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A Critique of Modernity and Modern Values: Comparing the British with Indians in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*

Modernite ve Modern Değerlerin Eleştirisi: *Bye-Bye Blackbird* Romanında İngiliz ve Hintlilerin Karşılaştırılması

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Abstract

This paper intends to deal with *Bye-Bye Blackbird* by Anita Desai by presenting the critical gaze of diasporic Indians over modern British society and the ways these maladjusted Indians feel a sense of uneasiness and discomfort in an alien land dominated by modern values. Basing the theoretical framework on criticism of modernity, the study focuses on how Indian immigrants position the British and themselves in relation to modern values. Whereas they associate the British with privacy, isolation, coldness and lack of close and intimate social relations, a mechanical and standardised pattern of behaviours, they identify themselves with a set of social norms which incorporate warmth, affection and close relations along with spontaneity and non-mechanical acts. The central point of attention concerns the impression diasporic Indians have by observing attitudes of the British toward traffic, nature, social relations and technology and by comparing these attitudes with theirs.
Keywords: Anita Desai, modernity, modern values, diaspora, British, Indian

Öz

Bu makale diaspor Hintlilerin modern İngiliz toplumuna eleştirel bakışını ve modern değerlerin hakim olduğu yabancı bir ülkede çevrelerine uyum sağlayamamış bu Hintlilerin nasıl huzursuzluk ve kaygı duygusunu hissettiklerini gözler önüne sererek Anita Desai tarafından yazılan *Bye-Bye Blackbird* romanını ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Teorik çerçevesini modernitenin eleştirisine dayandıran araştırma Hintli göçmenlerin İngilizleri ve kendilerini modern değerlerle ilgili olarak nasıl konumlandırdıklarına odaklanır. Hintli göçmenler İngilizleri mahremiyet, yalnızlık, soğukluk, yakın ve samimi sosyal ilişkilerin yokluğu, mekanik ve standartlaşmış davranış biçimleriyle özdeşleştirirken kendilerini mekanik olmayan tavırlar ve doğallığın yanında sıcaklık, şefkat ve yakın ilişkileri kapsayan birtakım sosyal normlarla bağdaştırırlar. Çalışmanın merkezi odak noktası diaspor Hintlilerinin İngilizlerin trafik, doğa, sosyal ilişkiler ve teknolojiye karşı tutumlarını gözlemleyerek ve bunları kendi tutumlarıyla karşılaştırarak edindikleri izlenimle ilgilidir.
Anahtar sözcükler: Anita Desai, modernite, modern değerler, diaspora, İngiliz, Hintli.

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Introduction

As philosophical, psychological, political and cultural transformation of societies does not occur suddenly, but might require a process of centuries, the roots of today's crises and problems of modern society can date back to the rise of modernity and modern philosophy in many respects. In order to understand inherent features of modern human and society in a comprehensive way, it is necessary to extend the point to a period of almost four centuries when modernity emerged. Rene Descartes, Newtonian concept of time, technological developments are frequently at the core of discussions on modernity where critical comments are also made regarding to what degree modernity and modern thinking have brought happiness and produced the expected results for humanity.

Generally known as the founder of modern and rationalist philosophy, Rene Descartes set forth views that have been widely acclaimed for centuries. He asserted that "the aim of science is 'to make us as masters and possessors of nature' and also "declared the universe a giant clockwork, tying these two forms of domination - numbers and time - back neatly together" (Zerzan, 2002, p. 78). He laid the foundation of elevating human beings to the central position in the universe due to his rational capacity, and thus displayed a sign of subverting previous traditional hierarchies. Through his "mathematical" method, Descartes changed "nature" into "a thing" or "object" whose sole function is to serve "human beings" and elevated the status of humanity to "a subject" and dominator (Manicardi, 2012, p. 76). It means that every living thing was available and ready to be exploited and destructed by human beings. "The mechanistic view of the universe" contributed to a capitalist system along with "technological" development and became an ideology which legitimised the basis of dominating and exploiting both man and nature (Landstreicher, 2009, p. 54). Thus, the philosophy of Descartes has brought about destructive consequences for both humanity and nature, giving rise to a system where the distinction between the oppressor and the oppressed has been sharpened.

Time and clocks gained a new dimension through the modern philosophical mindset and led to critical implications for humanity. As a result of the "Newtonian time," clocks have become "invariable, standardised and universally applicable" irrespective of "organic principles such as embedded contextuality, networked interconnectedness, irreversible change and contingency" (Adam, 2005, 40). Contextual elements became subservient to the operation of clocks, and time exerted a guiding and supreme influence over space. Adam emphasises that "globally standardized, decontextualized clock time permeates even the most personal, contextual time of birthing; the universalized artefactual time invades the uniquely variable time of the mindful body" (1991, p. 158). Hence, the modern sense of time has prompted clocks to remove individuality and spontaneity of human beings.

Although proponents of modernity equate it with scientific and technological development which they consider a means of facility and practical results for humans, it is still controversial to what extent technology and machines have produced merely advantage and welfare for humanity. Sepulveda, for instance, argues: "Technology alienates. Technology consumes and mediates human life... Technological reason has made consciousness begin to standardize itself, standardizing everything simultaneously" (2005, p. 106-107). Hence, technology strips individuals of their individuality, sensitivity and human reflexes. Likewise, Marcuse asserts: "Rationality is being transformed from a critical force into one of adjustment and compliance. Autonomy of reason loses its meaning in the same measure as the thoughts, feelings and actions men are shaped by the technical requirements of the apparatus..." (1978, p. 146). These arguments seem to refute the modern perception that human reason can act as the sole instrument of judgement, classification, interpretation and solving problems. It is possible for human reason to be shaped and altered by the standardising force of technological devices.

Modern values and rationalist thinking have also altered social relations and institutions. Max Weber associates modern rationality with a "process of the practical rationalisation of the institutional orders of social action (in terms of their growing calculability, predictability, effectivity and so on) which leads to a homogenisation of the organisational structure of all forms of social institutions..." (Markus, 2011, p. 190). As institutions become homogenised and standardised, human beings spending time and working in them also accommodate themselves to such standardisation. Furthermore, it seems possible to state that "Modernity" can be regarded "(and, of course, criticised) as a society of universal levelling, whose

mechanisms efface all differences, and as a society that externally imposes fixed differences upon the individuals... and forcing them to accept restrictive and exclusive, non-communicating group solidarities" (Markus, 2011, p. 643). Due to the transformative force of modernity from the viewpoint of daily activities, a mechanical society in which privacy, cold relations and lack of face-to-face communication emerge.

Considering that modernity worked hand in hand with colonialism, which served the modern ambitions of European nations, it is no coincidence that the rise of modernity and then colonialism was concurrent. For this reason, delving into the effects of colonialism on Eastern peoples and the relationship between the West and the East, postcolonial literature may offer us an opportunity to evaluate the culmination of colonisation with reference to conditions of modernity and rationalist philosophy. The fiction of Anita Desai, a writer of Indian origins, seems to offer enough room for such a discussion. Especially *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, one of Desai's novels which relates the story of Indian immigrants such as Adit and Dev in England and Sarah, the British wife of Adit, opens up the possibility of defying cliché and extending its analysis far beyond hackneyed discussions revolving around Orientalism and hybrid cultures.

Analysis of Bye-Bye Blackbird

Drawing upon the arguments above deriving from critical comments on modernity and modern thinking, the present study deals with the legacy of modernity and its deep-seated effects on British society through the lens Indian immigrants, especially Dev and Adit, observe the British in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. Taking as the point of departure traffic, time, nature, human relations, social life and technology, the essay aims to argue how Indians identify the British with a standardised and mechanical mode of behaving and living. In line with the uniformity of habits and behaviours, according to Indian immigrants, the British have lost their emotional sensitivity and spontaneity, leading a life of cold relations, isolation and indifference. However, diasporic Indians see themselves as part of an ethnic community whose daily life and social relations are based on affection, emotions, intimacy and spontaneity as well as spiritual values without any sign of dull, mechanised and homogenous patterns. Their perspective may stem from diasporic consciousness of Indians. Discussing literature of the Indian diaspora and their ambivalent position, Vijay Mishra claims that "diasporic communities are said to occupy a border zone where the most vibrant kind of interaction takes place" (2008, p. 1). Besides such blurred borders between homeland and host society, Mishra also emphasises the possibility of "the return of the repressed" regarding the concept of "homeland" for diasporic communities (2008, p. 17). In the novel, diasporic Indians are obsessed with mainly differing sides of lifestyles between themselves and the British and inclined to recollect and revive their traditional social norms and relations in Britain. Rather than raising cliché about hybrid cultures that diasporic communities embody, the focal point will be on contrasting tendencies which Indians often focus on through their critical gaze.

The novel puts forward how daily activities are governed by clocks and watches and individuals in the modern British society adjust their acts according to a standardised time schedule like a mechanical creature while Indians act against the modern sense of time and its standardising effect. Adit says: "How is the Englishman to understand that? He’s been a clock-watcher since the day he was born. Do you know, English mothers even feed their babies and put them to bed according to the clock?" (1971, p. 186). A British child undergoes a mechanical lifestyle from birth and learns how to live by complying with norms dictated by clocks. John Zerzan argues: "The standardization of world time marks a victory for the efficient/machine society, a universalism that undoes particularity as surely as computers lead to homogenization of thought" (2002, p. 28). Thus, heterogeneity, individuality and individual differences in British society are reduced to uniformity by the standardising effect of time and clocks. Emotions and social relations are subjected to alienation in the mechanical society since the standard time regulates their intensity. Desai underlines the absolute distinction between the West and the Eastern concerning the conception of time with an emphasis on Indians' attitudes toward clocks. Adit says:

> You must admit that is the trouble with Orientals — we don't really believe in watches' and clocks. We are romantics. We want time to fit in with our moods. It should be drinking time when we feel like a drink, and sleeping time when we feel like sleeping (1971, p. 186).

Adit implies that Indian society does not act like machine-like creatures as the British do nor regulates social relations and daily activities according to the operation of clocks. Their emotional side tends to resist alienation and mechanisation that modernity attempts to impose on them through a standard time. In a similar vein, calling attention to the late arrival of an old Swami in a meeting, the narrative illustrates a marked lack of correspondence between a mechanical understanding of time and Indian immigrants' inclination to disobey such a modern conception of time. A British woman called Emma organises a yoga class in her house and prepares the house crowded with Indians for the meeting. An old Swami is called in advance to teach yoga to Emma and the guests, but he is too late for the meeting, which makes her panic-stricken. The writer relates the possibilities of his late arrival: "Had the Swami lost himself in the underground? Did Swamis not possess watches? Had he gone into a meditative samadhi from which he might not rouse himself for hours, even days?" (1971, p. 101). The reason why Emma is overcome by fuss and anxiety due to such belatedness more deeply than Indian guests is probably her tendency to be loyal to clocks and fixed time. The late arrival of the Swami may be associated with his Indian character that is opposed to pursuing clocks and the standard time strictly. The possibility of meditation lasting for hours and days unfolds a wide gap between the modern sense of time and his daily activities and spiritual journey. After his arrival in the meeting, Emma wants to call him to make a speech but notices that he naps. Manicardi claims that "The clock tells us when to come and when to go. It tells us when to do and when not to do. The clock moves, removes, stops, confirms, directs" (2012, p. 154). The Swami's nap is characterised by deviation from the generally accepted norm and order of the clock; that is, the clock directs people to awake, sleep, and work mechanically at specific hours, but the Swami's spontaneity defies standardisation and mechanisation caused by the clock. Indeed, his sleep undermines the modern sense of time as clocks in Britain command people to engage with daily activities like working at the hour which corresponds to his sleeping.

The novel reveals the homogenised and mechanical side of the modern British society by touching upon the smooth running of traffic without any violation of rules while reflecting Indians as far from such a monotonous and repetitious way of life. Comparing England with India, Indian immigrants find traffic in England too monotonous and dull and observe that it operates without any extraordinary and astonishing event. To illustrate, the heavy traffic at the weekend engages Dev's attention: "Every road and lane an unbroken chain of cars, linked together by their obedience to the rule of weekends to be spent in the countryside, inching along, then halting for hours, unable to break up and speed away" (1971, p. 146). There is no sign of any argument between drivers, feeling of impatience and hurry in spite of long hours spent in the traffic. Upon seeing such a process in the traffic at the weekend, Dev says: "Is there anything more regimented than life in England?" (1971, p. 146). Here, the heavy traffic also gives clues about how British individuals adopt spending their time at the weekends in the countryside as a rule and how it causes a traffic jam. The alignment of cars is reminiscent of troops formed into a regiment in a systematic order. The natural flow of weekly life for the British remains continually unchanged and uniform in that weekdays mean work whereas weekends denote a move to the countryside and the emergence of the heavy traffic. Similarly, traffic in England arouses no interest and charm for Adit:

> Bus, taxi car swept by — bus, taxi, car, with a monotony, a predictability that made him burn with longing to see one bullock-cart wander into the fray, only to make an alteration in the single, swift tempo of the London traffic. A slowly meandering, creaking bullock-cart, he prayed, or a monkey-wallah with his frocked and capped monkeys jingling the bells on their delicate ankles, or a marriage procession preceded by a brass band, decked in marigolds and tinsel — anything, he prayed, anything different in colour, tempo, sound, flavour; anything individual and eccentric, unruly and unplanned, anything Indian at all. (1971, p. 220-221).

Adit yearns for elements which can interrupt the routine and boring operation of the London traffic, but the same types of vehicles pass by without any interruption, and he hears the repetitious sound of machines at the same pace. He recalls the Indian traffic which comprises a rich variety of sounds, vehicles and activities and adds an unusual and colourful dimension to the tempo of the traffic. Thus, the Indian traffic appeals to emotions such as surprise and excitement rather than reason because of being far from the linearity and predictability that London reflects. Unlike the London streets where one can encounter only cats, dogs and birds kept as pets, the presence of monkeys with jingling bells also contributes to the richness of the Indian traffic. Human voices which interrupt the monotony of the traffic are often heard as well.

The narrative makes references to the ways the British attempt to treat nature by deriving inspiration from the rationalist philosophy of modernity. Settling in the countryside with his wife after his retirement and dedicating himself fully to gardening, Mr Roscommon-James, Sarah's father, illustrates the ambition of the British man to intervene in the operation of nature and exert mastery over it. The writer relates: "From day's break to nightfall he dug, bent, tied up, cut down, weeded, watered, dragged carried and crawled" (1971, p. 165). While mentioning that there was no well-groomed, tidy and trim garden before their arrival, his wife speaks highly of him: "Oh yes, he put in every flower you see. It was all a marsh when we came here" (1971, p. 152). He bears a resemblance to Robinson Crusoe, who cultivates land and shapes nature to his advantage by establishing his garden and growing crops. Mr Roscommon-James, similar to Crusoe, grows vegetables, fruits and also flowers in the garden where he is deeply engrossed in dominating and giving form to nature every day. This brings to mind the principle of rationalist philosophy which advocates the existence of a machine-like system in the universe and proposes that nature, due to being passive and unable to function properly, can be manipulated and activated by a powerful agent from the outside (Merchant, 1990, p. 193). Presumably, Mr Roscommon-James thinks that the wilderness and the marsh in the countryside entail his intervention to repair nature's failure to serve the mechanical running of the universe. Using his reason and tools helps him dominate and bring rationalist discipline to the disorderly and unkempt side of nature. By digging, cutting and weeding, he puts pressure on nature to tame and bring it under control by physical force, and nature conforms to his will by yielding products and beauty. Considering the conception of nature that man can tame, subdue and transform into "a garden to provide both material and spiritual food to enhance the comfort and soothe the anxieties of men distraught by the demands of the urban world and the stresses of the marketplace" in the Renaissance (Merchant, 1990, p. 8-9), the emphasis on gardening in the narrative is not accidental. Mr Roscommon-James seems to satisfy not only his bodily needs through food but also a sense of emptiness which would emerge after retirement and old age. Thus, as a legacy of modernity, constructing a garden where he can feel his capacity to cultivate land and grow plants despite his old age appears as the only way he falls back on to add value and meaning to his life.

Desai brings into question to what extent Mr Roscommon-James, despite his vigorous efforts, achieves in reaching the desired end in terms of disciplining nature and finding solace in the modern society. The narrative hints at his trait of neglecting responsibilities and lacking concern for his appearance and personal cleaning as follows: "With his head sunk up to its ears upon his shoulders, wearing a rough jacket that looked as though the dog slept in it every night, his boots with their soles peeling off and great nails painfully protruding, he shambled..." (1971, p. 165). Every day after gardening, he enters the house with "the earth and manure that covered him from top to toe, leaking out of his sleeves and boots, falling upon her parquetry and her carpets," which makes his wife seized with "a frenzy of irritation and alarm" (1971, p. 165-166). Sleeping "like an active mole-hill quaking and jumping with his horrendous snores, snorts, whistles and grunts," he interrupts his wife's sleep at night: "Every time his wife jabbed him in the ribs with an elbow and hissed, 'To-mmy! For heaven's sake, Tommy!' the mole-hill shook mightily as though threatening to erupt, then gradually subsided to its own-pre-historic and animal rhythm" (1971, p. 174). Because of his dirt, she reprimands him as if he is "an unusually naughty and tiresome dog," but he retreats into "the silence of a piece of log submerged in a water meadow, of a scarecrow in a cornfield;" moreover, "the fork in his hand" looks like "a farm implement," and "his mouth" is similar to "a waggon" (1971, p. 166). These depictions attest to his evolution into a figure that carries both animal-like and machine-like features apart from characteristics of a human being. His excessive dedication to dominating and

disciplining nature in the garden causes him to be reluctant to seek out companionship and interact with his wife and others; therefore, he prefers to remain silent and avoid any communication or exchanging ideas. Concerning the outcome of modernity and its philosophy, Oelschlaeger argues: "Classical science, as epitomized by the Baconian-Cartesian perspective, provided no answers and therefore no ethical guidance, for humankind was conceived as nothing more than the master and possessor of nature" (1991, p. 196). Mr Roscommon-James fails to maintain his gardening and social self in a state of equilibrium and becomes bereft of any social norms and spiritual values which can orient him towards a balanced mode of behaviour. Sarah compares her father to "a garden bloom," "left out in the wilderness," which "can no longer be recognised as the crisp and upright and brightly groomed plant it had once been" and thinks that he has transformed into "an unwieldy, half-wild country plant" (1971, 168). Possibly, following the principles of modernity makes him oblivious to the perception that the more he immerses himself in exerting mastery over nature, the more he is alienated from human dignity and falls victim into the dehumanising force of modern principles.

In recreational activities, standardised modes of behaviour, uniform acts in a synchronised way and relationship with nature in the novel have a bearing on conditions of modernity in British society. In the picnic area of the countryside, Dev sees individuals who are "buried deep in their newspapers," "tins and cartons in the littler bins placed conveniently under the trees" and a "child in a playpen placed in the centre of a smooth green meadow" (1971, p. 147). He is staggered by their isolation from both others and nature: "With their newspapers, their tables and chairs, their litterbins and playpens, what did they ever learn of this treasure they owned, this rich, abundant beauty and green grace?" (1971, p. 147). He understands that the modern British society are not aware of a green and spectacular landscape in the countryside nor attach importance to such a charm and attraction. As a sign of modern rationalist philosophy, they put rigid barriers between themselves and nature since nature appears as a part of the external world which needs to be dominated, controlled and exploited rather than an active organism whose beauties can be appreciated. While shedding light on the relationship between individuals and nature in the modern society, Giddens claims that "A visit to the countryside or a trek to the wilderness may satisfy a desire to be close to 'nature', but 'nature' here is also socially coordinated and tamed" (1991, p. 166). Hence, the British put into effect their impersonal and mechanical social norms in the countryside by bringing homogenised habits, such as reading newspaper, sitting on chairs, putting trash in litterbins and children playing in playpens, to nature. Nature in the countryside becomes a space which planned and predictable habits of British individuals pervade and which serve their interests. Rigorous adherence to established social norms and standards in a recreational activity eliminates emotional depth and freedom from constraint. For this reason, nature turns into a socially constructed object whose calming and relieving beauty is neglected. The reason why Dev realises that fact with surprise is most possibly his Indian roots which mean that Indians, as opposed to the British, have not seen nature through lens of rationalist philosophy and exploitation as a colonized society. He proves that their spiritual values continue to exist though Indians, their resources and nature were oppressed for centuries. His awareness of and appreciation for the beautiful scenery in the countryside and his astonishment aroused by lack of spontaneity in the British community during the picnic indicate the contrasting approaches of the British and Indians towards nature.

According to Adit, the modern British society appears as isolated, introvert, devoid of any warmth and intimacy, dull, indifferent and far from reflecting any sign of emotional intensity and friendliness. Adit feels uneasy with the British whose faces are "pale" and "expressionless" and does not want to encounter them any more (1971, p. 221). He sees the reflection of uniform patterns of habits and acts on their faces and how maintaining lifestyles in an unvarying manner deprives their faces of emotions and colours. Opponents of the modern values think that "the West has rationalized and disenchanted the world, that it has truly peopled the social with cold and rational monsters which saturate all of space, that it has definitively transformed the premodern cosmos into a mechanical interaction of pure matters" (Latour, 1993, p. 123). Impassive British faces testify to the innate inclination of human body to accommodate to a mechanical mode of living and to suppress its emotional side. That's why, due to suppression of emotions and crisis that suppression begets, their faces are suggestive of distress and sadness rather than any feeling of joy and affection. They look like machines and matter that have no facial expression, taking on a non-

human quality. When Adit and his wife visit his landlady in whose house he once stayed, he asks her some questions about her daughter and the house, but he understands: "In spite of this Mrs Miller did not seem to like any personal questions about her house or family" (1971, p. 93). She avoids giving away personal details as she considers them private matters that need to be hidden from others. She manifests her tendency to evade such questions by giving short answers and changing the subject. Another instance concerns the prevalent mood of the city that leads Dev to feel strange and out of place:

> ...the silence and emptiness of it - the houses and blocks of flats, streets and squares and crescents - all, to his eyes and ears, dead, unalive, revealing so little of the lives that go on, surely must go on, inside them. The English habit of keeping all doors and windows tightly shut (fresh air fiends - wasn't that what he had been told they were?), of guarding their privacy as they guarded their tongues from speaking and their throats from catching cold, cannot quite be explained to him by the facts of the cold and the rain (1971, p. 72).

He observes that isolation, lack of warm and close social relations, firmly set social barriers that detach individuals from each other, a constant escape from dialogues are typical characteristics of the modern society in Britain. It seems as though there is an impending disaster or a pandemic from which they struggle to hide and protect themselves by closing their doors and windows. For Dave, this is not associated with the climate in England, in which it is often cloudy and cold with a grey sky. Such detached lives showing no strong emotional involvement are most probably credited with conditions of modernity.

Desai raises the issue of the relationship between technology and human beings which has been the central point of attention since the onset of modernity. Especially, the mention of television and the implication of its role in the modern society in Britain are noticeable in the narrative. Dev witnesses that "Spidery aerials perched on rooftops like ritual totem poles are evidence of television sets by the dozen, but never a sound does he hear from them. He does not hear his neighbours - their radios, their quarrels, their children ..." (1971, p. 64). The novel draws upon a complex subject matter which has been discussed since the invention of machine and its function for human beings. Leiss argues that the "master-servant relation" between humans and machines has set in an opposite direction where machines are so uncontrollable that humans imitate and adapt themselves to operation of machines (1990, 41). The same view can hold true for television whose effects on social life has been profoundly felt in the modern society. It is possible to discuss:

> Television viewers identify with the characters from the soap operas that 'come into their homes' every day and seem to form a surrogate for contacts with family and friends: the viewers are made part of the emotional highs and lows in the lives of these characters (Hortulanus and Machielse, 2006, p. 4).

Movies and programmes exert a guiding influence over individuals to such a degree that they prefer to adjust their social life according to the starting time of TV programmes instead of spending time with family members and neighbours. The leading roles of elders in the family are replaced by movie characters who become idols. Accordingly, Sepulveda claims: "Television has been in the last forty years the sinister vehicle of standardization. It has not only imposed a way of speaking, but also of seeing and of dreaming" (2005, p. 101). Seeing the transformative force of television in terms of advertising and imposing a monolithic way of living on individuals, this may explain the reason why the narrative mentions television. According to the novel, television seems to play a significant role in forming homogenised patterns of behaviour and isolation in British society. Since there is no meeting and visiting between neighbours, lack of sociability brings to mind the possibility that television might arouse more interest and excitement as a spare time activity outside work for the British.

It is possible to see lack of affection, fondness and warm social relations between British family members in the novel. When Adit and Sarah visit Sarah's parents in the countryside, Adit always finds it strange to see "a parental relationship so cool that the parent did not rush out and embrace the daughter

whom he had not seen since last Christmas, but kept himself out of her way as though he were avoiding her" (1971, p. 163). He sometimes expresses "his astonishment and disapproval of their colourless, toneless, flavourless relationship only to have Sarah say impatiently, 'Oh we can't stand cuddling and petting and all that!'" (1971, p. 163). He cannot see any slight trace of longing for each other in the British family but only cold social relations where they keep themselves at a distance. The writer brings to light the reflection of dehumanising consequences of the modern values in family along with neighbour relations in England. Rare visits to parents and a sense of isolation and coldness appear as the prominent features of the modern family in the narrative. When Sarah asks her mother why she does not travel abroad and have a holiday, her mother replies: "Oh, I should love to, dear, but - well, perhaps if I can find someone to look after your father for a fortnight, I might manage it next year" (1971, p. 170). Sarah does not suggest her mother to look after her father when she is abroad, which proves her indifference and reluctance to care for her parents even for several weeks. Sarah's indifference towards her parents when they are in need of her and lack of any firm familial bonds are a case in point from the viewpoint of displaying isolation and loneliness between family members in the modern society.

Unlike the British, the social life of Indian immigrants in family and neighbourhood is characterised by warmth, intimacy, strong bonds and emotions that they evince openly. Not accustomed to the lack of human voices and isolation in the neighbouring flats, Dev says: "Now if this were India, ... I would by now know all my neighbours - even if I had never spoken to them." (1971, p. 64). He states that he would be familiar with "their taste in music," "the age of their child by the sound of its howling," whether "the older children were studying for exams by the sound of lessons being recited," "what food they ate by the smells of their cooking" and other personal details. (1971, p. 64). It becomes evident that Indians never hide any personal details from others; rather, voices which disclose their identities and daily activities are heard clearly through open windows and doors from houses around, and no privacy and isolation stand out. There is no sense of unfamiliarity, insecurity and mystery between neighbours. For example, an old Indian woman, one of the neighbours of Adit and Sarah, hears that Dev looks for a job in England and says to him: "And you did not come to us for help? What is this - are we not neighbours? Am I not like your own mother? It is bad you have not thought of coming to me and calling me mother" (1971, p. 136). Instead of coldness, indifference and social distance, her attitude and interest for other Indians whom she has not met yet give a strong indication of a close, affectionate and sincere approach towards others. The novel also brings to the reader's notice Indians' attempt to preserve the structure of traditional families where wives live together with their mother-in-laws. At the end of the novel, Adit and Sarah decide to return to India, and Adit says to Emma, one of Sarah's friends: "She's going to live in a family of in-laws, a very big one, and learnt their language and habits" (1971, p. 245). The writer insinuates that parents are not left alone and helpless in Indian families where they are esteemed and cared for with affection and respect. Emotional depth and fondness appear as typical features of Indian families, which stands in contradiction to an understanding of the modern family in England.

Conclusion

As an implicit reference to the dehumanising power of modernity and modern lifestyle mutating individuals into non-human and mechanised beings, Desai portrays how diasporic Indians think that their modes of habits and behaviours entirely differ from those of the British. For Indians, the rigid monotony in the London traffic and a standardised mode of acts and daily activities governed by the modern sense of time and clocks are instances which reveal uniformity and lack of any heterogeneity and individuality. The mechanical pace of life that television contributes to set ground for privacy, coldness and isolation in family and neighbour relations where lack of warmth, affection and intimacy is a typical feature of the modern British society. In recreational activities and gardening, the organic structure of nature is disrupted through socialisation and domination. Ferguson describes the condition of modernity as a process where "humankind" ventured to take on "the dignity of a self-moving and self-centred creature" but lapsed into a non-human position because of severing the inherent ties with "God and nature" (2006, 211). On the other hand, Indian immigrants realise that they display the obvious existence of spontaneity and lack of any

mechanical way of life. Their social bonds in family and neighbour relations reveal a close, intimate and warm pattern of behaviours. There is no ambition of dominating and taming nature. They try to adhere strictly to their spiritual values under the effect of diasporic consciousness even though they live in an alien land. Even if cultural borders are sometimes surpassed in the narrative for diasporic Indians, their main tendency reveals a recognition of the ways their social norms and modes of behaviour deviate from the mainstream modern ways of living in London.

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