

**Interrogating Space for Black Britishers- A Reading of Andrea Levy's  
*Every Light in the House Burnin' and Fruit of the Lemon***

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Levy displays a literary commitment to negotiate rights for Black in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s. However, the Windrush writers in the earlier decades articulated the Caribbean consciousness in their writings. Levy never failed to demonstrate her profound interest in exploring Britain in her own way. Hence her motivation to assert Britishness through her fiction writing is analyzed. Levy in her select novels showcases the inequalities faced by the Blacks in the English nation and also fails not to negotiate the right place for them in the transnational framework. Here an attempt is made to highlight the changeover in the articulation of Caribbean consciousness in the works of Levy.

**Keywords:** The Windrush generation, Acculturation, Andrea Levy, Black British writer, Caribbean Consciousness

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Exploring the legacies of colonization and histories of transatlantic slavery Andrea Levy won International acclaim for her novels. Andrea Levy, being the descendant of the Caribbean failed not to go back 300 years in her writing novel which she proudly uttered in the interview by Charles Henry Rowell, "I wanted to really show how it worked, and give back a power to the African population in the Caribbean. Instead of just showing them as victims or as people who had to endure horror" (Levy 268). Levy believed that getting back to their roots would bring back horror along with the unsung strength of her ancestors who emancipated and still being successful generation after generation. Echoing transatlantic slavery which means Modern slavery differs from transatlantic slavery in that it is more profitable and disposable. Slave traders focused on Africa during the transatlantic slave trade, and the high cost of transporting these people meant that once enslaved, they were frequently maintained and reproduced. Though Levy explored much on history, she bestowed her gratitude towards her ancestors as she says in the same interview "... because my ancestors, in very difficult circumstances built rich and complex societies from scratch." (Levy 268) Tracing back history, a progressive measure was taken when Britain suffered from a labour shortage. The people from the Caribbean and other British colonies were provided legal rights and allowed to settle in England according to the British Nationality Act of 1948. Therefore "...both categories of people having the right to enter, settle and work in Britain." (Solomons 56) Wives and children of already settled men started arriving as Stein states " Between the passing of the Nationality Act in 1948 ... the Immigration act of 1971... more than one generation came" (5).

Besides, her novels being celebrated for the connection, they had with the Caribbean, her early works demonstrate the intensified interest of the author in exploring Britain, the space in which she wrote the works and also the place where her novels were set. The two novels select from Levy - *Every Light in the House Burnin'* and *Fruit of the Lemon* explore Levy's literary commitment to negotiate a place for the Black in the 1960s and 70s when the nation was actively hostile to them. She utilized the "interior monologue" (Childs and Fowler 121) that is recording the flow of ideas in the character's mind. Deploying such style, Levy's novel suggests the refusal of the dominant epistemological perspective that silences the voices of the Black but not the place. More

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than singing melancholic ideas and invoking the degrading mindset among the immigrants of various generations in the alienated land, Levy wanted to dilute the binaries and equalize the rights. Not only Levy, but most of her generation, the British-born Black writers asserted a new Black British voice as Ghanaian poet Kwame Dawes states that the task of such writers "is to challenge the notions that they are not at home when they are in England." (Dawes 261) Many upcoming authors are also coming out with similar ideas on changing the diasporic consciousness as stated by Shweta Sharma "In the discussions of post-modernism and post-feminism, the viewpoint of rejecting the binaries has finally made a mark." (67)

Levy personally experienced the horror in the mind of Caribbean immigrants about their ill-treatment as she pens in *This is My England*: "There was a point when my mum had doubts about this emigration, on hearing stories of the treatment the first travelers had received." Irrespective of history's portrayal of the power system, Levy was confident enough to uplift the diluted new version of the black people in modern Britain where they are there to seek the power and freedom as other humankind of the Universe. In an article in Waterstone's Magazine she stated, "If Englishness doesn't define me then redefine Englishness". (Levy 64) Postcolonialism is followed by the ideas of creating new identities which turned out to be a more universal phenomenon. Such a scenario of the era was pointed out by Chambers as "The migrant's sense of being rootless, of living between worlds, between a lost past and a non-integrated present, is perhaps the most fitting metaphor of this (post) modern condition." (27) Levy's voice on the survival of the Blacks in the non-white land depicts her own experiences as the second generation immigrant. Levy also had contemporaries who brought out similar ideologies such as Austin Clarke. Even though writers and texts could not be taxonomies as per the Age, these two writers displayed similarities in their way of approach by delving into the new path, away from the Windrush generation who were the first-generation Caribbean writers of 1950s and 60s. The similar approach of these two writers can be observed in the statement by Clarke himself in an epigraph in Rinaldo Walcott's work. However Levy thought that she could attain the state of real self by revisiting the roots which she herself stated in the interview by Rowell: "That's the amnesia that I'm talking about, that's the selective memory that we have. So people like me...the bastard

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child of the Empire because that's how I feel, I want you to look at it. What happened? What happened? What happened? It's tough work, but someone's got to do it. A lot of people are doing it." (280)X

Meanwhile, when it comes to diasporic identity, the changeover is happening according to the development in the technologies and ideologies in the world. Caribbean immigration, in particular, is explored by certain critics and analyzed to come out with the concluding point as referred by Robin Cohen that "...more solid and accurate understanding of the nature of the Caribbean cultural diaspora will be possible only by gathering full historical information and sociological data." (152) Thus by approaching the different notion, Levy stood in peculiar path to articulate the Caribbean consciousness. Her style acclaimed popularity just by deviating from the writing ways of the Windrush generation i.e., the first wave of Caribbean writers published literary works in 1950s and 60s such as Samuel Selvon. Among the Windrush generation writers, Selvon in particular, felt proud in calling himself the Caribbean writer as Ken McCoogan states "always identified himself as a Caribbean expatriate... all his life, Selvon championed the development of a multi-cultural, pan Caribbean consciousness." (73) Hence, the first wave of the Caribbean writers uttered the Caribbean consciousness either through nostalgia or refusal. But Levy focused on the experiences of the low and working-class immigrants by building them as a sense of exile in her British-born characters in early novels as "... divorced from the wider space outside. In the space of ... questions of self-development, but they lack context in the outside world" (Pready 17). By contrast, the writers who preceded her concentrated more on the geographical set-up rather than the inner self.

*Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994) depicts the life of a Jamaican family living in London. Despite being in a strange land, Angela's family makes an effort to blend in, according to the narrator. In 1948, Winston and Beryl moved to Tilbury as a pair. Even though the couple faced a number of challenges as immigrants in their new country, they have made commendable attempts to dispel any unfavourable perceptions about them, particularly in relation to parenting. The concept of parenting, which entails fostering a child's physical, social, and emotional development, is ingrained in Angela's parents due to their astute portrayal. However, the parents firmly thought that the tactic

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of refusing to take a stand in the society in which they live and the pride in their ancestry would sustain a quiet and pleasant life. Being unquestionable of the second generation, Angela assumes the position of cultural mediator. Angela's upbringing by Winston and Beryl, where she was born and raised, gave her the independence to stand up for the rights that all people have basic human rights, regardless of geography or ethnicity. Susan Alice Fischer states that "What remains, in the end, is ...her ongoing struggle to find a place for herself. As her father dies, her generation will be the next to define a place for itself in Britain (206). Thus it is a beautifully crafted piece of work that shows the standard of living won't change merely because we enjoy the society we live in; instead, our inner conscience will take action.

The general definition of culture is the ideas, traditions, and values of a given civilization. It is common knowledge that all cultures develop socially, not physiologically. Therefore, culture is a concept that people learn through observation as opposed to inheritance. When an individual makes an effort to socialize within the framework of a specific cultural set-up, a relationship between them and that culture is created. Any individual can have cultural ideals ingrained in them by society. Since the glorified past, i.e., nostalgia is outside of time, fixed in unchanging perfection, strictly speaking, nostalgia has nothing to do with using memory. It may also romanticize the past, but not in order to demonize the present. Faith Jackson, a Jamaican immigrant's daughter, lives in London. The initial definition of faith describes a person as having unwavering ambition regardless of race or culture. She completed her degree in fashion and textiles successfully. Faith's parents have always assisted her in regaining composure. They worked nonstop to find a solution that would let their daughter recover her true self. They reasoned that she might rediscover her spirit if they helped her comprehend the pride of her ancestors. "...dreams and memories of lost-homeland play a positive role in securing identity and survival..." (Weedon 27).

As far as the "'coloured' immigration" (Spencer 153) is concerned they would almost result in racial tension. Characters like Angela and her parents and Faith Jackson shared their experiences of otherness. Thus Levy also fails not to illustrate the sharp commentaries on inequalities experienced by the Blacks. As Mbembe says " ... the desire for difference emerges precisely where people experience intense exclusion." (183) Such a

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sophisticated way of narration by Levy urges the readers to think differently about what true knowledge is and how and where it could be attained. Through such systematic anti-black racism Levy addresses the need to demand better treatment of all citizens. Also, by bringing in the new perspective in the time period as Parama Sarkar Says, "...strategy to keep the native cultures firmly in their place." Levy makes the readers realize the stain in British History which demanded the inhabitants of various countries once failed to provide a negotiated place for them in their strange land.

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**Interrogating Space for Black Britishers- A Reading of Andrea Levy's  
Every Light in the House Burnin' and Fruit of the Lemon - April - June 2022**

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