

## **The Female Predicament in Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?***

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**Abstract:** *Indian society, undoubtedly, is marching ahead at the path of development but still assigns traditional roles to the woman. Woman cannot come out of these customary roles because of conservative outlook of the male dominated society. She is imprisoned in the four walls of the house where there is no one else to share her grief. Even if she is provided with the material comforts, she, the voiceless, tries hard to let others listen to her agony which goes unheard in most of the cases. The present paper aims at focusing the problems and the psychological trauma faced by the woman in Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* And it also shows how the predicament of the loneliness is experienced by the married woman and how the marital discord, which lead the woman to astray, severs the life of Sita, the protagonist.*

**Key words:** *alienation, distress, illusion, liberation, existentialism.*

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Feminism is defined as culture, economic and political movements that are focused towards establishing legal protection and complete equality for the women sector. It is emerged as a worldwide movement to secure women's rights on the one hand and love, respect, sympathy and understanding from males on the other. It once focused on women's struggle for recognition and survival and made them realize that the time has come when they should stop suffering silently in helplessness. This miserable condition of woman all over the world inspired the women writers to raise their voices against the patriarchal society and the result was the emergence of Feminism, a great movement in the western world in 1960. It is a movement for the emancipation of women and their fight for equal rights.

With the rise of feminism across the world, a new generation of Indian feminists has emerged. Women have developed themselves according to the situations and have become advanced and independent in various fields. Contemporary Indian feminists are fighting for and against the Individual autonomy, rights, freedom, domestic violence, gender, stereotypes, sexuality, discrimination, sexism, non-objectification, and freedom from patriarchy, the right to an abortion, reproductive rights, the prostitution and education.

The feminist literary critics, in India in the seventies, came to believe that women had to create a literature of their own, in which the feminine sensibility could consider and confront the feminine issue and experience. Feminism in Literature is essentially concerned with the representation of women in society. It is always meant independent of mind, spirit and body and it has been subtly handled in the massive or colossal work of English novels in India.

In Indian Writing, Feminism has been used as a modest attempt for evaluating the real social scenario as far as woman concerned. Right from the past, woman has faced several problems and has been exploited by the man and the society, which is made by man at large. She has also been portrayed as subservient and weak and has been considered as an accessory to man. Her biological features are connected with her destiny. As she is deprived of her own identity in the male dominated society, she is always defined only in relation to man. She is altogether laden with a traditional role and confined within the four walls of the house. Simon de Beauvoir puts it in her essay *The Second Sex* as, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (295).

Anita Desai is undeniably one of the most powerful contemporary Indian novelists in India. She has presented in her novels an ideal image of modern "New woman". She is specially noted for her insightful depiction of the inner life of her female characters. Her novels explore tensions between family members and the alienation, the immobility and frustration of the middle-class women. She is also an explorer of the feminine sensibility. She also concentrates on the predicament of modern woman in the society and her ultimate destruction at the altar of marriage.

Desai's novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, an illustrious novel, deals with the story of an oppressed mind. It depicts an intense identity crisis of the protagonist, Sita, a sensitive woman at her early forties who finds herself alienated from her husband and children. Sita is hypersensitive and she is incapable of looking at things in the normal way. In the first part of the novel entitled "Monsoon 67", she is shown as married to a prosperous businessman, Raman. "She had had four children with pride and pleasure- sensual, emotional, Freudian, every kind of pleasure – with all the placid serenity that supposedly goes with pregnancy

and parturition" (29). She is now pregnant with fifth child. At this juncture, she feels unloved and experiences a strange loneliness and restlessness in her existence.

In this novel, Sita's own attitude to married life must have been warped by the knowledge and experiences in regard to their parents. The cause of her unhappiness is rooted in the miserable and lonely childhood. Her mother ran away to Benares leaving her husband and children behind and gave no information about herself. She was deprived of her mother's affection and her father also failed to look after his children. Moreover, his incestuous attraction for Sita's elder step-sister Rekha must have shocked and the disclosure that Rekha is not her real sister also gives her upset.

Sita, the protagonist of this novel like the legendary Sita, had spent many crucial years of her life on the island of her childhood, Manori. The modern Raman, unlike the legendary Raman does not understand his wife. The marital discord of the modern Rama and Sita is ironically referred with that of the idealized relationship that existed between the legendary Rama and Sita even though the similarity in names and situations is clearly seen as accidental. Marriage does not seem to offer Raman and Sita any solution rather aggravate the situation severely. They lead their life like an ill-assorted couple by lacking altogether in harmony in their lives and their marriage bond is proved to be unions of incompatibility.

Sita feels herself to a prisoner in a house which offers her nothing but a crust of dull tedium and of hopeless disappointment. Living with her rational husband, she finds her surroundings too unpleasant and cruel to cope with. Her reactions like smoking, abusing her children for trifles and getting extremely angry when the servants talk in the kitchen shows her hypersensitivity. She then decides foolishly not to give birth to the fifth child in a world of violence and hatred for the world is a place where "the crows that were attacking a wounded eagle on a neighbouring roof top" (31). She cried and says, "I don't want to have the baby" (30). She further says, "I mean I want to keep it. I don't want it to be born" (31) in this desolate and overly meaningless world. Madhusudan Prasad observes that this novel deals: "A recurrent existential theme that lies bare in the agonized modern sensibility of an Indian woman" (25).

Being distressed, Sita grows a defiant behaviour to rebel against her family and in desperation decides to leave the house when her husband, Raman asks the innocuous question *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* She insists on fleeing from the mainland to the island of her childhood, Manori, where she feels she will find the same magic as she had found in her childhood. She says, "What I am doing is trying to escape from the madness here (the house where she lives), escape to a place where it might be possible to be sane again (32) and "I will go. I am leaving tomorrow. On the Island – it'll be different" (33). Sita's return to Manori is the outcome of her desire to indulge in fantasy or illusion rather than face the reality. She thus makes an attempt to shut down emotionally and isolate herself from her daily activities as a homemaker. She takes an illusion as protective umbrella and as the only alternative force to hide her incapacity to adjust herself to the existed norms of society that she belongs. Desai here embodies the common yearning of womanhood for an individual identity and a passionate longing for the fullest life.

Sita's frustration drives her to the island, Manori, a corruption free world, void of mere appetite and sex, where she hopes to provide her unborn child. To preserve her sanity, she has to escape from the sweat and turmoil of the urban atmosphere in the Bombay and flee to Manori. After spending a few months there, she begins to realize that her effort to be away from her family, her husband and her children is nothing but a mere fantasy. Her effort to find an escape from the morbid and harsh reality of the world proves to be failure. When her husband, Raman arrives in the island and persuades her to go back with him, she agrees to do so. She thus tries to make a compromise between herself and her situations in the real life and realizes that Manori is an island which is an illusionary symbol to escape the real life and it cannot provide a solution to the ills of reality and it stands for spiritual peace and manifestation of individualism. . Through this realization, Desai expresses the philosophy of acceptance of life, the bitter truth of life.

The interrogation used as the title of the novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* leaves a big question mark. The name itself is suggestive of an escape from the summer that stands for the raging inner tension, frustration, disappointment, mental discord and disharmony of the inner consciousness of Sita. Anita Desai views the violence through the eyes of a woman in the limited area of her domestic relationship. Desai concludes this novel with Sita's recovery from her plunge into existential nullity. Sita as a "broken bird" of the seashore analyzes the cause of her anxiety and neurotic behavior and learns to cultivate the art of survival in the destined life. Her triumph over her illusions renders the island devoid of its powers and miracles.

Sita realizes that the part is irrevocable therefore it is useless to go back to it. Her diminished ego paves way for her becoming conscious of human relationship. The realization that her escape from the realities of life would not offer any solution to her spiritual impasses makes her regain, her lost faith. Sita is bold enough, first to protest against her circumstances, and then taking the blame on herself for being a coward and not facing reality. Desai's pre-occupation with the woman's inner world, frustration and storm raging inside her mind intensify her predicament. She also excels in elaborating the miserable position of highly sensitive and

emotional women tortured by negligence and loneliness. She is excellent in depicting the inner furies of women and their rising tone for emancipation and empowerment.

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