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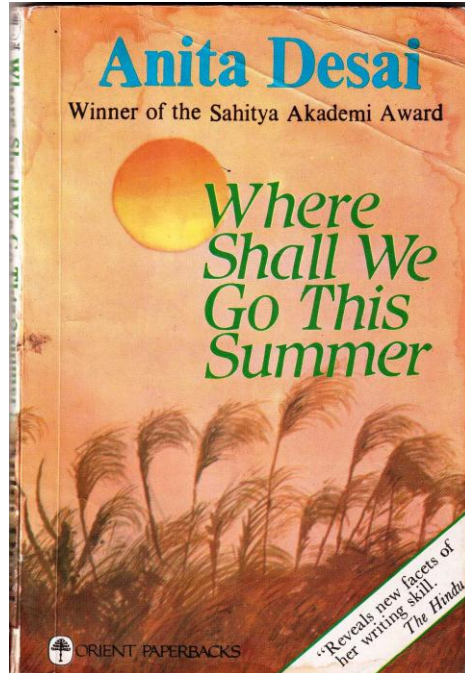
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Search for Self: Sensitive Sita in Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer*

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Inner World of Characters

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Search for Self: Sensitive Sita in Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer*?

Anita Desai is a renowned contemporary Indian woman novelist in English. For K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, she has added “a new dimension to the achievement of the Indian writers in India.” (Seshadri 50). She is a very sensitive novelist who associates more with the inner world of her characters. Generally her women protagonists are not brought up in a healthy way, being either pampered or else utterly neglected. Under such circumstances, women naturally turn to their husband and families for seeking their identity. Ann Lowry Weir who examines the feminine sensibility of Desai, states: “Anita Desai is the Vanguard of a new generation of Indian writers who are experimenting with themes of inner consciousness. She gives her readers valuable insights into the feminine consciousness through her memorable protagonists”. (Dodiya 2). Her artistic skill primarily lies in the delineation of the psychic condition of the characters.

Boredom and Loneliness in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*

Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer* depicts the boredom and loneliness of a married woman Sita. She 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 is an introverted character and her suffering springs from her constitutional inability to accept the authority of the society. Usha Bande rightly observes, “Anita Desai's characters reveal her vision of life, they share her perceptions and set out in quest of meaning and they love solitude and privacy.” (Bande 20). Hence, Sita's alienation is natural and dispositional.

Sita's Emotions

Sita is highly sensitive, emotional and touchy whereas Raman is sane, rational and passive. He ignores Sita. Desai's protagonists are “tormented souls who, in their death-in-life aspire towards life-in-death” (Sinha 30). Sita's state is representative of the alienation of a woman, a wife and a mother. She is also 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, a search for identity. S.P. Swain and P.M. Nayak emphatically 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). At last, she gets physical and mental courage in the island.

Conscious Existence

The island forms the core of Sita's conscious existence. There comes a change in Sita's identity. She has four children and now reluctant to deliver or to abort the fifth one. In fact, She goes to Manori to retain the baby in her womb. “She had come on a pilgrimage to beg for the miracle of keeping her baby unborn” (WSS 31). The reason is her fear of violence in the world. However, Sita wants to escape from the forces of fear and destruction in the world. Sita's escape is an escape from the ‘madding crowd’ from the dictates of her social conscience. To her, urban life means all that is destructive, sterile and sensate in life, “To Sita, however, the bestial civilization seems to ‘black drama’ in the crowd theatre, murder, infanticide, incest, theft and robbery...

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(WSS 25). She cannot bear violence, murder and aggression any longer. So, she decides to escape from the clutter and boredom of urban life.

A Symbol and a Sign

Sita is a symbol of nature and so she is unable to adjust the mechanical life. She feels difficult to survive in the destructive urban world. She has not been able to identify herself with the urban milieu and she feels alienation when she has seen the incidents of violence in the urban life. Her sons are fighting violently, the cook and the ayah quarrel with each other loudly, her daughter Menaka carelessly crushing a sheaf of new buds of a small plant. She is mentally affected by all those incidents. Now, she expects some miracle should be happen. N.R. Shastri says that Sita's pilgrimage to Manori is both, "an escape and a return: an escape from the destructive forces of the urban milieu and a return to the magic island." (N.R.Shastri 87). Her sense of alienation is because of her emotional imbalances.

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, 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.

Between Self-realization and Self-delusion

Sita's irony in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* lies in the fact that she constantly dangles between self-realization and self-delusion. Her family members think that she is waiting for someone or something. Her waiting symbolizes several things. First, she is waiting for some magical to be happen in her life. Secondly, she expects good relationship with her husband and so she is waiting for the day when her husband will be able to understand her correctly and emotionally. Third, she is waiting for some wonderful thing to happen in her fifth pregnancy. She believes that the creative act would bring some happiness and peace to her.

From Imbalance to Balance

Towards the end of the novel, one finds Sita accepting 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 she sees a dying Muslim woman in burkha, 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 enjoys that scene and she bursts out laughter. It is the only happiest moment in her life. Obviously,

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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. It symbolizes that her redemption lies in the following Raman through the web of reality:

Like the freed sea-bird evening, she wheeled round and
Began to circle about and then dropped lower and lower
Towards her home. She lowered her head and searched
out his foot-prints so that she could place her feet in them (WSS 150).

In the island, she decides to go with her husband. Her return to the mainland is the result of her realization that her sense of alienation being rootless. Sita, therefore, returns to the mainland with a sense of renewed awareness that reality through oppressive to bear, is better to live with than the illusory dream world that Manori represents. She searches her happiness and peaceful mind in the island. Even though she feels alienation, she identifies herself there. Her indefinable alienated life re-defined in the magical island.

Embodiment of Misery, Agony and Alienation – A Mirror

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.

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 island. Desai's 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.

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