

Redefining Relationship: Sensitive Sita in Anita Desai's where we shall go This Summer?

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to highlight Redefining relationship of the protagonist, Sita with her husband Raman in Anita Desai's Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975). Anita Desai's chief concern is human relationship and she explores the disturbed psyche of the modern Indian women. The protagonist, Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer is a nervous, sensitive, middle-aged woman who finds herself isolated from her husband and children because of her emotional reactions to many things that happen to her. She takes a holy pilgrimage to Manori, an island for spiritual purification. She also redefines her relationship with her childhood soil, Manori where she understands her husband, children and city life. There is also a change in Sita's identity and she is redefining her relationship with her husband. She accepts to go with her husband. Her return to the mainland with her husband is the result of her realization and her sense of alienation is rootless.*

Key words: *alienation, desire, identity, journey, psyche*

I. Introduction

Anita Desai gives a new dimension to the Indian novel in English by shifting the emphasis from outer to inner reality. The most predominant theme in the Anita Desai's novels is the complexity of human relationships, particularly man-woman relationship. Her women are not ordinary women, but sensitive beings. They possess refined sensibilities with the complexion of aesthetics. Her male characters are rational, pragmatic and logical. This temperamental incompatibility triggers a sense of frustration and alienation among her women characters. They live as emotionally unfulfilled souls. A common trait in all major women characters is their longing to be free of all kinds of social and familial involvement. Their expectation from their family and society leads to final disaster. Meena Belliappa observes: "What is new in Anita Desai is the effort to delineate a sensibility to locale, as it operates within the consciousness of her characters" (Belliappa 27). Anita Desai writes about miserable plight of women suffering under their insensitive and inconsiderate husbands. So man-woman relationship brings characters into alienation, withdrawal, loneliness and lack of communication that frequently occurs in her novels.

Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* describes the tension between a sensitive wife Sita and the rational husband Raman. It emphasizes the triumph of life over chaos and of art over life. The protagonist Sita's main problem is maladjustment with her husband, Raman who ignores her desires and misunderstanding between them. She is fed up her husband, his business, surroundings and also his friends. Raman's lack of love and feeling brings her to the verge of insanity. P.F. Patil in his article titled "The Theme of Marital Disharmony in the Novels of Anita Desai" comments that the novel provides "a passionate commentary upon the maladjustment that spiritually renders Raman and Sita totally homeless. Disaster inclines from the very beginning" (Dhawan 136). A great change takes place to the proud mother of four children. As a result of her escapism, the husband-wife relationship is dragged into difficulties. It comes in the form of identity crisis; both Raman and Sita stand for binary oppositions.

The novel is about two journeys, one is undertaken to escape from immediate surroundings and another is to move towards something of the future, created out of the illusions which hold of the past. In her journey, she reveals the agonies the journey as transparently as the jellyfish does its self. At last, she discovers herself. Sita's search for self ends in wholeness of life. For Atma Ram the novel "seeks to unravel the inner mystery of life, to discover the energy that nourishes the spirit, and discards pettiness, horror and hypocrisy of everyday life" (Halpirin 133). The title *Where Shall We Go This Summer* is highly sensitive. The interrogative feature of the title is symbolic of the uncertain state of the heroine's mind, of her awareness and of her indeterminate fate. Obviously, Sita re-establishes her contacts with the soil and gets over her loneliness by learning to laugh. It is the story of the boredom and loneliness experiences of a sensitive, over-emotional middle aged married protagonist, Sita who is alienated from her husband and children and refuses to give birth to her fifth child in a world of destruction. She escapes to the island where she realizes the life in spite of its nastiness, brutishness, madness, tedium and boredom should be lived. The island forms the core of Sita's conscious existence. In short, the novel is an exploration of the vital source of life and consciousness.

The protagonist, Sita is sick of everything, everybody, her husband, her children, their film way of fight, Menaka's cutting of flower buds, insensibly and tearing of Sunday water colours, Karan's senseless joy, at the dismantling of the tower of clocks by throwing his body over it and the servants talk in the kitchen, all disturb her mind. She expresses her resentment through smoking, abusing her children for trifles, losing her temper at the servants' talk. None of these leaves any impact on her husband. Another incident which accentuates her sense of alienation is the street fight of the ayahs. Sita's own servant maid, Rosie fights with two other ladies in the street. She is irritating to hear those words and she rushes to the street where she drags her ayah out of the knot. At the same time, she places Karan at a safe distance. Sensitive Sita feels distress to narrate the whole incident to her husband. But Raman takes it as another instance of her drama and ask her to stop the story. Besides, there are many incidents which intensify her sense of alienation and search for identity. Prasanna Sree emphatically comments that Desai "penetrates psychologically deep into the inner working of women and externalizes their passive reaction" (Sree 22). Sita can no longer endure the violence around her. So, she decides to search a place for her peaceful life.

Sita tries to escape from her duties and also dismay of her husband Raman. It seems an absurdity of the plan that a pregnant woman is leaving for an unreal place. She expects her new vision of life in the remote island and her dream of island is unbound:

"She had escaped from duties and responsibilities, from order And routine, from life and the city, to the unlivable island. She had refused to give birth to a child in a world not fit to Receive the child. She had the imagination of offer it an Alternative- a life unlived, a life bewitched." (WSS 128)

Sita's state is representative of the alienation of a woman, a wife, and a mother. She is oppressed and depressed with loveless wedlock with Raman. So, she takes a holy pilgrimage to Manori, an island and it is a journey for spiritual purification. S.P. Swain and P.M. Nayak comment that "Sita is an uprooted woman who wants to regain her primitive self. Ironically her pilgrimage with its promise of renewal and regeneration is the result of her social alienation" (S.P. Swain 23). She gets physical and mental courage in the island. She is an introverted character, whose suffering springs from her constitutional inability to accept the authority of the society. Like Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, Sita is also unable to put up with her in-laws.

Desai deals with the entry of Sita into the island after living a "life was a crust of dull tedium, of hopeless disappointment" (WSS 52). In fact, Sita's journey to the island is a quest for integration of the self. Actually, island is a heaven to Sita which wonderfully holds the master key to her final liberation from the existential anxiety, hopelessness and suffering. She believes that her problems being magically solved by the island and she relieves from her mental anxiety and will be calm and comfortable in the island. The psychological cosmos of Sita's life mingles with her father's fantasy. Before her marriage, she led a glorious life style in an island. She remains the lovely company of her sister Rekha, Jeeven and her mystic father who had always been surrounded by his disciples.

Sita comes to the island with foolish hope. She already has four children. At the age of forty, she conceives the fifth one. But, she would not like to deliver her child in the destructive land. So, she comes to Manori in order not to give birth to the fifth one, "she had come on a pilgrimage, to beg for the miracle of keeping her baby unborn" (WSS 31). Sita has been presented as a shattered and frustrated woman who feels trapped in the monotony of her house. Her neurotic fears and anxieties make her terrible. She feels dullness and boredom and deadness in the people whom she meets and they pose the greatest threat to her existence. As a result, Sita cannot even treat her husband's friends, guests, colleagues, business associates and visitors with tolerance and understanding. They appear to her, "nothing but appetite..... animals." (WSS 32). Perhaps, Raman stands for the conformity, sanity and prose of life whereas Sita is all sensitivity, feverish imagination and vague romanticism.

Towards the end of the novel, Sita accepts affirmation of life and reconciliation. Her expectation fulfills in the island after twenty years of her visit. She feels that the gap of communication between her and her husband can be bridged. Thus, Sita's journey is from imbalance to balance. Her husband arrives at the island to fetch their daughter back to Mumbai for her further studies. At first, Sita doesn't show any interest on him. When they visit seashore, they have seen a lovely couple. It happens in the Hanging Gardens where they visit seashore, she sees a dying Muslim woman in burtha, lying on the lap of an old man with spectacles and grey beard. The man touches her face so tenderly, so lovingly unmindful of the people around him. Sita feels liberated at the sight of a pale, weak Muslim lady being loved intensely by her anxious husband. The lady is about collapse, but the husband embraces his hands around her in order to provide her strong protection. Sita regards these moments of love and sympathy as truly divine attributes and life spend during these fractions of time as an immortal bliss. For some time, she forgets all her anxieties and cares about Menaka and Karan. She treats life as not a lengthy span of right and wrong actions, but as small but beautiful, resplendent but satisfying experience. Raman, her husband appears to her not as something to be hated and despised but as a life-partner of very low and dull responsibilities. Here, Sita realizes that her own married life and all other relationship based

on compromise, duties and selfishness only and this is the cause of ugliness, discord, incoherence, clashes and increasing violence in life. Sita enjoys that scene and she bursts out laughter. It is only happiest moment in her life. Obviously, Raman feels that her happiest memory is not of their children or of their house but of strangers, however, some lovers in the park. At the moment, she understands her husband's love and naturally, she follows the path which is trodden by her husband and she places her feet on the foot prints of Raman.

In the magic island Manori, she realizes her husband and decides to go with him. Her return to the mainland is the result of her realization that her sense of alienation being rootless. After her reconciliation with Rama, she realizes that, "her time on the island had been very much of an episode on the stage" (WSS 152). Sita returns to the mainland with a sense of renewed awareness that reality through oppressive to bear, is better to live with then illusory dream world that Manori represents. Even though she feels alienation, she identifies herself in the magic land. Her indefinable alienated life re-defined in the island. Thus, N.R. Gopal notes: "The novel ends establishing victory of reason over fantasy" (Gopal 40). Sita is a name which in Hindu mythology is synonymous with troubles, tortures and separation from her husband. In this novel, Sita is presented as the very embodiment of misery, agony and alienation.

Unlike Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, Sita finds the answer to her question as to where shall she go this summer is that she should go back to the society and to submit to the demands of the prose of life. Anita Desai holds mirror of Indian society before us in the form of her novels. It is our Indian tradition that wife should live with her husband at any place, as Raman's place is the Sita's Ayothi. However, Sita's change in attitude marks a positive acceptance of life and of the man-woman relationship in the traditional way. Sita finds herself in the heart of her husband in the magical land. Desai stance in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* is a clear indication that "she does not advocate gyno-centric struggle, leading to woman's liberation in western feminist terms" (Piciuccio 143). The familial bond of which woman is the crux has to survive. The bonds of Indian tradition have to be preserved.

Sita's life is re-defined in the island. She realizes that her own married life and all other relationship around her are based on compromise their duties and selfishness only and this is the cause of ugliness disharmony and increasing violence in life. She accepts reality of life instead of illusions. Unlike Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, Sita comes out of her illusionary world. Maya always thinks about the childhood prophecy of disaster. But Sita realizes her mistake in the magic island. Her voyage ends with the discovery that she has some responsibilities in her life. She also discovers her hidden aspects of her real life. So, the illusionary world gives way to her real world and her duties. Desai views through the eyes of her female protagonists that everyone has some duties or responsibilities in their life. They must accept in any way.

In fact, her visit to Manori helps Sita only to fuse into one the span of present, past and future and life-span of childhood, youth and adult age. She redefines her relationship with her childhood soil, Manori. There is also a change in Sita's identity and she is redefining her relationship with her husband. She realizes her husband and decides to go with him. Sita, therefore, return to the mainland with a sense of renewed awareness with reality rather than live in the illusory dream world like Manori.

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