



Incertitude and Alienation in Where Shall We Go This Summer- Anita Desai

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Abstract

Anita Desai is a prominent Indo-English novelist. She has added a new concept to the India English fiction. Her main concern is to peel off layer after layer the human mind. She is interested in the psychic life of her characters. Where Shall We Go This Summer is an intense story of a sensitive young wife torn between the desire to abandon the boredom and hypocrisy of her middle class and ostensibly comfortable existence, and the realisation that the bonds that tie her to it cannot easily be broken. Her novel, Where Shall We Go This Summer? brings forth the agonized self and feminine sensitivity of the protagonist, Sita. This paper attempts to analyse the novel to find out the instances of feminine sensitivity in the life of Sita. Socio-cultural atmosphere of the metropolitan life will be noted in particular. Sita's family atmosphere will be studied. The purpose of this paper is to note the marital disharmony in the life of Sita and her husband Raman. The main focus of this paper is to show how feminine sensitivity, marital disharmony, family relations and socio-cultural atmosphere are responsible for creating the feeling of loneliness in Sita and compelling her to alienate herself from family and society. Finally, to mark how Sita becomes the victim of psychological conflict and leaves the metropolitan city for an island.

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Where Shall We Go This Summer is a story that highlights the gulf between the life of modern-day technopoles and conservative village life. The differences between the two often create a very different culture and breeding grounds for people and affect how they behave and what things they value. The main character of the story is named Sita who is expecting a baby soon. She is pregnant but does not want to deliver her new born in the toxic surrounding of her city. She is frustrated how her other children have been spoiled by the luxuries and distractions of modern lifestyle and remiss her own childhood and simple upbringing. In Where Shall We Go This Summer? Anita Desai writes on the boredom and loneliness experienced by a married woman when she feels ignored and unwanted. It is a crucial period when one feels the dilemma of existence. The children grow up and become independent, while husbands are increasingly

busy with their routine work. In this novel the searchlight is inward focusing on the mental make-up feelings of Raman and Sita which bring out the mental trauma to the two caused by their different attitudes.

The prominent feature of her works is her art of the portrayal of characters. She examines the psychological inner workings of women and presents their reactions. Her two novels *Cry, the Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* present the traumatic experiences and mental tensions that Maya and Sita undergo. Desai explores the emotional world of neurotic Maya, who is haunted by a premonition of her husband's death on account of her belief in astrological prediction; while in *Sita*, Desai highlights the theme of repressed childhood neurosis. The repressed impulse and memories lie buried in the unconscious of the protagonist Sita but return later in a form of a full-blown neurotic picture during her fifth pregnancy. The theme of both novels is disharmony and discord confined to the family and at times to the mal-adjusted or ill-adjusted self. Loneliness and unrequited love drive Maya to the jaws of death and violence, while Sita suffers from "Oedipus complex". Both Maya and Sita are representatives of Postmodern Indian Feminism. They both represent the Indian personality structure which is very complex and multi-layered.

Anita Desai has explicitly presented a sense of alienation in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Sita's mental condition epitomizes the loneliness of a woman, a wife, a mother – a void, conditioned by family and society. Sita's disturbances are the direct result of a clash between the hypocritical world her and her inherent honesty that resist any adjustment from her side. Desai in her emotionally charged *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* provides a passionate commentary on the maladjustment that virtually renders Raman and Sita totally homeless. Sita's marriage to Raman is not cemented through proper understanding and love between them. Her marriage was saved "finally – out of pity, out of lust, out of a sudden will for adventure and because it was inevitable – he married her" (p. 99). Sita is highly sensitive, emotionally and touching. Carelessness on Menaka's part in breaking all the buds unconsciously disturbs her mental peace. They are in the habit of throwing their bodies at each other playfully. To Sita, it is virtually an act of violence and destruction. Sensitive to the core such unthinking destructive acts are unbearable to her. As a consequence, she finds it extremely difficult to cope with Raman and his relative.

Initially Sita lives in Raman's joint family which is willing to accept even such an outrageous outsider like Sita. But because of Sita's haughty supercilious, adjusting nature, Raman decides to live separately with his family in a flat. He tries to make Sita happy but she is hard to be pleased and is always seething with anger discontent and apathy. When Sita becomes pregnant for The Journal for English Language and Literary Studies – October – December 2013 44 Volume III Issue iv www.tjells.com ISSN 2249 - 216 the fifth time, it is an ordeal for her, and she does not want to deliver the child. Manori Island seems to her a refuge, the enchanted island of miracles and she decides to go there, against the same advice of Raman, along with her two children Menaka and Karan even though she is in her advanced stage of pregnancy.

On her island she expects a miracle that never comes about because miracles hardly ever take place in real life. They only exist in the fantasy world of children. Actually, her going to the island is symbolically her retrogression to childhood and to her father who was a God to illiterate islanders. The children get annoyed and are fed up with the primitive life on the island and Menaka asks her father to take them back to

Bombay. Raman comes and takes the family away though Sita goes only grudgingly. However, by the end of the novel revelation comes to Sita and she accepts the world of reality and becomes mentally prepared for the delivery of her child.

The novel ends establishing victory of reason over fantasy. The conflict between Sita and her uninvolved children is brought to focus in the concluding part of the novel. Menaka and Karan both fail to adjust to the primitive life on Manori. They long to return to the highly sophisticated urban life in Bombay to which they are used. The sharp conflict between Sita and Menaka is depicted in the scene in which the former discusses with the latter about the poverty of science and opulence of art. Sita says, “Science can’t be as satisfactory. It is all – all figures statistics, logic. Science is believing that two and two make four-poooh” And a little later continuing her argument, she says, “It leads you to a dead one. There are no dead ends, now in Art. That is something spontaneous, Menaka, and alive and creative...” But Menaka dismisses the argument saying, that is all nonsense” This temperamental conflict between mother and daughter also remains unresolved in the novel.

Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* describes the cruelty and callousness of urban life. It marks a return to the autonomous world of inner reality. When Sita is with child again she panics at the thought of bringing a new. She runs away to a small island to avoid the harsh reality. Her sudden capitulation comes as an anti-climax. Sita, a sensitive, emotional and middle-aged woman feels alienated from her husband and children. She undergoes acute mental agonies. She silently- suffers in isolation because of her sharp existentialist sensibility and explosive emotionality.

The novel is a pointer to her angst and ennui of her anguished soul. Her character consists in her inwardness, introversion and the resultant psychic odyssey. Sita tries to visualise the world of her dreams. But ultimately, she intensifies her desire to recapture the experience and excitement in her. Therefore, she comes to a dilemma to decide as to where she should go that summer. The novel issues forth from the interaction among the characters. Chief among the characters is the miracle man, Sita’s father. His eldest daughter Rekha, youngest daughter Sita, his son Jivan and his runaway wife are members of the generation along with Deedar, Raman’s father and the servant Moses and Miriam and the village folks benefitted by the father. The characters of immediate concern in the novel are Raman, Sita and their son Karan and daughter Menaka. There are two kinds of familial relationships father may not have been a Rai Saheb pampering the child, yet her father created a magical aura around her. He is a freedom fighter whose wife has deserted him, living somewhere in Benares and Sita brought up in an atmosphere which cannot be, strictly called a family.

Where Shall We Go This Summer? portrays in psychological terms, the feelings of ennui, boredom – and meaningless existence experienced by a middle – aged woman. Though Sita is married to a prosperous businessman and has four children, she has no sense of achievement fulfilment or satisfaction to make her life worth living. An abnormal childhood environment and frustrating human interaction turns her into a disintegrated personality. The atmosphere in which Sita grows as a child is that of neglect and hypocrisy. She had a motherless childhood and to make matters worse, her father also neglects her completely. He has special affection for Rekha, his eldest daughter.

Sita ascribes this partiality to the talents Rekha possesses and brood over this inadequacy in herself. Anita Desai has explored different aspects of feminine psyche that also includes man-woman relationship. Almost all of her novels are family play mainly concerned with the theme of marital discord between husband and wife. Sita and Raman in *Where Shall We Go Thus*, Anita Desai makes effective use of this technique to portray the loneliness of her central character. The title itself deals with nature. The fire and the mountain both are natural phenomena. In Sita's struggle and final acceptance there is thus this sense of defeat for the individual. Sita is not very happy for having made a compromise, which she takes to be her defeat. But married life, as Chesterton remarks, is a perpetual compromise, and any compromise or sacrifice for a greater good vindicates one's victory and greatness. Only by 'connecting' extremes one can arrive at an acceptable path in life.

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