



The Silent Protest Of Sita Against The Traditional Society In Anita Desai's Where Shall We Go This Summer?

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Abstract:

Women in this large social and cosmic infrastructure of the universe were displaced at some point of time. Her role and contribution in the functioning of this superstructure is either ignored or sided away as marginal or peripheral. The feminist movement as such is woman's urge for being rooted and regenerated. It specifies her need to have a say (voice), possess a space and live for her fulfillment.

Anita Desai is a painter of the inner world. The world is full of violence and destruction for her female characters. They feel lonely and alienated in such a dark world. They are hopeless and full of despair, acutely aware of the emptiness and absurdity around them. Almost all her characters revolt against the existing patterns of life. The novelist seeks to discover and convey through her characters the intensity of internal conflict by probing deep down the mysteries of the mind. These protagonists reveal a bleak and sinister vision of life. Through their experiences and attitude they also exhibit perceptions set out in quest of meaning.

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* the island of Manori becomes Sita's refuge and consolation. It also offers maternal refuge to her. It is Sita's disillusionment with her immediate surroundings that had forced her to make a return journey. She was bored and tensed with life on the main land and hence this trip to Manori. She cannot enjoy her truncated existence in the city of Bombay. Hence Sita's return to the island is an attempt to restore the magic and the mystery that surrounded the place. This paper focuses on the prodigious attempt Sita makes herself in the landscape of her past. Her escape to the island of Manori becomes more than an escape or a withdrawal. It is the process of reconciliation and recreation. It is an expression of her desire to be herself by going to the island. The paper traces how she succeeds in her attempt to see her inner self.

KEYWORDS: Being rooted, despair, protest, escape, alienation

INTRODUCTION

The fictional world of Anita Desai is located in the corridor of human consciousness. She is almost obsessively concerned with the dark, uncannily oppressive inner world of her intensely introvert characters on the verge of psychological breakdown.

Anita Desai's fictional oeuvre has undoubtedly carved her a distinct niche in the contemporary fiction world. What makes her remarkable is her attempt to shift the focus from socio-political realities as is evident in the novels of Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Pravar

Jhabwala and Nayantara Saghil to the exploration of the inner reality – the unexplored realm of the female psyche.

Modern women identify with the heroines because they find themselves in a similar situation,

facing the same problem of identity, loss of values and meaninglessness in life.

Anita Desai seriously examines, with the consciousness of woman, the effect of the accepted social norms in the life and position of a woman, who is considered merely a drawing-room decoration piece or domesticated animal. The search for understanding and sympathy with the woman, whose life without the support of man means losing safety, happiness, comfort and dignity, is the central point in Anita Desai's fictional world.

Anita Desai's female characters reveal that they find the real world too harsh, unpleasant, difficult and too complex. They withdraw from reality into their inner world and search there for ways and means of living through hostile world of sorrow, misery and suffering.

In the words of Amar Nath Prasad,

Anita Desai's women characters in her novels rebel against patriarchal community in order to explore their own potential or to live on their own terms, regardless of the consequences that such a rebellion may have on their lives. They take the position of 'outsiders' to fight and criticize those cultural ideologies that come in their way of becoming free individuals. Self-chosen withdrawal, for these women, takes on the form of a weapon for survival in a patriarchal community. (250-251)

Where Shall We Go This Summer? is a novel that talks about the loneliness of a woman, a wife and a mother. This loneliness according to the writer is conditioned by society and family. Sita's pain and suffering is only domestic and temporal. There are moments of pure terror and void in her life. She is depressed due to the attitude of her busy and indifferent husband and the grownup children. They feel that she reacts abnormally to ordinary incidents and think that her outbursts are melodramatic. Every little incident, for example: the lone young dead eagle being torn apart by the crows and the tearing up of the sketches by her daughter disturb her very much. Sita who is very pessimistic and whimsical is a victim to things and incidents that happen around her. Her being sensitive is the cause of most of her troubles. According to her the people in the world are pariah. When she first enters her father-in-law's house, she is infuriated by the sub human placidity and "sluggishness." Sita, unlike other women of her kind, is bold enough to fight and protest against the age old customs and traditional facts of life. Her revolt is expressed through her provocative behavior such as smoking. She goes to the extent of shifting to a smaller flat which she can call it her own. A series of incidents take place making the tide of emotion swell in Sita's mind disturbing her peaceful life. The violence of the world around is the ultimate cause for her decision of not delivering her child. She wants to escape from the brutal realities and harsh facts of human life. She forgets that life is one part full of violence, suffering and pain. Treasons, betrayals and treacheries are mixed up with pleasure, joy and happiness to colour it. She is not satisfied with her present life that she decides to leave for Manori. Raman tries to enlighten her mind about the "contraries" in life, saying "other people put up with it – it's not so – so insufferable" (WWS 143). But she lacks courage, practical knowledge and wisdom which make others believe that "life must be continued, and all its business...why can't you? Perhaps one should be grateful if life is only a matter of disappointment, not disaster" (143). She feels so wretched that she decides to run off to the island where she thinks she would attain all her lost peace.

She is a symbol of nature and cannot adjust with the mechanical world. She seems to be an "odd one" where she is alienated from her family and society. In an incident, where a wounded eagle being targeted by crows, she tries her best to protect it with the help of the absurd cork and the toy gun. The way she behaved and reacted in that situation makes her ridiculous before her children and husband. The turmoil, clash and clamour of city are once again depicted through the quarreling ayahs. The aggressive and violent women remind her of the modern soul. Another incident that distracts her attention is the fight of her two sons. The childish yet furious fight ignites the subdued sentiments of Sita. Destruction in every form frightens her. Her childish behaviour that she has

exhibited in this incident throws light on her innocent nature. She failed in her attempts to save the eagle from the crows and later when Raman came to know about this, he took it lightly. In the morning, there was nothing on the ledge but some feathers and stains of blood. Raman said, "They've made a good job of your eagle. Look at the feathers sticking out of that crow's beak" (41). Sita as a symbol of nature finds herself a stranger in that atmosphere. She feels disturbed by this chaotic and violent society. She finds fault with everyone around her and even with her own children and husband. She feels that the world around her is not moving according to her whims and fancies and cannot more offer security to her. She feels that the outside world is filled with cruelty and destructions. For her, the city is nothing but a place of madness where children enact scenes from movies, fight with each other, even the grown-up quarrel in the road side dumps. She is shocked at the behavior of ayahs, who in an uncivilized manner indulge in cheap quarrels in the streets. She is shocked when she sees the destructive element in her children's behaviour. She watches Menaka, her daughter crumble a sheet of new buds and unable to bear the sight of such destruction, shouts at her. She is upset when Menaka destroys her paintings which she has drawn with great care and were really too good.

Being disintegrated she wishes to go to Manori, the island where she had spent her childhood happily, in order to gain integration. But this escape to the island proves to be futile since her past existence in the island and her curious childhood reactions which were merely illusions.

In Where Shall We Go this Summer? In order to get rid of the boredom, void and terrific life, Sita decides to go to Manori. She, accompanied by her children arrives at Manori in a desperate and doubtful mood. The deserted house in the island seems to be similar to her condition. Sita had come to island in order to achieve the miracle of not giving birth to her fifth child. She does not want her child to be born in this cruel world with all its selfish and money minded people.

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 relieved 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" (WWS 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.

Perhaps, Raman stands for the conformity, sanity and prose of life whereas Sita is all sensitivity, feverish imagination and vague romanticism. Manori the place where Sita had spent her happy childhood seems to provide solace to her. Sita's father was more than a man of community than an affectionate father. He was busy with his public activities as a social reformer. He was like a saint to his children. Sita was always puzzled by her father's magic miracles, cures and clinic. According to her, her father possessed mysterious powers and she feels that even after his death he will help in her mission of not giving birth to her child whenever she is disturbed by the present suffering, the thoughts of the island and the happy days spent there bring comfort to her soul. And now she wants to live in that small heaven, the island totally cutoff from all responsibilities, tortures and problems. All she needs is

relief freedom and peace in life.

Sita considers her visit to the island a pilgrimage to make the miracle of her baby unborn to happen. She also feels that it is a place of refuge from the boring life of the town. But after going there she realizes that Manori had failed to satisfy her desires and all her hopes are sullied. Her initial enthusiasm, that the island will work miracles on her is slowly waning. She believed that she could get satisfaction in the island, but she could not achieve it in the island too. She is unable to achieve temperamental compatibility with her husband at home and now in Manori she is unable to achieve the same with her children. The island to which she goes in the hope that it will provide peace and harmony seems as suffocating as the city. She also confronts with the reality that the island and its people are no more innocent and her father who had been a great source of inspiration being revealed as tricky and manipulating. To her dismay she is much an outsider here as she was on the main land. Sita looks to the island for protection, but all that it has to offer her is a hostile and cold welcome. The hardships of the island deceive Sita's expectations. However she begins to enjoy the slow moving life. Her children, who lived in the city comfortably, could not adjust with the life in the island, accuse Sita and regard life on the island as madness. They want to escape from that island to their "beloved" city. So Menaka without the knowledge of Sita, writes a letter to Raman to come and take them home.

Sita feels dejected and betrayed when she comes to know that Raman has come to take her away not out of genuine interest in her. She considers herself to be a woman unloved and rejected. She does not wish to go back, realizing that it would be hard to make compromises when one did not want to. Sita is forced to accept the reality and she is confused. All she knew was that there were two periods of her life, each in direct opposition to the other (153). She believed that she could not achieve it in the island too. She is moved by her children's eagerness. At last she decides to return to Mumbai with her husband and children.

The trip to Manori is actually a trip of self discovery and recognition of reality. Finally Sita realizes that Sita and Raman are the two different poles where there is no attraction but repulsion always. Raman is an ordinary man who has a practical commonsense approach to life. But Sita is a woman who gets disturbed easily and fails to adjust with her family and society. 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" (WWS 152). Sita returns to the mainland with a sense of renewed awareness that reality through oppressive to bear, is better to live with than illusory dream world that Manori represents. Even though she feels alienated, she identifies herself in the magic land. Her indefinable alienated life gets re-defined in the island.

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