

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Celebration of Eastern Values in Anita Desai's *Diamond Dust*

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Abstract

Diamond Dust by Anita Desai depicts the cultural dilemma with her characters celebrating the Eastern values. This thesis observes how the oriental culture starts to create a space in an occidental society interpreting its values and systems. It also discusses how in her almost stories, characters and situations acquire a symbolic meaning and thus they are capable of being associated to phenomena specific of different cultures or of major spheres, such as the Eastern/Western opposition. Whether living in a small town in Mexico or on a Delhi rooftop, her array of characters traverse cultural and class boundaries like seasoned veterans. Desai's greatest strength is her accurate depiction of the postcolonial reality of Indian life. The power and authority of western colonial representation have been questioned and challenged by the discourse produced by Desai's characters. By doing this they revealed what the colonial authority did in the name of progress, science and civilization. As a consequence, there seemed some sorts of celebration of their own cultural values, which is beautifully depicted by Anita Desai in her story collection, *Diamond Dust*.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Abstract

I. Anita Desai's Writings: Resistance of the Hegemony of West	1-5
II. The Eastern and The Western Culture	6-24
Eastern (Indian) Culture	10
Western (European) Culture	12
Differences between Eastern and Western Culture	13
III. Eastern and Western Cultural Variation	25-46
Emphasis on Eastern Culture	27
IV Eastern Values: Nucleus of Desai's vision	47

Works Cited

I. Anita Desai's Writings: Resistance of the Hegemony of West

Anita Desai was born to a German mother and a Bengali father. Although Desai was formally educated in English, she was raised speaking both Hindi and German in her home in Old Delhi. She attributes some of the diversity of her fictional characters to having lived among a mix of Hindu, Muslim, and Christian neighbors while growing up. She attended Queen Mary's Higher Secondary School in New Delhi. In 1957 at the age of 20 she received a B. A. with Honors in English Literature from Delhi University. Already hard on the heels of her dream of being a writer, she published her first short story the same year she graduated, in 1957. Desai continued to compose and publish short fiction, working for a year in Calcutta and marrying business executive Ashvin Desai on December 13, 1958. In 1993 Desai took as post as Professor of writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and has remained there ever since.

Desai, who lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts and teaches writing at MIT, has been appointed to various literary offices. She was a member of the Advisory Board for English at Sahitya Akademi in New Delhi from 1975 to 1980, and a member of the National Academy of Letters, as well as becoming a fellow for the American Academy of Arts and Letters and has produced three children's books, an unusual feat for an Indian author of her caliber. Desai became a freelance writer in 1963, and has retained this as her occupation ever since. She addressed her craft in the her interview, "Writing is necessary to me: I find it is in the process of writing that I am able to think, to feel, and to realize at the highest pitch. Writing is to me a process of discovering the truth" (The Indian 1-2). The position of the immigrant writer and the discourse of those who write conscious of spatial, temporal and linguistic alienation from their native land have come

to occupy an important place in literary and cultural studies. One of the principal exponents of this discourse is Anita Desai herself, a product of the postcolonial and diasporic condition. Her literary and critical endeavors are recurring meditation on the plight of those who like herself, have had to deal with the change and continuity, strangeness and familiarity, characteristics of our increasingly complex multicultural world. Concentration on thematic pattern and skillful presentation of eastern values without valorizing the West depicts her eastern ethos which is the backbone of her writing.

Her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), was published when she was 26 years old. In 1965 she published her second novel, *Voices in the City*. Desai's other published novels are: *Bye – Bye, Blackbird* (1971), *The Peacock Garden*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), followed by another juvenile venture titled *Cat on a Houseboat* (1976).

Although her first three novels were not favorably reviewed, her later work garnered growing attention for what the 1999 *Encyclopedia of World Literature in the 20th Century* critic Janet Powers referred to as "a sensitivity to subtle emotions and family reverberations. . . [an] intuitive awareness that emanates from a distinctly feminine sensibility (21)." In 1980 she published her novel *Clear Light of Day*, a study of Delhi that combines fiction with history to explore the lives of a middle – class Hindu family. In 2000 Desai published *Diamond Dust*, short story collection, in which she seeks to deconstruct the Hindu cultural identity stereotype that has been built by Western societies. From the localized way of thinking of post modernity, she presents the spatial configuration of India as a conflict between opposing forces. In the collection, she wants

to show that in India the past and the present, the wild and the civilized world are living together.

The nine stories in the collection *Diamond Dust* are served up with characteristic perspicuity, subtle humor and attention to the little hypocrisies of the middle class. Diverse settings and domestic dramas frame universal themes, often involving the complex relationship between an individual and her/his family and culture. In “Winterscape,” Rakesh’s two mothers fly to Canada from India to attend the birth of his first child. Rakesh, now a husband of a Canadian and fairly alienated from his past, has trouble explaining to his wife, Beth, the love and sympathy with which his mother gave him to her childless sister. Especially vivid and rewarding are the stories set in India, illuminating the ways familial ties and various aspects of Indian culture can nourish or suffocate. In the title story, Diamond, a huge black dog, terrorizes the conservative suburb of Bharati Nagar. Moyna, in “The Rooftop Dwellers,” lives in New Delhi “barsati” (a small room built atop a flat-roofed house), seeking independence from her family and traditional roles; amid a community of struggling young adults. She finds support in resisting the common social attitudes of “fear and loathing for the single working woman” (161). As always, Desai explores her subject with sensitivity while maintaining the perfect authorial distance, achieving a compassionate and subtle irony. In her stories, she has deliberately given her upper hands to Eastern characters, cultures, values, and Indian topography to raise the deep rooted existence of Eastern cultural values.

Since the publication of *Diamond Dust*, stories collection, it has been analyzed from various perspectives. Some have looked the psychological aspects of its characters.

At the same time others have commented on the hybridity of its characters. However it is concerned with dynamics of interpersonal relation and with the ways self is formed through interactions with its familial and socio-cultural environment.

Salman Rushdie, a renowned name in the English literature has all praise Desai's technique – providing a hint of upcoming events through a bit witty happening. He comments:

With her trademark perceptiveness, delicacy of language, and sharp wit in full evidence in *Diamond Dust*, Anita Desai once again gloriously confirms that she is India's finest writer in English. Desai's books are illuminated by the author's perceptiveness, delicacy of language and sharp wit that leaves its readers perplexed. (24)

It is the quality of Desai to expose simple yet, outstanding outcome from a normal looking events in the story.

Alison Lurie writes in a literary review in Guardian writes that Desai is wonderful in depicting the culture of east and west and this is how, in his words, “. . . will unite the people of the world” (27). He has further praised for Desai and her *Diamond Dust* and writes:

Anita Desai is one of the most brilliant and subtle writers ever to have described the meeting of eastern and western culture. Her new collection of stories is both serious and wonderfully entertaining, but at the same time exposes the deeper level of sentiments of the people of different nations and societies. (26)

In her stories, somehow, the oriental culture starts to create a space in an occidental society. She does not merely present them in the form of fiction, but are something more to it. As Lurie further opines, “Desai’s work are on humane ground, where the broken relationships in the west are joined in the east. Still more, the east serves as rejuvenation to the people of the west” (31). Thus, norms, values, traditions and trends of Eastern life are contrasted to the culture of Western metropolitan location in much pretty manner.

In this regard, no significant attempts have been made to discuss the Eastern cultural values which is a prominent issue of the collection. There exists a strong need to carry out a research on this text from new perspective. Without a proper study on the issue of celebration of eastern values, the meaning of the text will remain incomplete. Having taken this fact into consideration, the present researcher’s attempt in this dissertation is to throw light upon it and make clear the celebration of the Eastern values to avoid the hegemony of the west. Taking this idea as the guideline, the present researcher will interpret some of stories; “Royalty,” “Winterscape,” “Five Hours to Simla or Faisla,” “The Rooftop Dwellers,” “Diamond dust, a Tragedy” from the eastern perspective in order to show the celebration of eastern values in relation to the west.

II. The Eastern and Western Culture

East and West are the terms frequently used in religion and philosophy which are difficult to define with their subtle meaning. We can not make the demarcation line between east and west and can not particularize where the east ends and where the west begins. The terms 'East' and 'West' are used to refer not just to areas of spaces but also the modes of thought and behavior. It needs to take a long view of cultural and historical elements to find the very relevant aspects. There is not the eastern view which is totally different from the western view of life or vice versa. As a matter of fact, eastern and western people had common beginnings and have been developed from relatively independent views and acquired certain features, which marked them from each other.

Geographical areas are not cultural or anthropological entities. Neither east nor west is a corporate single entity. The North American Indians are supposed to be the authentic Americans as they owned the place but anthropologists relate them to eastern races. If we look at the problem from the historical and cultural point of view, we can learn single family of related languages the Indo-European runs almost uninterrupted, and without a definite break from western Ireland and the highlands of Scotland to the Ganges and beyond. Neither 'East' nor 'west' has had any monopoly of the values of civilization. Both cultures have crossed certain decisive steps during the development of civilization. Such as, Paleolithic (Stone Age or invention of stone tools), Neolithic (food producing and animal breeding) etc. Each term East and West, therefore is a blanket term, used to cover a number of separate people and region in different stages of development. It expresses itself through speech and symbols, through religions, political and social institutions or culture in our term.

All the great religions are living, spreading, and increasing. It needs to remember that all the great religions of the world are very ancient, not one has been formed at the present time, and that every religion of the world owes its origin to the country between the Ganga and the Euphrates; not one great religion has arisen in Europe, not one in America, not one; every religion is of Asiatic origin and belongs to that part of the world. If what modern scientists say is true, that the survival of the fittest is the test, these religions prove by their still living that they are yet fit for some people. There is a reason why they should live, they bring good to many.

The very names Hindu Indian, Buddhists Asia, Western Christendom or Islam society suggest that spiritual traditions, philosophies of life underlie each society. The social institutions, economic arrangements and scientific beliefs are all bound together by certain ideals by which men move. "One by whose command the wind blows, the fire burns, the clouds rain, and death stalks upon the earth"(Prasad, 10). As long as a society lives by its ideas its tools and forms have meaning. If the faith fails, the society loses its guide and direction. The withering away of vital beliefs is the symptom of cultural decline. All cultures have their roots, old and new. They receive influences from others. For example, the Chinese and the Hindu cultures were long ago in touch with these of the west and vice versa.

India and Greece are the leading nations in the history of the world. As Radhakrishnan in his *East and West some Reflection* has rightly quoted the line what Bishop Westcott told me late Mr. C. F. Andrews:

India and Greece were two great thinking nations who had made the history of the world. As Greece had been the leader of Europe, India

would always be the leader of Asia. While India repudiates any claim to the leadership of Asia, and acknowledges the antiquity and importance of the Chinese culture. Indonesia, Indo-China, Malaya, Thailand, Burma, China, Japan to some degree are the witnesses to the spirit of India, whereas all European countries and countries whose history strongly marked by European immigration are the witnesses of the spirit of Greece which had its nourishment from Palestine and Rome as well. (16)

From these statements we can generalize that the East namely stands for Asia and West for Europe. The differences between East and West became emphasized when western countries experienced a major transformation through the achievements of science and technology in 13th and 14th century and also when European Christendom established beyond which there was alien culture in the East. The Crusades established what a border between Eastern and Western peoples became. With the European colonization of Americas (north and south) the east/west distinction became global. The concept of an Eastern or oriental sphere was emphasized by ideas of racial as well as religious and cultural differences. Such distinctions were articulated by Westerners in the scholarly tradition known as Orientalism. Thus, whether it is Europeans' Asia or Westerners' Oriental or geopoliticians' East it includes nearly forty countries including India, China, Japan, Korea etc. with their distinctive civilization. Buddhism and Hinduism which arose in Asia and spread throughout, Nepal, Malay, Peninsula, Indonesia, Confucianism and Taoism which are purely Chinese in origin and influential in Korea and Japan and Muslim, with whatever origin but influential in India, Pakistan, wholly marked the Asian or Eastern civilization. But to speak of the Asian traditional culture India is found at the

centre, Stephen N. Hay also agrees ". . .India was the home of Asian civilization"(252). "India, of course, was the teacher of Asia" (255). He brings the lines of Tagore what he says in his lecture," In former ages India was a sort of hermitage of thoughts and peace apart from the world...her thoughts flashed out over Asia and created civilization"(288). For Gandhi, India was the heart of Asia. He declared "if India falls Asia dies" he continued "India aptly been called the nursery of many blended cultures and civilizations"(qtd. in Hay 288). India was refuse for Muslims (when crusaders were trying to overcome their holy land) and homeland for Hindus and Buddhists. Hindu is the religion of the Indian aboriginal. Hay includes Savarkar's agreement for India meant Hindu: "Since Hindu and India both are derived from the same Sanskrit word *Sindhu* (the land of the river) (289). Hay also says that "India firmly excluded the Muslims. . ." (289). He also comments," For RadhaKrishna as for Ramaswami Sastri India meant Hindus"(269). For this thesis also the concept of eastern culture will refer to the Indian Hindu Traditions.

Likewise, the term 'West' generally means the Europe, Americas (South and North) and Australia. The history of America and Australia is strongly marked by the European immigration. So, Europe is found at the heart of West or Western countries as India of the Eastern. Europe also includes different civilization such as: Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and Shintom. The concept of Western culture to which this thesis will refer to is the modern European Christian (Protestants) way of life- their beliefs and attitudes. F. S. C. Northrop says, "we find the meaning of western civilization European in its European origin" (292).

Eastern (Indian) Culture

The traditional culture of India (Hindus) has its root in Vedas. The truths suggested in the Vedas and developed in Upanishads. As Northrop has written "Every idea contained in at least the older Upanishads, with no exceptions, is not new to the Upanishads, but can be found set forth, or at least very clearly foreshadowed, in the older Vedic texts" (313).

This Indian culture is found to be very much old. As Northrop quotes the lines of Surendranath Das Gupta, "When the Vedas were composed, there was probably no system of writing prevalent in India" (313). The Vedas were handed from mouth to mouth from a time immemorial. As Northrop writes ". . . even if one goes back to the earliest date at which they may have been set down the people had to look upon them not only as very old, but so old that they had theoretically at least no beginning in time"(313). Again Radhakrishna writes, "the Vedic period, on a most cautious estimate, covers the period between 1500 to 600 B.C. The Rg Veda is older than Homer or the old Testament"(21). Anyway, whatever the date is, Indian civilization is found to be older than other in the world. Hay quotes the line what Tagore had said, "For centuries we did hold torches of civilization in the East when the West slumbered in darkness" (63). He continues "India is the cradle of the world's oldest civilization" (222). Raghavana Iyer in *The Glass Curtain between Europe and Asia* agrees with the point, "The transmission of ideas, goods and influences was mainly from East to West in the ancient world and from West to East in the modern age" (7).

The date or the period from which the Indian Civilization started is not much important, what is important is the setting of the tone of this Indian (Hindu) culture.

Spiritual yearning (truth is known by spirit and spiritual salvation is the end of life), immediate experienced aesthetic continuum (i.e. love, beauty, loyalty), transcendental thinking (i.e. other world hell or heaven is important than this world) set forth tone of Indian culture. As Radhakrishnan says:

There was neither being nor non-being. There was neither the air, nor the sky above, what is it that moves? In what direction? Under whose guidance? Who knows, who can tell it when the creation occurred? Whence it cometh and whether the gods were only born thereafter? These words of spiritual yearning, metaphysical unease and intellectual skepticism set the tone of Indian's cultural growth. (21-22)

Hindu believes that he is a spirit. Him the sword cannot pierce-him the fire cannot burn-him the water cannot melt-him the air cannot dry. The Hindu believes that every soul is a circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is located in the body, and that death means the change of this centre from body to body. Nor is the soul bound by the condition of matter. In its very essence it is free, unbounded, holy, pure, and perfect. But somehow or other it finds itself tied down to matter, and thinks of itself as matter.

Beside this image worship is a marked feature of Indian culture. As a whole Indian culture is directed according to what is suggested in Vedas. As Northrop quotes the lines of Surendranath Das Gupta:

Even at this day all the obligatory duties of the Hindus at birth, marriage, death etc are performed according to the old Vedic ritual. A little insight into the life of an ordinary Hindu of the present day well shows that the system of image worship is one that has been grafted upon his life, the

regular obligatory duties of which are ordered according to the old Vedic rites.... The laws which regulate the social, legal, domestic and religious customs and rites of the Hindus even to the present days are said to be but mere systematized memories of old Vedic teachings, and are held to be obligatory on their authority. (314-315)

The Hindus have received their religion through revelation, the Vedas. They hold that the Vedas are without beginning and without end. It may sound ludicrous how a book can be without beginning or end. But by the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times. It is the Vedas proclaim not a dreadful combination of unforgiving laws, not an endless prison of cause and effect, but that at the head of all these laws, in and through every particle of matter and force stands One by whose command everything runs. "He is to be worshipped as the one beloved, dearer than everything in this and the next life" (Prasad, 10). The Hindu uses an external symbol when he worships. It helps to keep his mind fixed on the being to whom he prays.

Western (European) Culture

The conversion of the West to Christianity between the first and the seventh centuries gave a decisive turn to the development of the West. This Christian religion or civilization took firm root in Western Europe. Asia is the cradle of world's civilization, Christianity is also found to be flourished in India from the beginning of Christian era. As Radhakrishnan writes:

The heart of Christianity is Eastern, its brain theology, its body ecclesiastical organization become Greco-Roman. There has been

continuous tension between the simple Eastern faith with its mystical spirituality and reason and human thought. Western culture derives its values and institution from Greece, Rome and Palestine. Greece gave critical spirit, methods of observation and political concepts, Rome-secular laws and principles of organization and Palestine monotheism. (80)

With whatever the origin Western culture now is developed a rationalistic philosophy of life by breaking from the purely 'aesthetic' exoticism of the Eastern civilization.

Westerners attempt to give a rational justification for their ethical and religious view.

They have faith in the power of human reason not in mystic God or divinity. As Northrop says:

The West, to be sure, begins with experience in the gaining of its type of knowledge and returns to experimentally controlled portion of experience in the confirmation of that knowledge. But the Western type of knowledge tends to be formally and doctrinally expressed in logically developed scientific and philosophical treaties. (315)

Yearning for material life, individual selfishness are also the marked features of the westerners. Matter never made mankind happy and never will make. He who is trying to make us believe this will claim that happiness is in the matter; but it is always in the mind. The principle of 'fit for exist' motivates them to have material prosperity rather than spiritual salvation.

Differences between Eastern and Western Culture

Till about 1500 AD there was considerable similarity between East and West. In *The Glass Curtain Between Asia and Europe*, Venkatachar also says the same: "Round about

A.D. 1500 the balance began to change" (38). But diversity has now arisen owing to the rapid growth of technology Western/European countries began to experience materialistic civilization whereas Eastern or Indian culture maintained a comparative constancy of belief and remains essentially spiritual. In the West the production of commodities is guided by the impulse of competition whose end is the gain of wealth for individual because their living is determined by the Darwinian theory of 'the survival of the fittest'. The emphasis in the East is on life not possession, intuition and not intellect, religion and not science, freedom and not direction.

The religion is the one and sole interest of the people of East. Whether it is good to have the vitality of the race in religious ideals or in political ideals, but so far it is clear to us that, for good or for evil, their vitality is concentrated in their religion. No one can change it, destroy it and put in its place another. No one can transplant a large growing tree from one soil to another and make it immediately take root there. Politics, social improvement, in one word, this world, is the goal of mankind in the West, and God and religion come in quietly as helpers to attain that goal. Their God is the Being who helps to cleanse and to furnish this world for them; that is apparently all the value of God for them. Hay also correctly quotes the lines what Rabindranath Tagore said in his lecture:

Western civilization is more mechanical than spiritual, more political than religious, more mindful of power than love and peace. On the other hand the people of the East do not organize themselves for power but for perfection. They do not hate and kill, suspect and envy but live and adore, love and worship. Europe after the war lies in her adoption of ideals of the

East, namely spiritual love, beauty and freedom, which are not diminished by sharing. (270)

Hinduism is the oldest religion of the world and a religion which had never encouraged religious fanaticism. East is the motherland of philosophy, of spirituality, and of ethics, of sweetness, gentleness and love. It is fitting that whenever there is a spiritual adjustment, it should come from the orient. It is also fitting that when the Oriental wants to learn about machine-making, he should sit at the feet of the Occidental and learn from him. When the Occident wants to learn about the spirit, about God, about the soul, about the meaning and the mystery of this universe, he must sit at the feet of the Orient to learn.

Religion in the East is the cultivation of the interior life. It is the attainment of spiritual freedom and is essentially the private achievement of the individual won by hard effort in solitude and isolation on mountain-tops and in monasteries. Radhakrishnan, in his *East and West in Religion* says:

The meditation of thinkers in communion with the eternal, the rapture of devotee in love with the transcendent, the dedication of the saint raised above egoistic desires and passions into the selfishness of divine possess value to the Eastern mind higher than life of power and enjoyment. (54)

In the West, religion is a social phenomenon, a matter of the ecclesia, of the community. Religion for them is a support for social stability. The Western converts religion into a sort of police system for the sake of social order. For them God is the promoter of the social customs. Ceremonies, which bind the groups, are emphasized. Good citizens are good believers those who breaks the rules are atheists while eastern religion is directed to the salvation of the individual soul rather than to the maintenance of society. Rites,

ceremonies are emphasized, as they are the functions of morality to earn life eternal. For them salvation is not automatic. It depends on our effort. To make out that salvation is not something that we deserve or earn; it is entirely free and spontaneous gift of the supreme.

In East, religion is the life of spirit. It is the perception of oneness of man with the spirit of truth, love and beauty in the universe. Religion is more a matter of spiritual culture than that of scholastic learning. God is not the highest form to be known but the highest being to be realized. Eastern religion lays stress on the patience of spirit and the gentleness of soul. Vigorous life and active service appeal to the West. For Westerners, "Life is a thing to be possessed and enjoyed" (89) comments Radhakrishnan. The Western mind is rationalistic and practical while the Eastern mind is more inclined to inward life and intuitive thinking. Western philosophy demands logic for real. It divides all statements into empirical and non-empirical; the empirical ones are contingent and verifiable in sense perception but non-empirical are tautological not verifiable and these are just simple nonsense. Northrop comments on Western philosophy as: "a practical philosophy . . . a philosophy which not merely argues but experiments . . . all that exist here. There is no need to throw eyes into the heavens for it" (365). For them what is expressed and is useful for our immediate ends, is real, what is inexpressible and useless is unreal. They search logical reasoning for things to be true. We see this philosophy vividly in Newton, Galileo, Darwin and so forth.

In the East, religion is experience of reality. God is truth and service for God is service for the truth. What is given in religion is too subtle and too complex to be expressed in logical propositions. Radhakrishnan comments in his *East And West some*

Reflection: "East believes that there are realities which can not be clearly seen, and even assumes that logical attempts to formulate them in communicable propositions do violence to them. . . ." (49). Thus Eastern religion is mystic whereas Western is intellectual. For Easterners, God is not seen, He is everywhere, and His grace is attained by sacrificial deeds. God is divine power, which holds the key of the universe. They believe in stone shrine of God and kneel, bow and give pain to oneself in front of the stone image of God to get the grace of divinity (God). While Europeans want to make life better for themselves, individually. They are more humanistic. They believe in power and action. Man, himself is responsible for his deeds that bring his fate. Henri Brugmans, in *The Glass Curtain Between East and West*, comments:

The measure of man is man; this humanistic confession is acceptable even for the Christian mystic whose faith tells him that God almighty, the creator of the universe, did not disdain to adopt the flesh with all its weaknesses and become 'Emmanuel', God with us-that is: Man among men. Therefore European might crusade for the glory of God they never forget that the lord is served through men. He saved so European pays a certain respect not only for the individual but for individual conscience.

(225)

Eastern religion aims at producing saints and heroes, western men that are sensible and can maintain social order. Radhakrishnan says in *East and West Some Reflection* ". . . they [European] are content to work with the material ready to their hands and reduce it to order and decency" (56).

In the West, we have the realism of the men of action, in the East the sensitiveness of passive imagination. The ideal of western culture is to train men for citizenship that they may be able to realize their full power in the state and for the state. In the East, the good man is one who feels at home in the whole world. Emphasis on logical efficiency, materialistic feeling, and individual selfishness are the characteristic marks of the western attitudes to life. On the other hand, mystic realism, familial life, salvation of individual soul is the eastern marks of civilization.

Perfect harmony among human beings is not possible in this world. Every great religion teaches brotherhood but always man creates some sorts of flaw in the jewel. It is the peculiar feeling of the West to have substituted for the ideal of harmony between man and man a series of intellectual justifications of disharmony, which have led to growth of difference not merely due to ignorance or sin but actually promised by ideologies and institutions. In the West, the religion itself, nationalism, racism are the main dividers. Christianity has been especially prone to that most hideous form of war-the war of religion; first, there was against the Muslim (the crusaders), then came internecine wars between Catholics and Protestants in Europe; there are even battles among Protestants as for examples, the bloody persecution of the normal pioneers in the USA. Nationalism has proved the cause of even more, extensive wars; for example, World Wars. Radicalism was also a main cause of war during the late twentieth century in the western world. The Darwinism principle of the “survival of the fittest” appears to offer a scientific justification for the wrong that strong may domineer over the weak.

The individual freedom to make one's gain by the operation of the market or the free play economics forces without regard the social obligation has been the cause for the

disintegration of society. The most potent nineteenth century European Ideology, Marxism, postulates the existence of a state of conflict between the classes based on the exploitation of one class by another. First, community was destroyed by industrial revolution, leaving men as a 'fortuitous can course of atoms' (in the phrase of Hugh Tinker). In the process that social unit which has been the foundation of mankind since the dawn of time has broken up the family. The family of brothers and cousins disappeared from the European thinking. Then more tragically came the disintegration of the closest relationships. As Hugh Tinker in *The Glass Curtain between Asia and Europe* comments:

No longer do sons accept an obligation to protect their parents in old age. Indeed the elderly have now become a separate category, unwanted often rejected by society. Close behind the alienation of the old came the weakening of the ties of marriage. Inevitably, then came the alienation of the young; the diminution of the sense of parental responsibility, and the growth of the concept of the 'teenager' as a separate species, viewing parents and the adult world at large as unfriendly, even enemy territory.

(269)

The whole social and political philosophy of traditional India is founded upon the concept of harmony. Within the family, a code of parental care and filial piety secure the amenities of family life by a pattern of courtesy and adjustment. Because the family owes its origin to the ancestors, an elaborate ritual of ancestral observances was evolved. But one would say that the most extreme example of social fragmentation, the setting apart of one man from another by absolute social laws is proved by caste in India. Yet caste is

also a syncretism, to enable society to operate in harmony, with mutual recognition of functions. As Radhakrishnan, in his *East and West Some Reflection* says: "The caste system was originally intended to encourage a wide range of individual differences" (27). It was not altogether without justification that Rabindranath Tagore could say of the caste system that it represented:

. . . experiments in evolving a social unity within all the different peoples could be held together while fully enjoying the freedom of maintaining their own differences . . . [within] a social federation whose common name is Hinduism. (qtd. in Raghvan 270)

Within this caste system there remains a social harmony in the exchange of their works. Social harmony is founded in the family. From babyhood to oldest age, the family shields and protects in East. Seniority is strictly observed, and the young must show deference to their elders; but there is seldom any likeliness to the reign of terror which is occasionally gripped Victorian English family. Throughout life, the individual is supported by the family. The family spreads out to take in cousins, nephews, and nieces. As Hugh Tinker in *The Glass Curtain between Asia and Europe* says: "Somewhere among the relatives there will be one who has become successful or wealthy: he is under an obligation to provide a kind of family social security" (271). An Indian proverb declares 'a good tree can lodge the thousand birds.' There are very few aged grandparents living alone in garrets, and few fatherless children immured in orphanages.

Beyond the family there is the association of the village. The brotherhood of the village community is illustrated by these proverbs; for example, 'When it is scarce share

it, when it is plentiful takes your fill'. 'When the right leg is wounded, the left also feels the pain'.

Family is the central element of social organization in the East. Marriage is the central element for that familial harmony. The Hindu marriage contemplates identity and equality. The primary motif of marriage is not merely individual satisfaction but the achievement of life. As Coomaraswamy writes:

For Hindu sociologists marriage is a social and ethical relationship, and the begetting of children, the payment of debt. Romantic love is a brief experience of timeless freedom, essentially religious and ecstatic, in itself as purely anti-social as every glimpse of 'Union as a denial of the Relative'; it is the way of marriage. . . for the oriental, marriage is the fulfillment of a traditional design and does not depend upon the accident of sensibility. To be such a man as Rama, such a wife as Sita rather to express oneself, is the aim. (107)

In Indian society marriage justifies the sexual relation both socially and religiously. Before marriage, to have a sexual relation is taken as a great crime. If it is found society punishes them for violating social norms. Virginity is a must before marriage, and fidelity is a must after marriage esp. for women. Marriage or sex is related to a creation but not as the quenching of the physical passion. In Indian society, choice is made by their parents for example and it is to be of the same caste. The marriage system within the same caste, perhaps, was originated with the view that it will help to continue one's ancestor's specialized work and that maintains the social harmony but later it become a superstitions. To be married with out of caste is strictly forbidden in Indian society.

Begetting child and nurturing them are the inevitable duties of an Indian woman. As Coomaraswamy says: "A majority of women preferred marriage and motherhood..." (101). On the contrary, Western theory seeks to establish marriage on the basis of romantic love and free choice; marriage thus depends on the accident of 'falling in love.' Those who are 'crossed in love' or do not love are not required to marry. As Coomaraswamy writes:

This individualistic position, however only logically defensible if at the same time it is recognized that to fall out of love must end the marriage. It is high and religious ideal which justifies sexual relations only as the outward expression demanded by passionate love and regards an intimacy continued or began for mere pleasure, or for reasons of prudence, or even as a duty, as essentially immoral. It is an ideal which isolated individual and groups has constantly upheld, and it may be that the individualism will tend to a nearer realization of it. . . .Western marriage is nominally founded upon free choice. . . . (106)

The hierarchical family and social system is possible by social virtues, supposedly characteristics of Eastern spiritual civilization - compassion, love, loyalty and forgiveness. But the Western lacks such spiritual virtues. As Hay quotes the lines of Tagore:

Westerners base their lives on practical intelligence
 Easterners find the mystery of creation on love.
 But shrewdness needs love's power,
 And love needs shrewdness to give it firm foundation

When love and women work as one

They create the design for a new and better world

Love is dead in the West, because thought has become irreligious.

Reason is enslaved in the East due to incoherent ideas. (298)

The orient has been the cradle of the human race for ages, people of the West are practical in their own department, in military affairs, and in managing political circle and other things. Perhaps people from Orient are not practical in those ways, but they are practical in their own field; they are practical in religion. If a man preaches philosophy standing on one foot would lead one to salvation. But in the West, plans of salvation mean intellectual gymnastics-plans which are never worked out, never brought into practical life.

For the methods and manners in the busy rush of life in the West vary entirely from those of East. Westerners with their science and technology have lost spiritual feelings. They have been rude with their rationalistic thinking. As Jawaharlal Nehru comments:

Today it is fighting silently and desperately against a new and all powerful opponent-the bania [merchant] civilization of the capitalist West. It will succumb to this new comer, for the West brings science and science brings food for the hungry millions. But the West brings an antidote to the devils of out-throat civilization. (qtd. in Hay 246)

Science that can give us only bread and cloths and power over our fellowmen, sciences that can teach us only how to conquer our fellow-beings, to rule over them, which teach the strong to domineer over the weak-those they could have discovered if they willed.

But if we praise unto the Lord, they come down to us, inherited from father to son for thousands of years, till it tingles in every drop of blood that runs through our veins, till the name of religion and Hindu have become one.

As we saw such opposing features of European and Indian everyday life, it seems that they always remain in a diametrical distance. But this is not the case in reality. After the world wars, the countries of Third World (the Westerners gave name for Eastern countries which had lagged behind in science and technology) started to import or imitate the Western system of politics and economics in the name of development or modernization which essentially affected the culture. Even today people mistake the word 'westernization' for 'modernization'.

III. Eastern and Western Cultural Variation

Every writer when genuinely writes with his own understanding and vision, becomes peculiar and unique. His/her perspective is shaped by the experiences he gets of his world around him/her and his writing especially becomes the manifestation of complex relationship to his socio-cultural ethos. Politics, socio-economic condition of a country also influence a writer's perception which is inextricably interwoven with its culture. Indo-English writing is basically a cultural product. Indo-English literature written by an Indian becomes an authentic expression of its socio-cultural and philosophical milieu. Literature that is written in English, a language of Indians received as a colonial heritage, expresses Indian experiences and sensibility. Anita Desai, generally, restricts herself to reflect upon the socio-cultural ethos of the society that she lives in and excavates the eastern particularly Indian culture and values.

All great works of art are the artistic and imaginative reconstruction of the social and human reality. But there is no one-to-one correspondence between both literature and society. The social reality is objectively reflected by the correct form of literary works. Artists are always within the societal wave and they can not escape from their social reality. George Orwell has regarded literature as the product of society:

The artist always has a desire to push the world in a certain direction; to alter the people's idea of the type of society that they should strive after . . . no look is genuinely free of political bias. The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude. (qtd. in Motilal, p. 192)

Art should reflect the social reality not by slavish copying but by framing a structure in which contradiction prevailing in the society merge into all opposite should be brought to be reconciled in the objective reality of the art. Though there is a great debate on what really the literature is, Desai somehow seems to agree with the notion that every political relation of art to society is raised by Marxist philosophy.

According to Marxist philosophy “Literature is the mirror of society, it is a sociological phenomenon. Its content should be derived from society and everyday reality” (Abrams 165). Literature does not exist in some timeless, aesthetic realm as an object to be passively contemplated. Rather, like a cultural manifestations, it is a product of the socioeconomic and hence ideological conditions of the time and place in which it was written, whether or not the author intended it so. Because human beings themselves are the product of their socioeconomic and ideological environment.

Multiplicity of the thematic pattern and poly-angular perspective in Desai's writing encompasses different issues like tradition versus modernity, conventional value system, marriage system, religious practices, yoga, meditation, socio-economic customs and cultural responses to the impact of the West. Apart from exhibiting a distinct and deep awareness of the social, economic and cultural realities around her, Desai also succeeds in effectively assimilating and transmuting these realities and experiences into her writing. The encounter between the diametrically opposite, the East and the West in the context of human relationships and cultural values constantly engages her attention and gets reflected in her stories. An attempt has been made in this chapter to analyze the “Celebration of Eastern Values” in Anita Desai’s *Diamond Dust*.

Emphasis on Eastern Culture

The terms east and west are used to refer not just to areas of spaces but also to the modes of thoughts and behavior. Though it is difficult to demarcate the frontier between the East and the west, for the purpose of this dissertation I have already specified the terms as 'Eastern culture' means 'Indian Hindu culture' and 'Western culture' means European Christian (protestant) culture in the preceding chapter.

Emerging from displacement, dereliction of social marginality, the writer articulates emergence of newly formulated idea of nation and individual identities rejecting the western tradition. This articulation leads postcolonial people to create their individual as well as national identity as it is done by Anita Desai, Salman Rusdie, and Michael Ondaatje etc. Postcolonial literature, licensed with cultural discourse of suspicious on the part of colonized people, seeks to undermine the imperial subject. It was forcefully produced parallel discourses which have questioned stereotypes about myths. The power and authority of western colonial representation have been questioned and challenged by the discourse produced by the people supposed to be subordinates. Those postcolonial writers and critics turned the table from the real situation of the colonial countries and presented the colonial history from the perspective of colonized people's experiences. By doing this they revealed what the colonial authority did in the name of progress, science and civilization. As a consequence, there seemed some sorts of celebration of their own cultural values, which is beautifully depicted by Anita Desai, an Indian story writer, in her story collection, *Diamond Dust*. The context of particular Indian cities with its norms, values and traditions, tastes, religious practices etc. are evident in the atmosphere of the book.

The collection opens with “Royalty” about a couple who delay their exodus to their summer home in order to welcome a much in-demand guest, a young man with such charm as to overshadow his parasitic nature towards the wealthy. It is an eastern couple Ravi and Sarla, an Indian middle-class typical Indian family have planned to go for an outing, to escape the summer heat. However, they are penetrated in their plan by the unexpected arrival of a guest, Raja, who they revered as a family guru. The shocking news which comes in yellow printed postcard through their nephew sensationalizes them:

In that uncomfortable interlude, a postcard arrived – a cheap, yellow printed postcard that for some reason to do with his age, his generation, Raja still used. Sarla’s hands began to tremble: news from Raja. In a quivering voice she asked for her spectacles. Ravi passed them to her and she peered through them to decipher the words as if they were a flight of migrating birds in the distance: Raja was in India, at his ashram in the south, Raja was going to be in Delhi next week, Raja expected to find her there. (2)

The yellow printed postcard was full of information about the arrival of main character, Raja. It reads, "She would be there, wouldn't she? You won't desert me?" (2). As the news exploded they were left helpless, as Raja was a person who could not be ignored and Ravi and Sarla had already known the greatness of Raja. Moreover, the letter was more an appeal to join the mission of Raja and they joined their hands to complete the mission. Raja was a representative figure of eastern society and all people were welcoming him. Ravi and Sarla consider it their duty to welcome their guest Raja. It is the depiction of how the eastern world is still under the influence of ancient Hindu

tradition. They believe "Atithi Devo Bhava"(Guests are God) because they are deep-rooted eastern characters. It shows the loyalty of Hindu people to their guest that was a factor that differentiated between the east and the west.

Ravi and Sarla who were going to California for the weekend represents the hegemony of western world being fallen as, generally it is the westerners' trend that prefer holidaying in a far away countries. Desai depicts the western world-California, from the eye of an eastern in a comparative manner. Many of the Indian citizens view life in west as full of charm and glow; however, it has its own flaws. Desai narrates the pomp of California, the western world:

California had such weather? Had they deceived by posters of palm trees and golden beaches? Didn't they know the fraudulence inherent in the very notion and practice of tourism, that abominable habit of the western world? Tourism! Now, when he returned to India, it was not to see the sights, he already knew them- they were imprinted upon his heart-but to imbibe them, savor them, nourish himself upon them. (12)

Desai questioned the western tradition of holidaying. She asserts that people are deceived by the western world and its fraudulence. But eastern world and places never deceive the people. The beauty of eastern location is imprinted upon the easterner's heart and they become happy with their surroundings. They try to seek beauty and pleasure in their own native land. So easterners are intimate with nature and they know the value of nature. So they can not spend their holiday in the pompous city like California. Eastern people always pray the nature and natural world where as westerners are wandering around the material world. It is associated with the trend of European and Americans coming to

India, and in turn the Indians going to the America for holidaying is the reversal of the trend.

When Raja arrived by train with a great blowing of triumphant whistles, immediately coolies sprang at the compartments, exhorting coolies hurriedly bring up the luggage of passengers:

Only after the united families began to leave, exhorting coolies to bring up the rear with assorted trunks, bedding rolls and baskets balanced on their heads and held against their hips, and the railway platform had emerged from the scramble. . . (4)

The presence of exhorting coolies in railway platform gives the scene of Indian railway platform. Indian railways have been serving the people of India for over 150 years. During the ups and downs of country, this organization operated as a great integrating force and assisted the economic structure of India. Indian railways not only enjoy the monopoly over India's rail transport, but it is also one of the largest and busiest rail networks in the world. Not only this, Indian railways is known to be the second largest commercial or utility employer in the world more than 1.6 million employer. Indian railways boast of the largest rail network in Asia.

When Raja reaches up to Ravi's home, he was fluting as the car drew up at one of the closed gates. Raja opines that the first and foremost duty of our lives is to be spiritual first, and then if there is time, let other things come. So he emphasizes on the spiritual blessing over physical bath:

. . . if I am to bathe and refresh myself, but,' he concluded, triumphantly, 'what further refreshment can one possibly require after one has already

been blessed with such, such enchanting acceptance, not, not physical, but, positively, positively. . .spiritual?’ (7)

To Raja, the world of spirit is as real as to the occidental is the world of senses. In the spiritual he finds everything he wants or hope for; in it he finds all that makes life real to him. Spirituality and mystical charm have always drawn people from all over the world to India. As the world becomes increasingly capitalistic and materialistic, the quest and urgency for spirituality grows more and more. Raja has recently come from western location and seeking the real nectar of spirituality in India. The traditional Indian way of life has helped in the quest of spirituality in Raja's life. Numerous cultures and value system have thrived and flourished together in his life resulted into the unique Indian way of life. His principle is all about showing respect to all living beings- animals, trees, rocks and even water and lead a positive and healthy life. It is believed that the supreme creator has put each one of us in this world for a purpose and that purpose is to be compassionate, caring and loving to one-another. As mentioned earlier, the great Indian spiritual personalities and gurus have played an important role in spreading the message of love, care, and the need for positive living all over the world.

“Winterscape” the second story of the compilation glorifies the eastern myth rearing children and affection associated with them. In every parts of the world, children are born and mothers give them special attention. However, in India there is a strange trend in relation to it. It is not only the birth giving woman, who is the mother, but all the senior females in the family, who provide the child with the motherly love and affection. Rakesh is an Indian origin youth, married and settled with Beth, a Canadian lady in Canada. He was reared by his widow mother, whom he called “Ma”(25) and by his aunt,

whom he calls “Masi”(25). They are happily settled family in Canada, until the day, when Rakesh decides to invite his mother and aunt to accompany him in Canada, and assist in rearing up his newly born child. Beth, not accustomed to such interference of blood ties in the family finds it disgusting:

She felt herself tense at the thought of not just one, but two strangers, foreigners, part of Rakesh’s past, invading their house. She had already wished she had not allowed Rakesh to send for his mother to attend the birth of their child. It had seemed an outlandish, archaic idea even when it was first suggested; now it was positively bizarre. ‘Why both of them? We only asked your mother,’ she insisted. (26)

Beth does not want two strangers, who are Rakesh’s mother and aunt, and with whom she is required to share her house along with many more things. She shows her unwelcoming response to the familial relationship from the east. The concept of two mothers, one son, probably, possible only in the east. The tie of family is strengthened by love and devotion, which Rakesh also realizes. And the interesting aspect is both of them have no complaints to other, and are sharing their motherly love to Rakesh, without any biasness and personal whatsoever. Their purity of unselfish love for their son is beyond expression. This is the presence of eastern culture in regards to blood ties and children. But in the western society, love and dedication are replaced by individual selfishness. Family leaves an individual to live in one's own style after the teen age. In western society the joint family, like the family of Rakesh, including two mothers and son has disappeared. But the family, like that of Rakesh (two mothers and son) is still there in the eastern society.

The culture of providing the child with a special treatment by senior family members is one of the characteristic of oriental, to which Beth is not known. In almost all cultures of the world, the birth of a child is celebrated with pomp and show; however, the east has its own way. The concept of treating children in a special way is very popular in the eastern part of the world. Here, the entire family gather and provide the newly born child with their blessings and offerings, with mental and physical care to the baby child. This in fact increases familial ties and increases internal bond and affection among the members of family.

Birth of a child is celebrated in the eastern world with charm and glow. Each of the relatives of the couple is invited, and the child is provided with offerings by all the attendants, followed by, in most cases giving monetary gift. It is, however, related to various local cultures, and may differ in style of celebration and gift of the ceremony. But, the essence that the child will be blessed by the senior members of the family continues even today. This is the rich side of eastern culture, which Rakesh wants to continue back in Canada but, of course, not understood and supported by his Canadian wife, Beth. She finds it meaningless:

‘Two tickets, for whom?’ because she knew, Rakesh did not have a father, that his mother was a widow. ‘For my mother and my aunt,’ he said, in a low almost sullen voice, sitting on the edge of the bed in his pyjamas and twisting his fingers, together. . . . ‘Your aunt?’ Beth heard her own voice escalate. ‘Why do we have to pay for your aunt to visit us? Why does she have to visit us when the baby is born? I can not have so many guests in the house, Rakesh!’ (26)

Two mothers of Rakesh fly to Canada from India to attend the birth of his first child. Rakesh now a husband of a Canadian and fairly alienated from his past has trouble explaining to his wife, Beth, the love and sympathy with which his mother gave him to her childless sister. It is obvious Beth does not understand the eastern culture. However, some of her expressions are anti-eastern values, like when she says, why we have to pay for your aunt, it is the expression of western woman, who is unaware of the rich eastern familial values. There is thoroughgoing conflict of two value systems throughout the story and Beth is reluctant to welcome the arrival of her husband's two mothers. The seed of dispute is sown when the eastern culture is introduced to Beth, western representatives.

After the death of his father, Rakesh was reared by mother and his aunt, who was his mother's sister. In the west, it might sound a little weird; however, in the eastern part of the world, it is absolutely accepted. And, when Rakesh has his own child, he invites his mother and aunt to Canada to assist in nourishing the newly born baby boy. However, Beth not habituated with such scenario and culture does not find it very welcoming. She is against the idea that two of the never seen and heard women are coming to stay with them, that too, in the pretext of caring her newly born child. For her they both are "Two guests, two foreigners- as such a time" (27). This is the intolerance of western culture.

Rakesh had two mothers- one who gave birth and other who reared him. When his real father died, his mother took him to her sister's house and there he was reared. When this fact is disclosed to Beth, she could not digest the fact. For her, it was impossible for a sister to give her blood-son to her big sister. Beth says, "Nothing, no one could make me do that. Give my baby away?"(35). Easterners believe in sacrifice to look into the

feelings of others but Beth is a typical western cultured woman, who dreams and works for self, and not for others.

Rakesh knew more truths about his mothers. However, he could not tell her all, as Beth could not understand it to the core even though he tries to persuade Beth by explaining the cultural and ethical aspects of the east. Rakesh was devoted to both his mothers because he was nurtured by them. Rakesh played an active role in earning the intimacy and affection of his mothers even in his youth. Rakesh is still recurring his childhood and upbringing by his two mothers:

It was not like that. They understood each other. Ma looked after me – she cooked for me and fed me, made me sit down on a mat and sat in front of me and fed me with her own hands. And what a cook she is! And Masi, she took me by the hand to school. In the evening, she lit the lamps and made me show her books. She helped me with my lessons – and I think learned with me. (35)

Ma and Masi involve themselves in the daily routine of their child. It was as simple as simple as calling him for a meal and sitting for the same with him all through or something difficult like helping him get ready for school. They remembered that routine and rhythm create a sense of security in their, something which forms the basis of a relationship. Still genuine love, care and concern went a long way in building a close knit bond between them.

Beth, a mere representative figure, voices the western culture in the entire process of story. But as things went on, the two old women – mother of Rakesh eventually won her. After they left, she kept their large photograph, despite the disapproval of Rakesh,

in the sitting room. In the refrigerator of their sitting room, Beth had added a photograph of theirs, which she liked to do the most. So, finally there was the victory of eastern culture.

There were three years between Masi (Asha) and Ma (Anu). Asha was the eastern rooted woman, to whom the author has presented as a typical representative of eastern culture. She was pleased to perform household tasks, she prepares eastern varieties of food enthusiastically wearing typical Indian dresses:

While Asha proved a natural housekeeper and joined, with gusto, in the cooking, the washing, the sweeping, all those household tasks shared between the women, pinning her chunni back behind her ears, rolling up the sleeves of her kameez, and settling down to kneading the dough, or pounding spices or rolling out chapattis with a fine vigour. (28)

The author does not miss to present an image of eastern girl. Asha, the eastern representative, manages household as a good housewife. Her parents were satisfied from her eager enjoyment in household chores which could make her successful housewife after her marriage. Because in eastern society, a good woman is expected to run her husband's households, look for him, look after her family members. Mother and wife are the traditional roles that women have been expected to fill. Women are primarily responsible for household and care-giving duties. They perform their jobs with gusto, without hesitation. There are millions of eastern women who go through it happily. But western woman does not like to do household chores.

In this richly diverse collection, Desai trains her luminous spotlight on private universes stretching around India skillfully navigating the fault lines between social

obligation and personal loyalties. The men and women in these nine tales set out on journeys that suddenly go beyond the pale or surprisingly lead them back to where they started from. In the mischievous title story, a beloved dog brings nothing but disaster to his obsessed master; in other tales, old friendships and family ties stir up buried feelings demanding either renewed commitment or escape. In the final exquisite story, “The Roof top Dwellers”, a young woman discovers a new kind of freedom in Delhi’s roof top community. These stories are of personal journey and awakening, around the door in a rural village in India. In the story "Royalty", Desai has depicted the rural agrarian life style of Bihar, state of India and also included the typical Bihari dresses that look very elegant and Indians wear them with a lot of pride:

‘Is that husband of yours still playing the patriot while dressed in Harris tweeds, and does he still wear that mouldy felt hat when following the elections amongst the cow-dung patties and buffalo sheds of Bihar?’ (10)

What makes the Indian culture so unique is the fact that each and every state of the country has its own distinct features of living and lifestyle. Bihar is regarded as undeveloped state which is untouched by the industrial wind of India. The people of Bihar depend on agricultural modes of production. People of Bihar rear domestic cattle like cow, buffalo to support their economy. This shows the typical rural way of living.

These stories are of native Indian flavor, personal journey and awakening, around the rural village in India. They depict the picture of backdrop city of India. Thus, the collection of stories revolves around the local suburbs of Indian village and its different cultures, values and tradition that is different to that of the western flavor.

Typical to the eastern way, Desai has a unique way of celebrating the eastern flavor. Like in “Royalty”, she narrates the story of a family preparing for holidaying marred by an unexpected guest, which they can not deny. As in “Royalty”, she twists her narration from a sudden flow towards an abrupt change in the course of flow of the incident:

All was prepared for the summer exodus: the trunks packed, the household wound down, wound up, ready to be abandoned to three months of withering heat and engulfing dust while its owners withdrew to their retreat in the mountains. The last few days were a little uncomfortable – so many of their cloths already packed away, so many of their books and papers bundled up and ready for the move.

Everything seems very normal in her narration, but then there is an unwanted thing happening all of sudden. This unwanted thing is the coming of some persons or befalls of ideas never precedent to the character’s mind and body. They are left to lurch to the same and, they can not avoid the same.

The varieties of stories in the collection are an amusing mixture of various diversities of social subject matter. Silvia Brownrigg in *The New York Times* praises the amusing collection of the stories and its way of presentation:

The diamond is a pure gem, stretching from buried resentments (in *The Artist’s Life*) to the havoc caused by a dear dog, *Diamond* (in *Diamond Dust: a Tragedy*) and to a businessman away from home sees his own death (in *The Man Who Saw Himself Drown*). Thus stories cover a wide variety of twist and turn in its pattern and in its way of presentation. (18)

The curious mixture of happenings in the compilation ranges around the life in Indian soil, norms and values. This is the depiction of amazing combination of the Indian society. The Indian society is a vast mixture of people from all most – all religions, ethics, class and status. All these have added to make up an amusing Indian society.

To present all these, Desai shows extraordinary compassion and caliber to present the eastern taste to the western world people. She depicts a minor incident, like a dog's havoc, or a businessman's odyssey, in to the extraordinary level of human experience and manifestation. In this anthology of nine short fictions luminously detailing events that lead characters to irrevocably cross the invisible line separating their past from new experiences, new insights and even new existences, Desai turns the world upside down. In setting that range from her native India to Cornwall, Mexico and Canada, Desai deftly sketches the scenes as she introduces varied characters.

Some of the best depicted stories are "Diamond Dust: a Tragedy," "Winterscape," and "The Rooftop Dwellers". In the first, a man's devotion to his notoriously cantankerous dog leads him to act precipitously with fatal consequences. The variant levels of depiction of incidents vary from stories like "Winterscape" on the relationship of the aunt and the mother of an Indian married to a Canadian, who visit the couple and their newborn son and, as the unfamiliar snowfalls, understand the great cultural differences that separate them.

In other notable pieces, an unexpected visit from a former college friends underlines a couple's growing frailty and distance from their past in "Royalty," a young Mexican studying in the U.S. returns to the town where he grew up and finds it changed and energized, while his family remains querulously in the past in "Tepoztlan

Tomorrow,” and a retired consultant running a hotel in Cornwall with his wife finds consolation after her death by closing the premises to guests and feeding the badgers that come out at night in “Underground”.

“The Rooftop Dwellers” perhaps the tale most redolent of contemporary India, describes a young, impecunious woman who moves to New Delhi to work on a literary magazine and, renting a room on a family’s roof top, begins to enjoy the freedom such a life permits, despite a robbery and a bullying landlord.

In “Winterscape” Beth, the central figure, in the beginning of the story has shown her disconcert to the eastern culture. It is one of the aspects of cultural indifference of the west to the east in today’s scenario. Through the cultural exchange and programs there can be an acknowledging the prosperity of eastern culture. In this way, “Winterscape” acknowledges the eastern culture and goes up to influence the western.

“Winterscape” is a story of a young Canadian woman, Beth, who does not understand the values and ethics of eastern culture. She is reared up in west and has a sister, to whom she owes no responsibility. However, when she becomes a mother, she encounters two mothers who have raised her Indian husband. As a new mother, Beth can not understand the poignant story of these two widows who have come to visit from India-one her husband’s natural mother and the other her beloved older sister to whom the mother gave the child to raise.

Similarly, the title story, “Diamond Dust: a Tragedy,” shortest in the collection, somewhat comical in the description of Mr. Das’s overblown devotion to Diamond, his dog “of an indecipherable breed.” Indeed, the dog becomes the most precious part of Mr. Das’s life, in spite of Diamond’s pariah status in the neighborhood – the dog is not only

dirty, mangy and a repeat runaway, he is also exceptionally mean with a special hatred for the postman. In the end, tragedy is inevitable.

Desai talks about a single woman in “Rooftop Dwellers.” In the story Tara, friend of Moyna was talking with her friends about her first meeting with Ritwick’s mother. The first thing Ritwick's mother said to Tara was not to wear pale colored cloth that gives the widow like appearance.

‘Why are you wearing this pale color? It does not suit you at all, it makes your complexion muddy’, or of how she would insist Tara wear her wedding jewellery to work ‘otherwise people will think you are a widow’, Adrian became wide-eyed and gulped. (182 – 183)

Married women in the east wear red and gold bridal dress. Hindu widows especially are faced with a battery of societal taboos. Golden jewellery and colorful cloths are regarded as the symptom of married life and additional assets and identity of their married life. But when they lose their husband, they have to give up all those cloths, jewellery and wear pale coloured cloths. Widows in east should no longer look attractive and are expected to wear only simple white saris for the rest of their lives.

Desai presents the life of a young woman residing in Delhi in “The Roof top Dwellers”. The story penetrates in to the mentality of a young lady, who has just come from Maharashtra, an Indian state. She is rather dull in being homely and cultural. When her landlady offers her an invitation to come to the house and watch *Mahabharata* – a popular teleserial based on ancient Hindu epic, by the same name:

‘You have come just at *Mahabharata* time’, the woman cross-legged on the bed reproached her. ‘Sit down, sit down beti. You can watch it with

us,' the man said more agreeably, waving at an open corner on the bed, and since they had all transferred their attention back to the screen. (159)

Man and woman requesting for a relatively unknown lady, as she has just arrived on the same day to rent the room, is rather disbelieving. However, in the eastern culture, people are soon believed; whether they like it or not. The eastern culture is based upon the concept of harmony. Within a house, a code of parental care and filial piety secure the amenities of social life by a pattern of courtesy and adjustment. One should not be in isolation to the other, because successful societies are those which combine both individual and society.

The house she shares, shelters many women and, who are like most typical Indian women; gossiping, spreading rumors and introducing fascinating stories. However she came from a house where:

The accommodation of objects, their comfortable clutter and convenience, could be taken for granted. Nothing had been expensive or elaborate but there had been plenty of whatever there was, accumulated over many years; rugs, chairs, cushions, cloths, dishes, in rooms, in verandas, odd corners and spaces. (160)

But in most Indian houses, even today, spaces and goods are very minimal. It is hardly sufficient to make selves comfortable. Life is difficult and so are the goods they enjoy and depend on. The living arrangements are still horrible, as most people come from same background, which do not have their own houses. To have a separate room and abundant facilities is still a distant dream to many of the Indian families.

Moyna, however, is rather above than most of the Indian girls, in the sense she has been enjoying a rather standard life and does not want penetration into her privacy, as often done by the girls and women of the boarding. Desai narrates Moyna's dilemma:

Whenever she shut the door, she was swallowed by the cell, its prisoner. If she left the door ajar, every girl going past would look in, scream, 'Oh, Moy-na!' and come into talk, tell her of the latest atrocity committed by the matron or of the unbelievably rotten food being served downstairs, and also of their jobs, their bosses, their colleagues and homes and families.

(160)

One of the fascinating cultures, especially in case of female in India, is their never ending gossip. This may not be true to all, but it is true to many housewives and single woman. Moyna becomes the victim of such gossips, which she was not accustomed earlier. She finds it disgusting that women have to come to her to narrate many things, not concerning to them to narrate her. However, this is the difference between eastern and western culture.

Similarly, the story, "Five Hours to Simla or Faisla" sketches a colourful, entertaining and exasperating interlude in a family's drive to Simla, animated by splashes of local colour - Indian sights, Indian sounds and some very Indian loonies. The story is the portrayal of northern India along with its Himalayas and ground reality of peasants and laborers. The story opens in this way:

Then, miraculously, out of the pelt of yellow fur that was the dust growing across the great northern Indian plain. . .

'Look – mountains!'

‘Where?’

‘No! I can’t see any mountains.’

‘Are you blind? Look, look up – not down, fool!’ (115)

India is the land of philosophy, of spirituality, and of ethics, of sweetness, gentleness and beauty. Hindu people yearn for individual spiritual salvation visiting different pilgrimage or meditating at the top of mountain. For them religion does not consist in erecting temples or building churches or attending public worship, but religion consist in realization. Mountains are the glorious assets of the blessed eastern *Punya Bhumi*.

The author has depicted the scene of typical Indian countryside, when she talks about laborers and typical vehicles, which are found only in villages of India, the reader easily gets the smell of rural India:

Other drives got out of and off their vehicles - the bullock cart driver lowered himself from the creaking cart, the bicycle rickshaw driver descended, and the bus driver got out and stalked, in his sweat – drenched khakis, towards the truck driver standing at the head of the line. (117)

Bullock cart driver, bicycle rickshaw driver, bus driver are the real representative of labourer class of India. Vehicles like bullock, rickshaws are only found in Indian villages. These are cheap means of transportation for poor peasants of India, which can not be found in western metropolitan cities.

In between are a number of unforgettable pieces, “Underground,” about a couple trying to find a room in a resort town, “The Artist’s Life,” about a young girl who announces she wants to be an artist, “Tepoztlan Tomorrow,” about a college student who

returns to his relative's hometown in Mexico. All these are third world's issues; let it be traffic jam, or a man willing to return to his home.

All these stories are celebrating the cultural values of the eastern world that depicts the falling aspects of so-called superior, civilized western culture. Every story of the anthology contains happenings based on eastern context, which thereby depicts that every culture has its own importance, prosperity. So the author has tried to establish mutual understanding and harmony from the humanistic standpoint. Most of the stories of the anthology set in Indian soil, consisting of simple villagers' anecdotes and stories. It thereby observes the Indian people and society very minutely in a realistic manner.

The celebration of eastern values is depicted along the line of love, marriage, holidaying, religion etc. Desai's strategies of characterization play a great role for the treatment of cultural encounter. In today's world every person has his/her way of thinking in conception of society is seen as complex and sum total of constructed discourses that are produced frequently in the course of time. West has created its own perspective to see the east. Westerners consider the eastern culture as inferior, uncivilized but Desai has twisted the matter and shows the victory of eastern thoughts over the western ideas.

Desai most excels –as many writers do- are in the stories that are perhaps closest to her own experiences, at least in surroundings and environment. It is beyond doubt that her eastern rearing has to do with the manner of her presenting stories. She is eastern at soul and western by manner. Similar trend is reflected in almost all the stories, where she has depicted the rise of eastern culture to the height of the west, and a parallel culture is in the offering. Her characters move from the dusty streets of India, as far as the farthest corner of the globe- to Canada, and then again come back to native land, India.

Thus, Desai portrays the rise of eastern culture to create the balance amongst eastern and western cultural aspects. Her strongest stories are those that take place predominantly in Indian locations, people with Indian characters. There is no culture like superior or inferior. All have their own identities. To sum up, she proposes a parallel eastern culture; which is the voice of the day to challenge the growing indifference of westerners to the people of eastern nations and societies.

IV. Eastern Values: Nucleus of Desai's Vision

Anita Desai's *Diamond Dust* is a collection of short stories that celebrates the eastern, typically Indian culture and values. In doing so, she deconstructs the Hindu cultural identity stereotype that has been built by Western societies. The anthology, comprising of nine stories portrays the rise of Eastern culture to create the balance amongst eastern and western culture.

All stories of the collection have celebrated the cultural values of the Eastern world that depicts the falling aspects of so-called superior, civilized western culture. Most of the stories of the anthology contain Indian flavour of culture, values, tradition and happenings based on Eastern context and its impact in the western people and the world, which there by depicts that every culture has its own importance, prosperity. So the author has tried to establish mutual understanding and harmony from the humanistic standpoint. Therefore, the author has observed the Indian people and society very minutely in a realistic manner.

"Winterscape," one of the second stories of the collection glorifies the Eastern myth rearing children and affection associated with them. Rakesh is an Indian origin youth, married and settled with Beth, a Canadian lady in Canada. He was reared by his widow mother. They are happily settled family in Canada, until the day, when Rakesh decides to invite his mother and aunt to accompany him in Canada, and assist in rearing of his newly born child. But Beth hesitates to welcome the familial relationship from the East. This is the presence of Eastern culture in regards to blood ties and children. Rakesh wants to continue back Eastern culture even in Canada. But, of course not understood and supported by his Canadian wife, Beth. This shows how the Oriental culture starts to

create a space in an Occidental society. Similarly, in “Diamond Dust: a Tragedy” the story of a dog-Diamond might be amusing to typical Eastern people, who might find love of the dog, rather amusing in this part of the globe. It shows that even inside a non-dominant culture, there are ideologies that are also claiming a space of containment. In both short stories, characters and situations acquire a symbolic meaning and thus they are capable of being associated to phenomena specific of different cultures or of major spheres, such as the Eastern/Western opposition. Similarly the story, “Five Hours to Simla or Faisla” sketches a colourful, entertaining and exasperating interlude in a family’s drive to Simla, animated by splashes of local colour – Indian sights, Indian sounds and some very Indian loonies.

Similarly, Beth, a Canadian born lady has dislikes towards the Eastern culture. She can not digest the fact that her husband, an Indian fellow, has been reared by two blood-sisters; one the biological mother and, second the teacher-mother. Some of her expressions are anti-Eastern values like when she says “why we have to pay for your aunt.” However, when she is aware of the love and affection of the two women to her husband, she is spellbound and ultimately develops a liking towards the Eastern culture.

In the process of creation of a certain cultural identity, heterogeneity tends to be replaced by homogeneity. In this way, the image that such identity projects in other cultures is a homogeneous and identifiable whole. Western culture has built a stereotyped image of India. We can find an instance of this in Beth and her prejudice against the Hindu sisters in “Winterscape.”. Anita Desai seeks to deconstruct the Hindu cultural identity stereotype that has been built by Western societies. Thus, she proposes a parallel Eastern culture; which is the voice of the day to challenge the growing indifference of

westerners to the people of eastern nations and societies. From the localized way of thinking of post modernity, she presents the spatial configuration of India as a conflict between opposing forces. In *Diamond Dust*, she wants to show that in India the past and the present, the wild and the civilized world are living together.

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