herself being a half European descent and residing in U.S.A, truly captures the cultural Dilemmas in her novels. She depicts the problem of the immigrants in a new culture where her protagonists strive for an order. Sometimes they succeed and most of the time the new culture, custom, language, and value systems of such society become hostile to them. Because of this hostility, they strongly feel the need of their home- the native land. Desai projects the need for cultural negotiation and a meaningful existence amid the conflicting cultural spaces through the characters like Hugo Baumgartner in Baumgartner's Bombay, occupying two different cultural backgrounds.

Baumgartner's Bombay is a moving account of the painful effort of a simple and submissive Jew. It narrates the life of Hugo Baumgartner from his childhood days in Germany to his death, at the age of about seventy, in India. Born to a well to do Family in Germany, Hugo's misfortune begins with the suicide of his father, Herr Baumgartner, and the political upheavals under Hitler. He escapes to India to conduct the export of timber. But he faces difficulties because of the lack of education and the experience of a businessman. When he enters India, he finds it to be completely different

from what he had imagined. He accepts everything India and Indian offers to him but fails to come to terms with them.

In Calcutta, he fails to develop a sense of belongingness. Though, he builds friendship with Habbibullah, falls in love with a German cabaret dancer, Lotte, but does not think of marrying her. Finally he is cheated by his friends. He escapes to Bombay. He becomes intimate to Chimanlal only to be betrayed by his sons. He starts his fortune by earning commissions with orders and transactions for Chimanlal's business. Fed up with human company, Hugo prefers to live in the company of his cats in a dark, dingy and shabby flat in Bombay. His financial resources are so meager that he has to collect left-over from Farrokh's café to feed his cats. Though he prefers living lonely and miserable life, one day he takes pity on a drug addict German boy Kurt, and brings him home for rest and food. But the boy, whom Hugo pitied once, kills Baumgartner and runs away with his silver trophies. Thus, throughout his life in India, Hugo becomes a perpetual drifter, a nowhere man, a Firanghi; accepting but not accepted, always trying to negotiate amid the conflicting social and cultural spaces for a meaningful identity.

Baumgartner's Bombay has received a wide range of criticism from different critics, where much of the focus has been placed on the issues of gender, race, culture, and immigrant's identity crisis. For Suresh Chandra the novel is "A Tale of Two Cities" for it portrays the vivid picture of two cities (Bombay and Calcutta) which have "the feature of with its mirror image and a painting with its depth, density, colour and image. The backdrop of Bombay offers a frightening picture." In his view, "the oppressiveness and squalor of the city life in *Baumgartner's Bombay* should be viewed through Hugo's experience of the city" (120).

Baumgartner's Bombay is as much the story of a man who is not welcomed

anywhere and is jostled as in a time capsule from one place to another as the portrayal of two cities. Bombay is the base of Baumgartner on his arrival in India. Later, he shifts to Calcutta. After a stint of internment camp and brief stay in Calcutta, he moves over to Bombay again and meets his nemesis there. Subhash Chandra compares the struggle of Baumgartner with Sisyphus because both are involved in exhausting, monotonous and apparently unending futile task. According to him:

> Sisyphus is "superior to his fate". He is "stronger than his rock" so is Baumgartner. He learns to live with the indifferent and absurdly cruel surroundings and goes on rolling the rock of life. Sisyphus is conscious of the hopelessness of his situation and yet he goes on and that is what gives him tragic stature. Baumgartner too is aware of his desolate condition. He has no illusion of rosy future as against his sordid past & humiliating present. But he remains unbent in his desire to go on living "One must assume Sisyphus happy", Baumgartner is happy too deriving his happiness from an otherwise hopeless existence. Hugo Baumgartner can be murdered, but he will not succumb to despair and commit suicide.
> (137-38)

Desai's novel is a compelling and moving document of the bleakest period of history. It forms part of a body of writing that confronts one of the darkest moments in the history of humanity, and with great courage reveals not only how humanity suffers & inflicts upon itself untold damage but how it eventually repair itself and thus survives.

The background of the novel is one of the major social and political confrontations of the century. It is the story of the "humanity's need to find sustenance within itself. It is the story of love that binds, sustain, and ennobles; love that draws

human beings to one another and responds to their innermost need for human warmth" (Taneja 167). An ambience of racial hatred in Germany shrivels Hugo and leaves him singled. His search for the bonds that makes living meaningful takes him to India. So, to look upon Hugo Baumgartner as a decrepit old man purposelessly living with caterwauling cats in filthy surrounding is to underestimate his genuine efforts to build up enriching relationship with alien place, people and its culture.

Baumgartner's Bombay can be viewed as Anita Desai's attempt to explore her roots and family background. The entire narrative of the novel is structured on Anita Desai's tinted view of her mother's past, her memories, experiences and old association. Suresh Chandra Saxena focuses on the private history of the novelist as he adds, "the indo-German aspect of Desai's background is the centerpiece of all her writing and no worthwhile study of her work can be made without taking notice of her parent's past & their influence on Desai's sensibility" (139).

The story effectively unfolds the socio-cultural sterility of the two places and their inhabitants. Desai's protagonist exhibits a lack of unquestionable and self-validating certainties. As A. Clement views, "Deprived of secured sense of personal identity, Desai's protagonist[s] … [is] […] emotionally incapacitated to encounter the hazards of life--social, ethical, spiritual and biological" (215-16). The emotional sterility is at once the cause and consequence of his failure to achieve an authentic and integral selfhood.

For Mrinalini Solanki "the protagonist[s] … [is] torn between … [his] search for authentic selfhood and the limitation of the human situation that prevents … [him] from such realization" (114). Hugo is forced to overcome the horror of separateness and of lostness and to find new forms by letting himself to the world so that he will be able to feel at home. In an anxiety provoking situation, failure to achieve authentic selfhood results in

more and more discomfort. It becomes a serious threat to his survival. S.P. Swain and P.M. Nayak comment that Hugo's "struggle for the attainment of an authentic existence […] moves from a mistaken and confused awareness of identity to quiet self-assertion" of individuality. His "struggle for self-identification leads to the transcendence of his self-alienated plight" (18).

Every writer has his own vision, which is peculiar and unique. His perspective is shaped by the experience he gets of the world around him. National ethos may also influence a writer's perception which is inextricably interwoven with its cultural heritage. Expatriate writers have the complex experience of coping with the coalescing influence of the land of their birth and the country of their choice. Their vision gets suitably modified by a confluence of divergent cultures, of which they are the products. In a similar manner, Anita Desai has made a place for herself in immigrant writing too. Born of a German mother and Bengali father, married to an Indian, and currently settled in the us, her cross cultural background added to her first hand experiences as an 'outsider' or as a 'marginal' living in another dominant society. These experiences accounts for the unmistakable stamp of authenticity in her novels.

Anita Desai, an Indian settled in US is familiar with the east-west confrontation and the resultant identity crises. As a writer hailing from colonized country, it is but natural that her sympathy is with the oppressed. She seems to affirm that to be on the side of human and life against machinery, against exploitation of the weak, against war and violence. The encounter between the dramatically opposite east and west in the context of human relationships and cultural values constantly engages her attention and gets reflected in her novels. Desai herself being the product of both the oriental and the occident cultures, it is not far-fetching to see in most of her novels, her own experiences being filtered.

II. Cross-Cultural Negotiation in the Contact Zone

Cultural encounter facilitates a pattern of mutual adjustment and reciprocal give-and-take by offering a space enough for coexistence and meaningful identity between cultures. When two or more cultures come together, the contestation/struggle takes place that matches the tensional relation between absence and presence, emptiness and affirmation because of the distinct cultural traits of the respected cultures. The juxtaposition of two cultures i.e. alien and native culture generate a moment of self-transformation or the re-evaluation of prevailing patterns in the light of newly experienced insights of life. Cultural encounter is a process in which various modes take place like interaction, acculturation, assimilation, adaptation, cultural and dialogical engagement etc.

In the context of globalization, encounter of diverse cultural traits and complexities are modified because of the constant contact and cultural identities are becoming hybrid, in-between and multicultural. Cultural interact stem from the prolonged contact between two or more sets of values and norms which can be extremely different from one another and such contact may extend from domestic contacts to global interaction and between hegemonic western culture and developing non-western societies. Cooperation and competition between cultures may result either in exchange and mutual support or hostility and conflict; from such cultural policy, cultural modification takes place which concerns the changes a cultural group to identities in collective as well as individual behaviour in order to coexist and interact with the norms and habits of a dominant social system. The ethnic minorities, immigrants, indigenous people exposed to the colonization are mostly obliged to adapt the so-called superior, civilized and dominant cultural system for the meaningful existence and identity. The interaction with a dominant culture has been labeled as biculturalism.

Post-colonialism pursues a post-national reading of the colonial encounter by focusing on the global amalgam of cultures and identities; it examines the mutual contagion and subtle intimacies between colonizer and colonized. The political subject of decolonization is engendered by the encounter between conflicting systems of belief. Anti colonial identities do not owe their origin to a pure and stable essence, rather they are produced in response to the contingencies of treatment and disruptive breach in history and culture. The encounter between colonizer and colonized can be read as contact which requires a noble form of cross- cultural communication between speakers of different ideological/ cultural languages. As Bhabha observes, the grim polarities of the colonial encounter are necessarily bridged by a 'third-space' of communication, negotiation and by implication, translation. It is in this indeterminate zone, or "place of hybridity;" where anticolonial politics first begins to articulate its agenda and "where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other*, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the movement of politics" (25).

The mode of cultural encounter is a dialogical engagement and interaction where two diverse cultures meet, there emerges a conflict. The conflict and mutual enmity are the facts of human relations through which communication or dialogue between cultures is possible where negotiation takes place for mutual and meaningful engagement in a new, social and cultural milieu.

Cross culture dialogues are more numerous in the non-western post-colonial societies. Post-independence societies established new metaphors of nationhood to write new history and to create and frame defining symbols for the purpose of imagining the notion. They tried to integrate the cultural life of the past with their post independence

westernized realities by the conceptual structures drown from local tradition. The third world or new world space is the junction where many cultural traits meet; it is the 'empty' land where strangers from every other part of the globe collide, clash and grapple in order to 'belong' to it. It is the space where the creolization, assimilation and syncretism are negotiated. As Hall observes:

> We do not stand in the same relation of the 'otherness' to the metropolitan centers. Each has negotiated its economic, political, and cultural dependency differently. And this 'difference', whether we like it or not, is already inscribed in our cultural identities. In turn, it is this negotiation of identity which makes us, vis-à-vis one another, Jamaican, Haitian, Cuban, Guadeloupean, Barbadian etc. (114)

The common history-transportation, slavery, colonization- has been profoundly formative which does not constitute a common origin. There always remain the difference and conflicting situation.

In conflicting situation of cultural exchange and cultural encounter, there always arises the situation of dialogical engagement between diametrically opposite sides having distinct interest, desires, thought, cultural traits, social values and norms. Both the sides attempt to come to the negotiable environment through dialogue, compromise, a wide agreement, communication or a mutual interaction. Negotiation is a back and forth cultural communication designed to reach in an agreement when the two sides have the same interest that are shared and others are opposed. In most negotiations output is achieved without exhausting the option which results in mutual gain. The negotiation is a form of interaction and dialogue through which individual, groups; organizations and government explicitly try to arrange a new combination of their common and conflicting interests. The

compromise is a must for the negotiation and the both sides avoid their position to participate the give-and-take relationship through mutual interaction and dialogue. Interaction, dialogue and bargaining are the major components of negotiation to come on the process of settlement; accepting attacks, threats and loss of temper etc. as perfectly legitimate tactics should not be allowed to disrupt negotiation.

The important point of negotiation is to manage the conflicting situation for the better socio-cultural and economic environment to human beings who are living together having distinct cultural traits and so on. Negotiation usually involves a number of steps including the exchange of proposals and counter proposals. In a good faith negotiation, both sides are expected to make offers and concessions. Once aware of the conflicts, either parties or persons experience emotional reaction to it and think about it in various ways. Such emotions and thoughts are crucial to the course of developing conflicts. Sometimes conflicts escalating the atmosphere become charged with anger, frustration, resentment, mistrust, hostility and sense of futility and lead to the failure of reconciliation. A hybrid cultural location always does not allow the merger or assimilation but mostly the partial adjustments and hybrid cultural practices.

Hybridity has been most recently associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha, whose analysis of colonizer/ colonized relation stresses their interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities. All cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space, the third space of enunciation, where cultural identity always emerges in contradictory and ambivalent space which, for Bhabha, makes the claim to a hierarchical 'purity' of cultures, untenable. The recognition of this ambivalent space of cultural identity may help to overcome the exploits of cultural diversity in favour of the recognition of an empowering hybridity within cultural difference:

> It is significant that the productive capacities of this third space have a
>
> colonial or a postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that
>
> alien territory may open the way to conceptualizing an international,
>
> cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of cultures hybridity.
>
> (Bhabha 38)

It is the 'in between' space that carries the burden and meaning of culture which makes the

notion of hybridity so important. It is frequently used in post-colonial discourse to mean

simply cross-cultural 'exchange' and the idea of equal exchange.

'Hybridity' can be understood by referring to Bhabha's notion of 'mimicry' and

'ambivalence'. The 'ambivalence' in post-colonial discourse refers to the cultural cross-

over of various sorts emanating from the encounter between colonizer and colonized, alien

and native. It is the mixture of both parties where second one act in the consent of first one.

The colonized adopts the colonizer's culture, language, and values thinking that it is

superior and is mimed to be such. The mimic men never become pure white men, and what

they mimic appears also as mockery or parody. Mimicking the colonizers, the colonized

becomes almost the same but not the quite though they want to acquire the superior

position of the colonizer. As Bhabha says:

> The menace of mimicry is its double vision which is disclosing the
>
> ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. And it is a
>
> double vision that is a result of what I've described as the partial
>
> representation/ recognition of the colonial object. (88)

Along Bhabha's line Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have further defined ambivalence as,

"the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between

colonizers and colonized. The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is

never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer" (12). The colonized as a mimic man is not the same person as the colonizer though he wants to be so by wearing a mask to imitate the colonizer. Such mimicry of the colonizer places the colonized in an 'ambivalent hybrid space' or 'in-betweenness.'

Mimicry reveals the limitation in the authority of colonial discourse, almost as though colonial authority inevitably embodies the seeds of its own destruction. The consequences of this for post colonial studies are quite profound for what emerges through this flow in colonial power is writing that is post colonial writing, the ambivalence of which is menacing to colonial authority. The menace of mimicry does not lie in its concealment of some real identity behind its mask, but comes from its 'double' vision which discloses the ambivalence of colonial discourse and also disrupts its authority. Mimicry is, then "the sign of a double articulation", a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which "appropriates" the "other" as it visualizes power:

> Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate; however, a difference or recalcitrance, which cohere the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both normalized knowledge and disciplinary powers. (Bhabha 86)

The appropriate objects of a colonial chain of command are also inappropriate colonial subjects because what is being set in their behavior is something that may ultimately be beyond the control of colonial authority. This inappropriateness disrupts the normality of the dominant discourse itself. The threat inherent in mimicry then comes not from an overt resistance but from the way in which it continually suggests an identity not quite like the colonizer. This identity of colonial subject is 'almost the same but not quite' means that the colonial couture is always potentially and strategically insurgent.

Hybridity like mimicry, Bhabha argues, subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures. The series of inclusions and exclusions on which a dominant culture is premised are deconstructed by the very entry of the formally-excluded subjects into the mainstream discourse. The dominant culture is contaminated by the linguistic and racial differences of the native self. Hybridity thus can be seen, in Bhabha's interpretation as a counter narrative a critique of the cannon and its exclusion of other narratives.

Hybridity, thus, is an expression of everyday life in the post-imperial era. It continuously alters the national and international. Hybridity draws on local and transnational identifications and generates historically new mediations. Such 'mediations' are new because they are located outside the official practices of citizenship situated in the interstices of numerous legal and cultural borders, which undercut hegemony.

Hegemony, initially a term referring to the dominance of one state within the confederation, is now generally understood to mean, domination by consent. Fundamentally, hegemony is a power of ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all. Domination thus exerted not by force, nor even necessarily by active persuasion, but by a more subtle and inclusive power over the economy and other state apparatuses such as education and the media, by which the ruling class interest is presented as the common interest and thus comes to be taken for granted. Hegemony implies a situation where a 'historic bloc' of ruling class faction exercises social authority and leadership over the subordinate classes through a combination of force and, more importantly consents.

However, hegemonic bloc never consists of a single socio-economic category but is formed through a series of alliances in which one group takes on a position of leadership. Ideology plays a crucial part in allowing this alliance of groups to overcome narrow

economic-corporate interest in favor of 'national-popular' dominance. Thus "a cultural social unity is achieved through which a multiplicity of dispersed skills, with heterogeneous aims, was welded together with a single aim as the basis of an equal and common conception of the world" (Gramsci 349). The building, maintenance or subversion of a common conception of the world is the dominant aspect of ideological struggle involving a transformation of understanding through criticism of the existing popular ideologies.

Hegemony is temporary settlement and series of alliances between social groups which is won and non-given. Further, it needs to be constantly rewon, renegotiated, for culture is a terrain of conflict and struggle over meanings. Hegemony is not static entity but series of changing discourses and practices intrinsically bound up with social power. It should be understood in terms of "how strictures of signification are mobilized to legitimate the societal interest of hegemonic groups" (Giddens 6). Since hegemony has to be constantly remade and rewon, it opens up the possibility of a challenge to it, that is, the marking of a counter-hegemonic bloc of subordinate groups and classes.

Since one of the central arguments of cultural studies is that its object of study, culture, is a zone of contestation, competing meanings and versions of the world constantly fight for ascendancy and pragmatic claim to truth. In particular, meaning and truth in the domain of culture are constituted within patterns of power. It is in this sense that the 'power to name' and to make particular description is a form of cultural politics. Issues of cultural representation are 'political' because they are intrinsically bound up with question of power. Power as social regulation, which is productive of the self, enables some kinds of knowledge and identities to exist while denying it to others.

The relation of "culture and power, which most typically characterizes modern societies, are best understood in the light of the respects in which the field of culture is now increasingly governmentally organized and constructed" (Bennett 25).

For Bennett, culture is caught up in, and functions as a part of, cultural technologies which organize and shape social life and human conduct. A cultural technology is part of the 'machinery' of institutional and organizational structures that produce particular configuration of power/knowledge. Culture is a matter not just of representations and consciousness but of institutional practices, administrative routines and spatial arrangements.

Along Bennet's line one can argue that cultural hybridity produced by the black diaspora does not obscure the power that was embedded in the moment of slavery nor the economic push pull of migration. Since, diaspora identities are constructed within and by cultural power; it has become a constitutive element of our cultural identities. Thus, the cultural identities of rich white men in New York are of a very different order to those of poor Asian women in rural India. While we are all parts of a global society whose consequences no one can escape, we remain unequal participants in the globalized era, which thrives on contact zones.

Contact Zone and Cultural Mediation

The idea of 'contact zone' was first developed by Mary Louise Pratt in her seminal book *Imperial Eyes*. Contact zone is a social space marked by the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjuncture and whose trajectories now intersect. "Contact zones", writes Pratt, "are the social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination-like colonialism, slavery, or their

aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (Pratt 4). A contact perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizer and the colonized, self and other, native and the non-native, not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within asymmetrical relations of power.

Though, characterized by the asymmetrical relation of power, "along with rage, incomprehension, and pain," contact zone, at the same time offers "exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding and new wisdom" (Arts 71). In such spaces people historically and geographically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, racial inequality, and intractable conflict. Numbers of other vocabularies are closely related to the idea of 'contact zone' like 'transculturation' 'autoethnography' and 'safe houses'. 'Transculturation' aims to replace overly reductive concepts of acculturation and assimilation. As Pratt says, the term refers to a "process whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by dominant or metropolitan culture" (Arts 65). While subjugated people can not readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own. Transculturation not only refers to the metropolitan modes of representation of its periphery but also the formation of metropolis by the subordinated periphery. But the bitter fact is that while the imperial center tends to understand itself as determining the periphery, the metropolis habitually blinds itself to the fact that it was constructed form outside in as much as from the inside out.

The term "autoethnography" refers to the process of using the vocabularies and idioms already used by others while representing the self. To be precise, "autoethnographic

texts are representations that the so-defined others construct *in response to* or in dialogue with those tents." Such texts, Pratt says, are "merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding" (Arts 64). They often address to both metropolitan audiences and the speaker's own community and constitute a group's point of entry into metropolitan literate culture.

Along with 'transculturation' and 'autoethnography', 'safe houses' is the phenomenon of the contact zone. It refers to the "social and intellectual spaces" Pratt writes, "where groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degree of trust, shared understandings, temporary protection form legacies of oppression" (Arts 71). Where there is a legacy of subordination, groups need places for healing and mutual recognition – safe houses – to construct shared understandings, knowledge, and claims on the world that they can bring in to the contact zone. However, the idea of 'contact zone' denies the homogeneous, sovereign 'community' embodying values like equality, fraternity and liberty, which the societies often profess but systematically fail to realize.

Contact zone includes identifying with the ideas, interests, and histories of the other. It involves transculturation and collaborative work, comparison between elite and vernacular cultural forms, offers the spaces for people to uncover confront and reflect on suppressed aspects of history, and ways to "move *into and out of* the rhetoric of authenticity." It provides "ground rules for communication across lines of difference and hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect; a systematic approach to the concept of *cultural mediation*" (Arts 72).

In the contact zone, when two diverse cultures meet, there emerges an initial stance of conflict. As a mode of social and cultural interaction conflict occupies a prominent place in the annals of human history. Conflict and mutual enmity are the chief trademarks of human relations through which communication or dialogue between cultures is possible. It is the dialogical engagement of cultures that characterizes our age, which is incarnated by ethnology.

The notion of dialogical engagement or 'dialogical exchange' facilitates reciprocal encounter that involves an affirmation of the other's 'exteriority' which goes hand in hand with recognition of the other as subject. This 'exotopic' relation is 'non-unifying', that is, an engagement which preserves reciprocal freedom where no one has the last word and neither voice is reduced to the status of a simple object or elevated to the status of a superior subject. William Connolly has endorsed an ethic of 'cultivation' which involves "both distance and engagement, both recognition of inalienable otherness and genuine care for difference" where identity remains open to "loose strands and unpursued possibilities in oneself" (160-61). Such openness can generate and sustain an attitude of agonal interdependence, an ethic in which adversaries are respected and maintained in a mode of agonistic respect for the difference that constitute them, an ethic of care for life.

Cultural encounter does not always entail merger or fusion, but may lead to partial adaptation or negotiation, through a process of cultural borrowing. This happens when the respective cultures face each other on a more nearby equal or roughly comparable basis. Assimilation, as Dallmayr quotes Robert Park and Ernest Burgess is, "a process of interpretation and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated by them in a common cultural life" (Dallmayr 14). Negotiation is the process

whereby individuals or groups once dissimilar becomes similar, share the same sentiments, values and goals and whereby attitudes of many persons unite and develop into a unified group. It results because of the functional relation of the diverse cultural elements.

Negotiation is closely affiliated to the process of acculturation. Within the acculturating group, individuals lose their ties with the original cultural background, and acquire values, habits and behaviors from the dominant culture. It is usually applied to policies in some western or westernizing nations. In the post-imperial era assimilation is greatly abetted and intensified by nationalism and the idea of the nation-state. As Fred Dallmayr quotes Rupert Emerson:

> In the contemporary world, the nation is for greater portions of mankind, the community with which men must intensely and most unconditionally identify themselves. The nation is today the largest community which effectively commands men's loyalty, overriding the claims both of the lesser communities within it and those which cut across it. In this sense the nation can be called a "terminal community." (Dallmayr 15)

The hegemonic influence of nationalism and the nation-state is not only confined to advanced western countries but extends to non-western, postcolonial societies. While initially opposing the 'state' as an alien, colonial apparatus, independence movements quickly adopted a nationalist rhetoric geared toward the acquisition of state power. Every nationalist assertion of independence urgently needs to reconstruct the nation through collective imagination.

In today's world wave after wave of immigrants are steadily socialized or assimilated into the prevailing way of life of the nation states like India, Africa, and Caribbean Islands etc with their accent on individual initiative and the profit motive. But

the 'melting-pot rhetoric' alone cannot truly depict the cultural clash of these societies, because it is difficult to find a homogeneous cultural coexistence. Rather the notions like cultural pluralism' or 'rainbow coalition' of cultures are sustaining a broader social synthesis.

Cultural assimilation then, is a continuous process characterized by the fusion and adjustment of various cultural traits. It facilitates partial adaptation and finally assimilation. Partial adaptation, in any case, involves a greater subtlety in self-other relations. Rather than self-imposition of hegemonic situation, selective borrowing requires a willingness to recognize the distinctness of other culture, coupled with a desire to maintain at least some indigenous preferences. That means the result of such borrowing that is assimilation, is not always motivated by the hegemonic influence rather it may turn otherwise. To quote Fred Dallmayr:

> Assimilation is not only or exclusively a policy imposed from above, that is, a process whereby a hegemonic culture is disseminated by an elite to subordinate segments of the population. Sometimes […], the hegemonic culture holds a powerful attraction for subordinate groups eager to gain social acceptance or recognition and thus to terminate discrimination. Where such acceptance is pursued deliberately and with some promise of success we are in the presence of acculturation through upward mobility. (Dallmayr 17)

This is to say that the negotiating groups while acquiring new cultural values or making adjustment with the alien cultural milieu, still maintain an indigenous solidarity. Thus, cultural difference never becomes 'complete' and 'univocal' because it moves in symbolic formation form one enunciatory position to another leaving it further open to cultural

translation. Any demand for the full representation of cultural difference is bound to lead to the loss of meaning because it involves interdisciplinary and the emergent cultural forms can't be contextualized in terms of some pro-given or already existing frame of reference.

In the contact zone cultural encounter may result in cooperation or competition between cultures. In the first case exchange and mutual support can take place while in the second case hostility and conflict may arise. The second alternative is most frequent one. Acculturation only seldom occurs as a bi-directional process. More often, cultural modification concerns the changes a cultural group has to introduce in collective as well as individual behavior, in order to coexist and interact with the norms and habits of a dominant social system. It usually applies to ethnic minorities, immigrants, indigenous people exposed to colonization, refugees, which can be globally considered as acculturating groups. Because of the involuntary character of the acculturation process minorities are mostly forced to adapt to the cultural system they live in, in order to cope with the dominant environment and become an active part in it.

III. Cross-cultural Encounter: Failure of Reconciliation

Multicultural Ethos: Mutuality and Co-existence

Baumgartner's Bombay is a daring and colorful novel, in which Desai brings forth the multicultural ethos. The genesis of the novel, in her own view, lies in her urge to confront her German past and to appreciate its implications. The protagonist of the novel Hugo Baumgartner is a German from a well to do Jewish family. From his early childhood, Hugo was restless and his experiences and interactions with the family have been frustrating. As a child he notices the difference in taste and temperament of his parents. His father always preferred expensive ashtrays, cigarette cases, the table lamps, the shelves of volumes of Goethe, Schiller and Heine because all these show the air of prosperity and satisfaction with which his father always used to behave. Contrary to this, his mother selected those things for her house, which contained living quality that prevented the rooms from becoming showrooms. For Hugo his mother was an epitome of grace, beauty and sensuous aspects of nature, "the more graceful and wayward tendrils of ivy in the baskets above the window were quite naturally and obviously hers"(27-28). The emotional quality in her fascinates him. She also didn't want him to involve himself in the dull and tedious routine of business life. Hugo oscillates between his father's decorum and the gracefulness of his mother.

Hugo's father fails to infuse trust, confidence and inspiration in the young boy. He finds himself trapped in an unhappy situation when his father stubbornly refuses to let him go with him to see the horse race. This inconsiderate behavior makes him feel nothing but contempt for his father. Hugo loves his mother's company. Only with her he finds himself free from the masculine atmosphere created by his father. Hugo's experiences in school fill him with fear and anxiety. He feels like an insignificant outsider. At the Christian party, in

 his school, he feels insecure, uncared for and unwanted. Being Jews his parents forget to

send the Christmas gift and this neglect on their part forces him to retreat into his own

thoughts. In the Jewish school, the children's remark "Baumgartner's dumb, has a nose like

a thumb"(38) makes him uncomfortable and inculcates in him a fear of strangers and

unknown people. Because of the sudden break of World War II, and because of Hitler's

indifference towards Jews, his father's business took an unfortunate turn. He observed that

the "van no longer lined up at the door for deliveries, there was no one to flick the dust out

of the gilt scrolls around the mirrors or to keep the table tops of mahogany glowing"(39).

Berthe, the maid servant, stopped coming. Everything seems diminished. He remains a

silent spectator and a non-participant in the unhappiness of the family. The incomplete

schooling creates problems for Hugo. Apart from job opportunities he misses the most

important aspect of social interaction at the different stages at school. He realizes that "the

school had an element of robust reality that appealed to him, that he had been learning to

deal with and even enjoy, and that he missed in the hushed pallor of his own home"(50).

Being cut off from the outer world, not having an opportunity to enjoy the company

of his father and having no friends of his own age, he becomes immensely attached to his

mother. Being a Jew under Nazi in Germany was panic for him since he remained unable

to cope with the dominant Aryans. His father commits suicide leaving him and his mother

all alone. He escapes Nazi Germany through Venice to India. It is Hugo's search for the

bonds that makes living meaningful, brings him to India. He had come to India as a young

man to start new life in business. When he reaches India the feeling of alienation and

loneliness surround him from all direction. Hugo starts a timber business with Habibullah,

a Muslim from Calcutta. He realizes that "if he were to remain in India he had to have the

means to live in it" (167). But his timber business soon takes opposite turn. In India he is

taken to a military camp run by the Britishers and has to undergo the strict and orderly routine of a prisoner in captivity for six years.

After his release from the camp, when he comes to Calcutta he gets confused. The city shows the mark of decay and destruction caused by war. The sights of the city become unbearable and he wants to return to the enclosed world of interment camp of the British. When communal riots begin in Calcutta, he escapes to Bombay. He starts his fortune by earning commissions with orders and transaction for Chimanlal's business. Gradually he becomes associated with him and enjoys his company during his leisure also. For the first time, at race course, with chimanlal, he gets overwhelmed with joy to see the horse for which he had pined for more than 30 years. He thinks of his early life when his father refused to take him to the horse races. At this moment he regresses completely into the past. He is transformed into the child Hugo, "to see the horses flying by on the circular track that began in Berlin and ended here in Bombay which became by magic, the Berlin of 30 years ago"(199). His escape into the past is an effort to overcome his sense of loneliness and non-belongingness in a foreign land from where he has no option to escape physically since Germany of his childhood was destroyed by the war and his mother had already died.

In Bombay, he receives a severe jolt at the hands of his friend Chimanlal's son. After the death of Chimanlal the body dismisses him without giving him any thought; Chimanlal's son disregards his father's association with Hugo either in public or 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" (206). In Calcutta Hugo becomes possessive about Lotte, a German cabaret dancer, married to an Indian businessman Kantilal. Hugo spends his final

solitary moments with Lotte. He visits her, understands her, sympathises her since she was disowned after the death of Kanti. The two make an island of mutual understanding and reciprocal tenderness insulating themselves from the harshness, bullying and cruelty of the world around. Withdrawn from the society of humans, he finds happiness in the world of animals—cats. In order to feed the cats, he collects the stale leftovers. The guests find it intolerable and wish to leave soon. But he does not find the stink repellent for the "acts of life." Rather, it "helped him to be comfortable, to survive, life, enjoy companionship" (148). Hugo remains submissive, normal, loving individual even in the hard times of life. In spite of his initial indifference towards the drug addict Kurt—a degenerated, wasted, inhuman German 'hippy'-he offers him advice, help and shelter. He is kind and hospitable towards this oaf, who is utterly devoid of human feelings; he invites the boy for food. The silver trophies in Baumgartner's room attract Kurt's attention for their monetary value. He must have his drug at any cost-even at the cost of Baumgartner's life. And he mercilessly plunges a knife into the sleeping, helpless mass of flesh.

Desai has used flashback technique by which the past incidents are related to the reader. These incidents become the backdrops of the present drama of Hugo's life that unfolds through the relationship with female and former cabaret dancer Lottee, Habibullah in Calcutta and Chimanlal in Bombay. Hugo was forced to leave Germany when the atrocities on Jews in Nazi Germany had become unbearable. Baumgartner's escape from Nazi Germany to India in search for a safe refuge leaves him bitter and completely disillusioned, as it was like a jump from one hell to another. If in Germany Hitler termed the Jews as 'subhuman races' in India, they were labeled as the 'hostile aliens'. Through a spotlight on Hugo's life in the two metropolitan cities of Calcutta and Bombay Desai unfolds the socio-cultural sterility of the two places. Calcutta has been depicted as the

frivolous city of the bars, restaurants, race horses, cabaret dancer and the black-back streets of the downtown. Hugo meets his nemesis in Bombay which is described as an abrasive city with unrelieved ugliness, squalor ad noise.

In fact by sketching the futility of Hugo's and Lotte's life in Bombay, Desai's novel raises some pointed and patient questions regarding the status of an exile in a non-familiar milieu. Hugo's and Lotte's struggle for survival and the formidable forces operating around them certainly provide this novel a much deeper meaning. However, Hugo's life comes to a full circle somewhat dramatically when he meets a young German Kurt who looks a certain type that Baumgartner had escaped and forgotten. After the death of Hugo, Lotte remains an isolated figure, totally broken after losing her oldest friend. The novel is a story of love that binds, sustains and ennobles a story of the warmth of love that draws human beings to one another. The narrative discourse bears ample testimony to the fact that he makes constant attempts to establish bond of relationship with number of people in Venice, Bombay and Calcutta and even in the internment camp. His concern for his friend Habibullah's fate during communal riots in Calcutta borders on panic. His relationship with Lotte, Farraokh and Chimanlal are deep, warm, enriching and genuine. Through the story of Hugo Baumgartner Anita Desai suggest that a comprehensive and meaningful understanding of life means the genuine attempts of the individual to establish human relationship with other individuals and through them with community and humanity; a multicultural perspective that widens and enlarges the frontiers of thought, an important literary characteristics.

Baumgartner's Bombay is a portrait of loneliness, of alienation and immigrant's existential problems. He tries his utmost to assimilate with the Indian way of life and makes sincere efforts to develop a sense of belongingness, yet he is marginalized and

subordinated. Hugo remains an outsider; accepting but unacceptable as he was in Hitler's Berlin some fifty years ago. He is a real nowhere man belonging neither to Germany because he is a Jew, nor to an India for he is a firanghi. Despite his long stay in India and his efforts to build reciprocal relation with Indians, he is not accepted. Throughout the story he remains incapable to master the language. This is the first major barrier in his way to develop any kind of friendship. He remains uncertain of "which language to employ" (6). "German no longer sufficed and English was elusive," so he gets bewildered to hear many languages as "languages sprouted around him like tropical Foliage"(92). The peculiar physical appearance of Hugo, his extremely light complexion easily sets him apart from the natives. He is conscious that the people look at him with awe and wonder. In Bombay Farrokh's protest against the irresponsible and shameless behaviour of the white people make Hugo feel humiliated. To cover up his shame he pretends ignorance. 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 racial identity and the circumstances under which he had to leave Germany. He feels more at ease with them.

The socio-political situation of India leaves an impact on Hugo's mind that ultimately affects his acculturation process. Hugo experiences the misery and bitterness caused by political upheavals first in Germany then in India. For him Germany is destroyed and ever since he had come to India he has not been able to get any information about his mother. So he feels more a citizen of India. He finds Calcutta suitable to mourn his loneliness and sufferings. The partition of the country depicts his inner drift and the place seems to echo his thoughts and feelings: "the Calcutta of the black back streets, the steaming rubbish strips, scarred tenements, its hunger, its squalor, its desolation"(166). He

feels disappointed to find Habibullah reluctant to give back Baumgartner his former business. When communal riots began in Calcutta he moved to Bombay to develop mutual bond of relationship. But ironically he is thrown in a whirlpool of isolation. His choice to go to India, which was the only solution to his problems, proves to be frustrating. It was a different culture to which he had come and the expectation of developing mutuality is replaced by isolation. He lacked the competence to be a bicultural individual. The gap between him and other Indians goes on increasing. He never becomes fit to the mainstream and simply is termed as 'sahib' which is sufficient to segregate him from others and this segregation from the mainstream remains forever since "he felt only relief that he had never been a part of the mainstream. Always, somehow he had escaped the mainstream"(211).

Baumgartner's isolation has been broken only for a short time in the company of Lotte in Calcutta, with whom he develops a kind of friendship. Both lotte and Hugo maintain group solidarity amidst hostility of the alien culture milieu. Lotte keeps him in touch with the German tongue. Baumgartner becomes intimate with lotte not only because she is a German but because she belongs to India of his experience. During the war time Baumgartner is arrested whereas lotte escapes by marrying Kanti Seth, a businessman from Calcutta. Hugo is kept imprisoned in a detention camp in Ahmedanagar for six years. The conflict between the Nazis and the Aryans broke in the camp, which was the same as his old days in Germany. The isolation in the camp made Baumgartner remain in search for a company to alleviate the burden, which was crushing him. His familiarity with a few other prisoners gave him consolation that he was at least not alone. His fellowmen found it amusing to see him with Julius and remarked "so, the two of you have found something in common, eh"(125). With the end of the war, Baumgartner is set from the camp but still he

fails to establish a bond of relationship. The communal riot keeps him shut in his apartment in Calcutta. Baumgartner finds himself overtaken by the fear of another war of another people. This war, he felt, was a religious war based on the fanaticism of the Hindus and the Muslims, two dominant cultural groups of India. Hugo confronts "endless war, eternal war. Twenty thousand people, the newspaper informed him, were killed in three days of violence in Calcutta. Muslims killed Hindus, Hindus Muslims" (180). Insecure and terrified he decides to leave Calcutta for Bombay.

In Bombay, Baumgartner is trapped in the feelings of estrangement and isolation, and persisting sense of alienation. In spite of his familiarity with each and everything externally, he finds himself a stranger, a wanderer internally even after his stay there for about fifty years. Hugo's individuation remains, however, only potential when internment interrupts his heterogeneous, linguistic and cultural transformation. In Bombay he finds himself in a society which replicates his childhood. He finds some solace when he meets lotte. Lotte now is deserted by the sons of Kantilal. Her helplessness, frustration and agony drive her to choose her only companions, country wine and Baumgartner. She has none except Hugo in her isolation just as Hugo has none except her. Though, they represent two worlds regarding their living in India but "still they shared enough to be comfortable with each other, pricky and quick-tempered but comfortable as brother and sister are together"(150). In India the immigrant-resident syndrome takes over. His loneliness is reshaped in Bombay. Hugo undergoes a metamorphosis in India from young age to adulthood and yet to a stage when India becomes "his country, the one he lived in with familiarity and resignation and relief"(219). Hugo never felt defeated, but struggled hard to accept India and the Indians. He is generous, kind, accepting, a normal individual who takes pity on a German Boy Kurt, who is a German like him. Unlike Hugo, Kurt is cruel,

wicked and degenerated individual. Kurt's playing fast and loose with material reality, transforming his life into a series of fictions, independent of truth or history, initiates a process of destructive fantasy which culminates in the murder of Baumgartner, appropriately in pursuit of latter's racing trophies, in order to procure fresh supplies of drug. Kurt is the man as Farrokh describes "men who remain children" who has probably "kicked his parents in the face" (13). The title of the novel appears to be ironic; Baumgartner's Bombay has not been very different from his Berlin after all. Despite his heart rendering efforts Hugo fails to assimilate perfectly in the mainstream Indian culture but remains a 'billewallah pagal', a 'Firanghi' who always escapes the mainstream.

　　In the eyes of the world, Hugo is a massive failure, a man who had withdrawn from a life after a temporary spate of success at business to turn into a 'ungainy turtle'. Hugo becomes one of society's self-imposed isolates because it is a matter of survivability as when he deliberately avoids British soldiers recognizing in them a threat to his identity. Or when he makes silence his natural condition in the internment camp or when he built a new language using English or Hindi or Bengali in the India he was making out for himself. More than the mere need to survive, Hugo had carved out for himself the mental picture of the kind of life he wanted to live. Venice, the city of his dreams, a land where east meets west, becomes his ideal and he learns to cross man-made borders and accept life and humanity for what they are and on their own terms. Thus, an unambitious life with his cats, caring for them and finding comfort and companionship in return, and taking the risk in helping his Aryan 'enemy' which finally cost him his life, are all in keeping with his strange philosophy of life: to build and not to destroy; to save, not to kill, to give not to expect in return, although he himself had met with nothing in life except defeat, betrayal and rejection. 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. She succumbs to her lot submissively accepting the existing order of things in society.

Baumgartner's Bombay is the story of the humanity's need to find sustenance within itself. It is a story of love that binds, sustains and ennobles; love that draws human beings to one another and responds to their innermost need for human warmth. An ambience of racial hatred in Germany shrivels Hugo and leaves him singed. His search for the bonds that make living meaningful takes him to India. Hugo makes constant attempt at establishing bonds of relationship with a number of people in Venice, Bombay and Calcutta and even in the internment camp. He panics at the thought of Habibullah's fate during the communal riots. He response to the screams of dying Sunil. His relationship with Lotte, Chimanlal and Farrokh are life-long, deep and enriching. Throughout the novel Desai reveals how other characters show similar inclinations and value similar opportunities for establishing bonds of relationships. In the novel not only the immigrants like Hugo, Lotte, Gisela, Kurt and Julius but the people like Farrokh, and Habibullah who are from the minority Muslim culture are in search of the bond of relationship, in a constant attempt to grasp the mainstream.

Contact Zone: Cultural Mediation

India remained subjugated as an exploited and slave nation of the Britishers for more than three hundred years. She had a glorious cultural heritage that went back to the Vedic era. But the interaction with the western world through the Britishers, the Portuguese and the French for about three hundred years did bring forth some new patterns

of cultural behaviour and value system, which generated new tensions in society. During imperial regime cities like Calcutta, Bombay were the centers of trade and exchange and characteristically multicultural and polyglot. After independence not only those mega cities of India but India as an independent 'nation state' adopted cultural diversity and pluralism within the parameter of an integrated nation. Today when the world is turning into a global village, India, too, is affected by globalization and striving hard to be a healthy mosaic culture. To study culture through the perspective of cultural encounter, India can be a proper site where various cultures (insider-insider, insider-outsider) meet, clash in highly asymmetrical relation of subordination and domination, at the same time revealing the wisdom of reciprocity and mutual understanding.

The sense of alienation experienced by the protagonist Hugo Baumgartner in an alien land fits in well with the environment Anita Desai has painted in the novel *Baumgartner's Bombay*. The novel is not only the story of bumbling Baumgartner; it is also the brilliant evocative travelogue of Berlin, Venice, Bombay and Calcutta. The major action of the novel takes place in the two cities Calcutta and Bombay and the environment of these two cities colours the mood of the novel. The story of the novel unfolds against the backdrop of the Second World War when India was passing through a turbulent phase in her freedom movement. Born to a middle-class family of Germany, Baumgartner finds himself as a haunted Jew as the Nazis regime supreme. His father commits suicide and he has to leave Germany rather reluctantly in search of a place under the sun. Destiny brings him to India. Zigzagging between Bombay and Calcutta, he finds himself unacceptable everywhere. He tries his hand in business and horse racing but always finds himself at the wrong place at the wrong time. He fails to come to term with the alien culture and remains subordinated despite his efforts to develop a mutual bond. His companions are the pet cats

and his occasional feelings with Lotte, a German immigrant like himself bring for him a whiff of romance. Finally, a German waif Kurt kills him and the novel ends in a disgusting tone.

Baumgartner becomes to India through Venice. Bombay is the base of Baumgartner on his arrival in India. Later, he shifts to Calcutta. After a stint of internment camp and brief stay in Calcutta, he moves over to Bombay again and meets his nemesis there. In India, the immigrant-resident syndrome takes over. With his first encounter with an Indian scene Hugo is made painfully aware of the difference in colour and language throwing him out of the orbit of normal existence. As he encounters:

> It had seemed bedlam when he disembarked and walked on to what he was assured as Indian soil the crowds of Indians, British, American, gurkhas, coolies carrying their luggage… memshaibs and blonde children with lopsided basin … Indian women in shapeless garments squatting passively with their baskets or babies … and heat like boiling oil tipped out of a cauldron on to their heads, running down their necks and into their collars and shirts. (83)

From the mother-country he is transplanted to an environment which is equally infantile. In his passage to India, in Venice, he feels as if already transported to east yet while leaving Venice for India he was happy and content. His first barrier was language which creates new realities. Baumgartner finds himself longing for a guidebook "or at least a signboard. In a familiar language. A face with a familiar expression. He could not read these faces"(83). Yet, although his language no longer controls his world, the unreadable quality of Bombay has some positive consequences. He is content that if language is no longer mimetic, if it can no longer map the world according to Baumgartner's expectations,

it may, nonetheless, offer a way out of the claustrophobia of Baumgartner's past into a world which is both multiple and syncretic where the blindness of Berlin is not to be repeated.

Hugo Baumgartner is forced to accept whatever is offered by the dominant insiders. He is Hugo '*bhai*' like common Bombayites. In front of Hira Niwas in Bombay, he confronts the slum life where a poor family is residing, "their tins, rags, ropes, strings, papers and plastic bags had been set up to make a shelter and when the tenants woke next morning they found a cooking fire burning, tin pots and pans being washed in the gutter"(207), panics him. He pursues his business continuously in the hot Bombay afternoons, thinking tiredly how familiar all Bombay life is to him. But he is deprived of his identity. He feels insecure since the problem with him is that he finds everything around him familiar, still he fails to gather courage to enter it. He "had never actually entered it; damply, odorously, cacophonously palpable as it was, it has been elusive still" (214).

Hugo's experience of Calcutta encompasses two zones in his life. His young days in Calcutta are associated with Lotte a German cabaret dancer. It was the Calcutta "of prince's own youth, the days of cabaret and scotch, and Tommies profiteering and wealth, the guns of war at a safe distance"(78). This pre-war period of bars, dances, soldiers, prostitutes, businessman is in sharp contrast with the situation Hugo finds himself in after his release from internment camp. Now it was the "city of the black back streets, the steaming rubbish tips, the sared tenements, its hunger, its squalor, its disolation"(166). Baumgartner's privacy is disturbed by the ceaseless cacophony of the Calcutta locality. The dark face of Calcutta affects his transculturation process. When the communal riots erupt frequently, not only the outsiders like Hugo, Lotte, Julius and Gisela but even the insider have hard

times. Habibullah, who is from the ethnic minority of India, represents the life of a marginal in the hands of dominant Hindus. When communal clouds engulf him, he looses all hope: "for us India is finished." He shares his plight with Hugo "every night they come and threaten us in our house. Every night they set some Muslim house on fire, stab some Muslim in the street, rob him too"(168). There is no safety whether one is a Hindu or Muslim.

Hugo is puzzled by the entire drama of communal frenzy which is beyond his comprehension. The heightened sense of cultural and social alienation of these characters and their outsider predicament at not being able to find a firm footing, finds an outlet with the nearness of a fellow-countryman who seems to fill some vacuum, i.e. with the 'safe house' they built. Habibullah wants to escape to Pakistan whereas Hugo finds comfort with lotte who, after her false marriage with a businessman, is left unwanted, unwelcomed. He visits her, understands her, sympathizes with her and the two make an island of mutual understanding and reciprocal tenderness insulating themselves from the harshness, bullying and cruelty of the world around. Lotte becomes a channel of belonging, imaginatively, to the place of his birth and upbringing- Berlin. She fills the void caused by his rootlessness though only in a small measure. Hugo brings Kurt, a German, addict, and behaves him a kind and friendly manner. But his "safe house" shatters when the boy mercilessly kills Hugo and Lotte remains alone, unwanted and deserted. In the internment camp, though he leads a withdrawn, isolated life, he does strike a bond of responsive friendship with Julius Roth, another German immigrant like himself. He knows that Julius exploits him and yet Baumgartner good humouredly, "shared him small ration of cigarettes with Julius, hung around the kitchen and begged for some of their soap so that Julius's shirts could be kept as immaculate as that dandy wished"(124). All this he does cheerfully

in order to nurture the relationship. Even in his final moments in Bombay he does not mind being a lowly person, virtually begging for food for his cats; he is not bothered about the epithet "Billewallah Pagal." He is indifferent to the contempt he is held in by the people in Hira Niwas, including the *chowkidar* of the building.

As in the contact zone both the Indians and foreigners are constantly making efforts to develop mutual bond among them, but both the outsiders and Indians are the real sufferers. One very powerful source to exacerbate the sufferings of these outsiders, both Indians and foreigners, is the asymmetrical relation of power i.e. the power exercised by those belonging to some dominant group. Habibullah, born and brought up in Calcutta, suffers insecurity and fear in his own homeland due to communal tension. Hugo simply can not comprehend the dramatic communal frenzy. He can not relate to it with enough sensitivity though he himself has been a victim of more or less a similar madness. Neither a Hindu, nor a Muslim, neither an Indian nor a Pakistani, he is the classic outsider whose life is rocked by divisive forces he can neither comprehend nor identify with. Baumgartner himself is a victim of a dominant insider, Chimanlal's son. Though Hugo was the business partner of Chimanlal, the son disposes him unceremoniously as if Hugo was servant. Jagu and his family, on the other hand, are rendered homeless by natural calamities. Lotte is deprived of her flat and other comforts by Kanti's sons, soon after his death. Both Kanti's heirs and Chimanlal's son represent the dominant insiders in the novel. The insiders undergo a different set of social and political crises and are uprooted by calamities of a different nature than the outsiders. Whatever the nature of the problems, the loss of personal identity, the sense of homelessness and the fear of insecurity are alike for them all. In order to overcome these problems the characters are busy in making their own world. Lotte indulges in drinking and her drink-sodden ways of filthy language make her a

ridiculous figure. If Kurt's is a world of hallucination of drugs, Jagu's is a world of alchohal. For Habibullah safety lies in a predominantly Muslim land. Hugo blurs reality by reading and re-reading his mother's letters till he arrives at an important conclusion that nothing matters, nothing makes sense.

Hugo Baumgartner and Lotte, each separately left their native Berlin with a view to settle in India, the country of their choice. Even after three decades, Hugo fails to be in a groove of the Bombayite, his long stay at Colaba Causeway, Hira Niwas, has very little impact on him. The entire locality is mixed-race of Parsi, Gujarat, Marwari, Anglo-Indians, and Indian-hippy, a world, melting pot of the Bombayites. Hugo continuously keeps up his spirit to take swim against such socio-cultural cross-currents. Hugo and others do have their own problems and have created the world of their sensibility in order to cope with the hard times. Whatever the nature of their individual world but in common they are thrown in a whirlpool of isolation despite their efforts to come to term with dominant culture. They feel sympathetic to each other. Hugo is sympathetic to Habibullah and Chimanlal. Farrokh is quite sympathetic to 'Hugobhai'. Jagu and Julius are friendly. Though these characters belong to the different culture, in India they share something in common and that is their being at minority. Despite the relation of subordination and domination, they together build up an island of mutual relationship among them, which sustains the idea of contact zone.

As *Baumgartner's Bombay* is set against the backdrop of the various cities and suburbs of India, it embodies and unfolds the theme of separation and union, fission and fusion, hatred and love, apathy and fellow-feeling and negation and affirmation- the phenomena of contact zone. The process of search for new values, the ideal of integration, the quest of the individual to come to terms with his/her universe□ a process of cultural

mediation□ constitute the pattern of the novel. The image of the journey is central to the novel. The vastness of the land, complex cultural forms and mysterious religious rituals, the beauty, the squalor and the noise and the westerner's constant efforts to come to terms with this unfamiliar land are keenly observed by Desai. The dense social world consists primarily of social, religious and racial groups with their own customs and patterns. The foreigners are mostly the professional people belonging to middle class, either on holidays or in search of spiritual enlightenment and the natives are themselves divided by religion and caste. Due to the long term contact with the Indian milieu, the foreigners are forced to adopt certain cultural traits offered by the Indians. The natives□ the Hindus and the Muslims get themselves entangled in various forms of social relationship and create their own little worlds. In general the relationship is of subordination and domination, of power and conflict and of a continual effort to develop a tie of mutuality despite differences.

Identity Crisis: Failure of Reconciliation

Identity becomes an issue when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty. Identities are not something once and for all rather they are constantly producing themselves anew. Identity is associated with desire□ desire for recognition, association, and protection over time and in space. Identities are constructed under circumstances which are not chosen deliberately, and at the same time identity is elusive and often raised when it is in crisis. Crisis in identity results from the sense of belongingness to a specific culture in a specific time and place. Because of the globalization process set in motion by the technologically advanced west, the notion of 'identity' is understood as hybrid not fixed, a cultural representation rather than autonomous and marginal and diasporic rather than central or metropolitan.

Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* has a host of lost personages who are pathetic in their loneliness and are unable to find their cosmos. Besides Hugo Baumgartner, the protagonist and Lotte, his friend, there are others, both Indians and foreigners, who remain outsiders for various reasons. These are individuals trapped by circumstances, the victims of forces beyond their control social, political and above all cultural. The pre- war conditions in Germany, the aftermath of the war, the partition of India and the post-independence degradation of values have affected their lives. They suffer, loose their foot-hold i.e. they fail to achieve an adjustment with the world, become homeless and experience a sense of personal inadequacy. The characters are haunted by sense of isolation and repeatedly manifest their desire to belong, to be recognized within the world occupied by the novel, can be grouped as outsider-outsider and insider-outsider. Among the former are the five German characters Hugo, Lotte, Gisela, Julius, and Kurt who for some reason always escape the mainstream. The other outsiders are the Indians, a part of the land and its culture, like Habibullah and Jagu, the pavement dweller and his family. The insiders undergo a different set of social and political crises and are uprooted by calamities of a different nature than the foreigner-outsider. Whatever the nature of the problems, the loss of personal identity, the sense of homelessness and the fear of insecurity are alike for them all. They suffer not only from war, persecution famine and ruin, but from inner problem – a conviction of isolation, randomness, and meaninglessness in their way of living. The worst sufferer is however, the protagonist Hugo Baumgartner.

Hugo is the victim of holocaust which uprooted him from his native soil and deprived him of his native sky. Hugo belongs to the wealthy Jewish family in Germany. His father was a respectable furniture dealer suffers the humiliation under Nazi Germany and commits suicide. Their house and the business are taken over by the Aryans. The

security of a home is lost and Hugo disowned by his own people, rejected by his motherland, embarks on the shores of India. He has a dream to earn some money in order to build a home so that he could bring his mother and "make her accept India as her home" (94). This inner desire for home is the desire to gain an individual identity, desire to live as a 'sahib' not as a 'firanghi' in India. Baumgartner arrives in British India and is overwhelmed by the exotic land which is "not one world but ten" where "languages sprout around him like tropical foliage" (92). The undefined notion of his childhood that "he did not belong to the radiant, the triumphant of the world" (36) during the Christmas Eve in Germany, solidifies into an unshakable conviction that he is a permanent exile, contrary to his expectations that "he would find for himself a new identity" (62). His romantic illusion about India, the birthplace of Gitanjali, a land he had invented in his fancy with the magic of the fairy stories, shatters the moment he lands in Bombay.

Driven by harshness of racial prejudice to seek refuge in India, he is once again haunted by British soldier- his colour can not save him and he spends six years of captivity among other Germans. Hugo with Julius Roth in the internment camp and with Lotte in Calcutta and Bombay becomes able to create a 'German diaspora' in India. Though most of the times Hugo keeps a distance from other Europeans in Bombay, because their queries reminds him of his past, his Jewish background, and the humiliating circumstances from which he tried to escape, he finds himself involved with them. With the company of Germans, Baumgartner feels happy as he has someone "to alleviate the burden, the tedium, the emptiness of the waiting days" (125). Hugo's relationship with Lotte is warm, enriching and affectionate. Lotte feel at ease with Baumgartner and develops a friendly relation. Hugo even shows pity to a drug addict German boy Kurt, since the boy reminds him of his German past which Baumgartner had left. Not only the German immigrants but even the

Muslims like Habibullah are marginalized. Habibullah equally feels insecure and uprooted in his own homeland. During the communal riots Habibullah escapes to Pakistan in search of a safe home or a distinct Muslim identity. In the internment camp Hugo is forced to recall his German past. Like in Germany they were termed as 'hostile aliens' since "Germany when it flourished had not wanted him"(16) and India has no need of him either. Baumgartner becomes an eternal castaway.

The problem of isolation and alienation pesters other too. Julius, a more lively and dynamic figure, and Lily, the raving dancer of Calcutta marry each other. Lotte marries Kanti, a Marwari businessman in order to acquire an Indian identity, hybrid recognition. But marriage does not fulfill their desire for security and home. Julius and Lily lost their art gallery in the hotel lobby because, as Lotte observes, after independence "Indian painters have Indian patrons…they have their own taste. They do not want any European telling them what is good and what to buy" (210). Even Lotte, lively and aggressive, fails to identify with the country of her adoption by marriage. Despite the brave front she puts up, she is lonely within. The life Kanti Seth gives her has no charm. She is reduced to his mistress, living in reasonable comfort but always alone. After the death of Kanti she is deserted by his sons. When she meets Hugo after long, she is almost hysterical with joy, "*Hugo, mein geliebter*," she shouts over the phone, "come, come. I am waiting,"(200) and tells him how lonely she is: "mostly I am alone. All all alone"(203). 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 countryman nearby.

Both Hugo and Lotte are solitary foreigners in India and are uprooted from their own culture. Sense of bewilderment, lack of companionship and lack of familiarity heightens their sense of alienation. Hugo's earlier expectations are replaced by isolation in

India. The gap between him and other Indians is ever increasing. He is simply a 'sahib' which is sufficient to segregate him from others and this segregation from the mainstream remains forever. Only he becomes aware from time to time that "the world beyond the curtain was growing steadily more crowded, more clamorous, and the lives of others were hectic, more chaotic, then he felt only relief that he had never been a part of the mainstream. Always, somehow, he had escaped the mainstream"(211). The crisis in identity further surrounds him in internment camp. He remains idle and every moment comes to him with emptiness. He eases his isolation by remembering either the days of his past or keeping himself under the illusion by thinking about the background of the lives of other prisoners. While others share their burden of sorrow and fears, Baumgartner keeps his problems with himself, "like a mournful turtle he carried everything with him; perhaps it was the only way he knew to remain himself"(109). In Bombay, he is still an empty wanderer with the loss of identity, the feeling of estrangement and isolation, and persisting sense of alienation. In spite of his familiarity with each and everything externally, he finds himself a stranger, an outsider, and a wandering loner, even after his stay there for about fifty years. Yet, "the eyes of the people who passed by glanced at him who was still strange and unfamiliar to them and all said: *Firanghi*, Foreigner"(19).

This stamp of representation as '*Firanghi*' or '*sahib*' on Baumgartner always keeps him segregated and makes him feel an unidentified wanderer. The Indians in Bombay does not care him and he remains unable to establish contact and understanding with them. The paradox of accepting but not accepted hurl him in the deep abyss of isolation since "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 *Firanghi*. In both the lands, unacceptable" (20). The passage of time and old age intensifies his feeling of loneliness. Lotte, no doubt, gives him

company temporarily, but he remains a lonely figure. Though Hugo is denied of German identity, he fails to assume Indian one. The blows and buffets, agonies and frustrations, estrangement and loss of identity shatter all the hopes and aspiration of Baumgartner who remains "an old turtle trudging through dusty Indian soil"(11). Unwanted and unwelcomed by his native Germany, Hugo Baumgartner remains the same in India. When Julius remarks, "Oh, Hugo, why did we not go back? We should have gone back long, long ago." He answers, "Go back where? To what?" which justifies his rootlessness (211). Wherever he goes, he is the nowhere man, the castaway whose life is rocked by alienating forces he can neither grasp nor grab. Nor can he identify with these inscrutable forces that propel him from one state of existence to another. His crisis of identity gets resolved only when he is mercilessly killed by a German boy Kurt in order to get the silver trophies of Baumgartner- the mementos of Baumgartner's past life.

In *Baumgartner's Bombay*, Desai fuses the two strands in artistic fashion. Her Indo-German parentage provides the novel a transparent sincerity. Desai's in-built indo-European sensibility filtered through her parents has created for her a synthesis. Baumgartner views India as an outsider. In fact, the entire narrative of the novel is structured on Anita Desai's tinted view of her mother's past, her memories experiences and old associations. The plot of the novel has a quest-motif in which the two characters Hugo and Lotte tries to establish their identity in an alien land. But their quest and journey through emptiness and isolation ends tragically, in failure, frustration and disgust. The tragic isolation leads Baumgartner to death and Lotte remains to suffer in loneliness, with no one to accompany her, after the death of her oldest friend Baumgartner. Baumgartner, a German Jew living in India for a period of fifty years is forced to live the life of seclusion and withdrawal. The only company is that of cats whom he nurses and loves. Both

Baumgartner and Lotte throughout the narrative are sailing in the same boat of isolation in

an alien country among their memories and dreams. Their isolation is the outcome of their

uprootedness from their own past, culture, tradition and society

IV.Conclusion

The theme of conflict and reconciliation of cultures has often been a repeated issue in Indo-English novel. Anita Desai too has treated this complex issue in her novels through the vivid character portrayal against the backdrop of specific socio-cultural milieu. In her novels most of the protagonists are alienated from society, families, parents and from their culture, because they are not average people but individuals who are unable to communicate and to identify themselves with the people around. Unable to relate themselves with the milieu, they drift into their own sequestered world where they spin their dreams which never materialize. It is their sense of alienation and a haunting past that motivates them in their quest for identity, for a meaningful present. In Desai's fictions one notes her concern with cross cultural and racist encounters between the characters on socio-cultural plane.

In *Baumgartner's Bombay* Desai brings forth the spirit, norms and values of various cultures to reveal the complex negotiation between them through various characters: both insiders and outsiders. For an outsider in an alien land and for the marginalized within the homeland, it becomes extremely necessary to develop a tie of mutual understanding. It is the bond that sustains human society and differentiates it from the animals. India has been treated as contact zone, a hybrid social space, a site for cultural mediation where people from different racial and cultural past come in contact. Though the initial phase of such contact is marked by conflict and contest, subordination and domination, at times the conflicting cultural groups develop a bond of mutual relationship. Since India is the setting of this novel, the place has been depicted with its beauty and filth, spirituality and materiality, the serenity of nature and the commercialized mega-cities. Hugo Baumgartner, caught in the process of cultural mediation, searches for a meaningful

 identity. Identity, for Hugo is associated with the desire; desire for recognition, safety, security, and above all, to live. Identity is perceived and discussed not as 'central' or 'once and for all' but as essentially 'hybrid and representational'. On the basis of the characters' inclination to create group solidarity in a hostile milieu, the issue of identity, at times is treated by relating it to the notion of diaspora.

From the widespread trend toward assimilation, imposed by invaders and colonizers, to the present-day effort toward integration, the relations between cultures are treated in a variety of ways in the novels of Anita Desai. In the novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* Desai treats the cross-cultural relationship between the Europeans and the Indians, where people from different culture and race try to develop a bond of mutual understanding on a common cultural ground. At times they preserve their heterogeneity but their sole concern is to develop a reciprocal relation in order to share a common cultural way of life. Through a host of uprooted and alienated characters from their original homeland, Desai beautifully observes the predicaments of these outsiders in an alien Indian culture. These characters try to replace their haunting past by the meaningful present, but most of the time they fail to materialize their dream. The protagonists Hugo Baumgartner and Lotte fail to identity themselves with Indian culture. But it does not mean that they remain completely unrecognized in an alien milieu. At times they also develop warm and enriching friendship with the Indians and fully absorb the Indian way of life but the tragedy is that, they are not absorbed by it.

Hugo Baumgartner's problem is that he has never belonged anywhere to anyone, except perhaps to his childhood home and his parents. In school, being a Jew was isolation in itself. But he did not belong to the school for Jewish children either. Even after a life-long stay in India, he failed to assimilate and assume an Indian identity. It is not that he

remained friendless in India. Lotte, Chimanlal, Habibullah, Farrokh and Julius to some extent were his good friends whether in Calcutta or Bombay. But he remains a misfit, a 'Firanghi', 'Billewallah Pagal," never quite related to the world around him. Consequently, he learns to withdraw, to keep things to himself, to be aloof, and not to share-a habit that stays with him all his life and exacerbates his loneliness that ultimately makes his quest for identity an attempt to give meaning to the meaningless, an attempt to grasp the ungraspable. Hugo Baumgartner remains a wandering Jew all his life; he belongs to none and though involved and associated with many, is not identified with any.

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