

MARITAL DISCORD AND QUEST FOR SELF IDENTITY IN ANITA DESAI'S *WHERE SHALL WE GO THIS SUMMER?*

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Abstract:

*This paper focuses on marital discord and quest for self-identity in Anita Desai's novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Marital discord and quest for self-identity have justified itself only by bringing about a radical transformation in public attitude towards man-woman relationship. It must make people realize that love-making and domesticity are by no means the sole concern of women. They have as much to do with the rough and tumble of life as men. Feminine certainly, has a new definition of woman's role in the wider social frame. Desai is a representative of the present trend in Indian English Fiction. She represents the welcome "creative release of the feminine sensibility which began to emerge after the world war second (Rao 50)." This paper tends to establish that how women character Sita faces the hardships of the real world. She lives in different environments and tensions in a repressive patriarchal social set up. The paper highlights his sudden rebellion and her final decision, granting them at least mental repose. Anita Desai has described vividly the artistic bent of mind of the chief protagonists in her novels.*

Key Words: *Marital Discord, patriarchal social setup, personal agony.*

Anita Desai's female characters are generally neurotic, highly sensitive but alienated in a world of dream and fantasy, separated from their surroundings as an outcome of their failure or unwillingness to adjust with the reality. They always differ in their ideas from others and venture on a long voyage of contemplation in order to trace out the meaning of their existence. An author pointing out the psychological aspects of characters has to employ a certain design by which the interior working of the protagonist's mind is unfolded to the readers gradually with the progress of the narration.

Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975) is an extension of *Cry, the Peacock* the theme, the atmosphere, the characters, though matured, producing the similar effects to a large extent. It presents another intense commentary on the incoherence of man-woman relationship that renders Sita and Raman, the wife and husband, spiritually homeless. Anita Desai elaborates the intense feelings of her characters and portrays their inner psyche with the use of symbolism which appears to play an important part. In this novel, her characters suffer from various complexes and psyche diseases. Desai shows her depth in human nature by delineating the gradual change of a trait into a psychic block which undertakes the form of a disease, making her characters neurotic.

Sita, protagonist of this novel, is sensitive, peace-loving and introvert. The tension in the novel is between a sensitive individual and an insensitive world conveyed through the most commonly image of the predator and the prey. Mrs. Desai uses an objective correlative technique to portray the plight of Sita as a wounded eagle. An eagle is surrounded and tortured by the crows. Sita wants to fight against the crows with a gun, pieces of tones, even a toy gun to help the eagle but could not. Sita devotes her life amidst crowds, without having any sense of identity and belonging. Her father was a freedom fighter, settles later in an island, Manori, to do his social and magical experiments. From a total neglect and indifference Sita's outcome centres on her apathy, listlessness, her 'insane' wish to keep her fifth child within the womb, and her ardent desire for a meaningful existence. Just because of it she goes back to the island in order to find a

reply to her dilemma. She lives in the world of fantasy and realises that going to the island and thereby to the world of childhood she could prevent the biological process of delivery.

She is also oppressed and depressed with loveless wedlock with Raman. The chief aspect of the novel is Sita's effort to say no to her life with her husband Raman and the rightful claims it makes on her. That is why the lines which firmly possess her mind are: To certain people there comes a day when they must say the great 'yes' of the great 'No' (*Where shall we go this summer?* 139). The novel also suffers from ill-matched marriage. Sita's relationship with her husband, Raman, is not deep and emotional and thus she is waiting for the day when her husband will be able to understand her correctly and emotionally. She had four children and waited for something beautiful to happen. She has confidence that creative act would bring some happiness and peace to her. But when she did not get what she expected, it "becomes unthinkable that anything should happen---for happening were always violent" (*Where shall we go this summer?* 55).

Sita's husband Raman is a businessman living in a joint family. Raman's family members are completely accommodative and considerate and adjustable towards Sita but she is always unwilling. In Indian tradition and culture joint family is supposed to be an emblem of progress and integrity. In Raman's family even men do not smoke openly but Sita's attitude is just opposite and in spite of in-laws smokes openly. Due to this, Raman shifts to a flat separately to avoid daily tensions. But in a separate flat Sita, as we see, is not happy and satisfied. Their marriage was not based on proper perspectives and love between them. Raman is a businessman and hence he has some business minded friends. They used to visit Raman's house and they talk only of business. Raman ignores Sita. Her condition is a representative of the loneliness of a woman, a wife, a mother. She is depicted not an ordinary wife and mother into a creature who "lost all feminine, all maternal belief in childbirth, all faith in it and began to fear it as yet one more act of violence and murder in a world that had more of them in it than she could take" (*Where shall we go this summer?* 56).

Sita starts to think that there is something mysterious in the relationship between her father and Rekah, her step-elder sister, is pointed out deeply through a visual image: "Who says so? cried Sita Leaping up and sending one whole side of the wall crashing with the pressure of her agitated foot" (*Where shall we go this summer?* 78-79). Anita Desai illustrates that her revolt is a representative of literate sensitive female's revolt against the male smugness in marital life. Due to marital conflict Sita's mother had run away to Banaras due to disharmony of her husband and was considered dead by her father and kith and kin. Sita's own children even Karan and Menaka are attached to their father Raman. When Sita runs away to her childhood home in the hope of miracle these two children are with her. But they write a letter to Raman, their father, to take them back to the Mainland, Bombay. It is a clash between the compromises with disappointment, as Raman puts it and the capacity to say the great 'No' if and when needed, as believed by Sita. It is not simply a case of a liberated woman revolting against the slavish bonds of marriage.

Sita's goal was to attain the miracle of not giving birth to a child in a world not fit to obtain it, it could also indicate her desire not to continue the bond that existed between her and Raman, because that bond had come to represent life tired down to liabilities and duties with a person who did not in the least understand and know her it has been quite difficult for her to believe that though they had lived so close together, he did not even know this basic reality of her existence that she had always felt bored with life. She felt with a shock but a forced marriage was and all human relationships. While, Raman has not any hint of the depth of his wife's despair, and is, therefore, horrified at her reaction to her new pregnancy. Four times before, she has filled with the usual large, placid joy of glazed satisfaction; now, she "smoked bitterly through the nights and displayed an agony that he felt, was an unbecoming to her as it was puzzling to him" (*Where shall we go this summer?* 21).

Sita, taking two of her four children with her, escapes to Manori with a view to seeking solace and achieving the miracle of keeping the already conceived child unborn. She considers her visit to the island

as “a pilgrimage to beg for the miracle of keeping her baby unborn” (*Where shall we go this summer?* 20). But she is shocked to see the miserable condition of the island which has been golden place to her. The novel opens with the return of the heroine Sita to her dead father's house right from the time of her father was alive; receives her. Her father was worshipped like a God on the island and is still remembered for his greatness. This way Moses expect that the daughter must have at least inherited her father's dignity, but he finds that she “did not have it- had nothing in fact, not even one piece of valuable luggage, seemed quite empty, vacant, stumbling” (*Where shall we go this summer?* 14). This indicates the vacuum in her life, which is devoid of love and care for children and husband.

Sita's children, Menaka, a young sensitive girl, and Karan, an obstinate little boy used to a highly unsocial living in Bombay, reject completely the rude-life in the island. The children get annoyed and are fed up with the primitive life in the island. Without taking her mother into her confidence, Menaka writes to her father to take them back to Bombay; for “everything was so clear to him and simple, life must be continued and all its business Menaka's admission to medical college gained, new child safely brought forth, the children reared, the factory seen to a salary spent” (*Where shall we go this summer?* 101). The sense of joy and warmth bubbling within Sita received a shattering blow when she learns that Raman has come to take Menaka away, on the girl's request but not for her, as she had hoped. The shame and frustration make her once again the fusion of unbalanced nervous.

Thus we find a conflict between the logical and illogical sides of her mind : the logical sides knows it well that the child has to be born ; but her illogical dreamy side tries to convince her that she can be able to keep the child within her with the help of the magic of Island. After some time the mental and emotional tempest again blows violently within her, and this is suggested and depicted by the disturbances in the external nature; “Of course it rained again. The monsoon was not over it had merely been resting” (*Where shall we go this summer?* 128).” Moses and Miriam are caretakers of the house of her dead father. Moses brings the news of Raman's arrival the next day. The first reaction of her is that of agony, for her uncharted freedom will be curtailed, and she will not be able to have the calm atmosphere she needs to keep her child unborn inside her. But very earlier she feel's “a warm expansion of relief, of pleasure, of surprise oh Happy surprise!” (*Where shall we go this summer?* 128)

Sita understands that her own married life and all other relationships are based on compromise, duties, and selfishness only, and this is the cause of ugliness, discord, incoherence, clashes and increasing violence in life. Sita is also unable to face the reality of life with its violence, sufferings and pains. The novel presents the psychic plight of the heroine. This is not solely a case of an emancipated woman revolting against the slavish bonds of marriage. It is much more than that, it is a question of the basic truth that is better and naked and can neither be hidden, nor behalved to suit individual. Sita's reaction proves that it is very difficult for a woman, however modern she may be to get rid of the situation she is ones placed in. In spite of her dislike to the ways of the world, to traditional life of loyalty, she resumes her return journey to adjust to the role of wife and mother.

Work Cited:

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