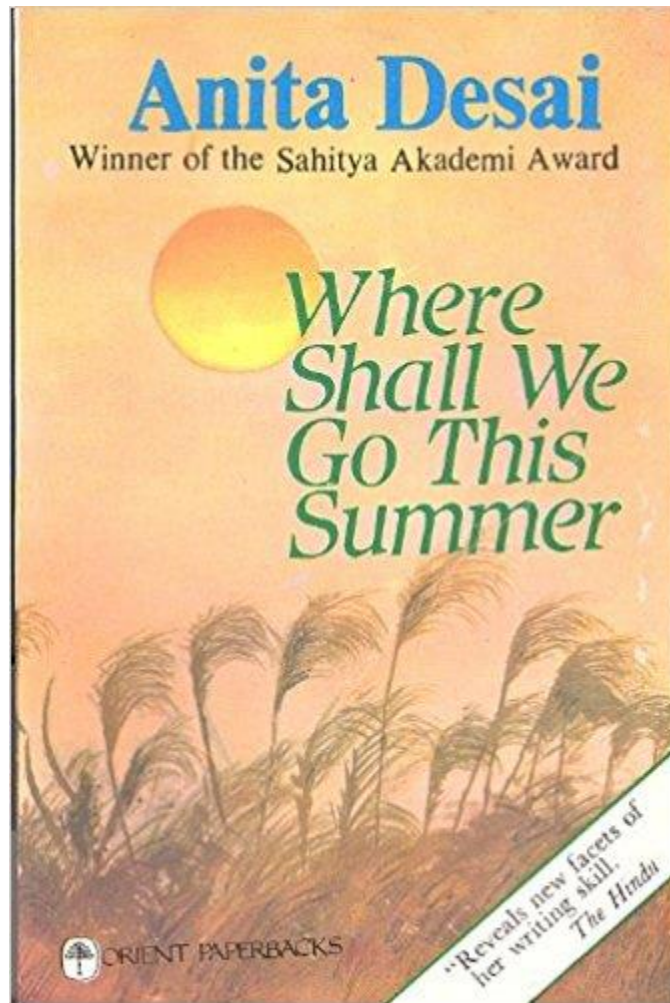


**Emancipation of Woman in Anita Desai's
*Where Shall We Go This Summer?***

P. Sakthivel, Ph.D. Research Scholar



Abstract

Anita Desai is one of the most famous Indian novelists in English. She is deeply captivated in exploring the independence of women through her novels. Her novel '*Where Shall We Go This Summer*' focuses in various ways on emancipation of Sita who the protagonist of this novel is. It brings forth the strain and intense identity crisis of a sensitive woman, Sita. It shows how intricacy of the loneliness is experienced by Sita who is unable to accept the demands

of male dominated marital life. In this novel, Sita always wants to escape from reality to fantasy. She is not able to tolerate the violence in her daily life whereas Raman is a practical man with a rational view of life. This paper analyses the novel to find out the prerogative aspects of woman in the life of Sita.

Keywords: Emancipation, Liberty, Patriarchal, Marital Discord, Feminine Sensitivity, Female Psyche, Prerogative.

Introduction

Anita Desai is a renowned novelist and short story writer who has much contributed to Indo-Anglican Literature. She has written many novels like *Cry The Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, *Bye-bye Blackbird*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, *Fire on the Mountain*, *In Custody*, *Fasting, Feasting* and *The Zigzag Way*. She is known for her susceptible portrayal of the inner feelings of her female characters. Her novels explore anxiety among family members and the estrangement of middle-class women. She has devised a stylized pattern and she has created new concept in her novels. As Tripathy puts it: “Anita Desai possesses one of the healthiest and psychologically most balanced minds in the realm of Indo-Anglican fiction” (1).

Feminism is emerged as a movement for the emancipation of women and their struggle for equal rights. Indian women’s struggle is centered on emancipation from the prejudices governing her position as wife. This involves declaring women’s rights without any dispute to the standard of values. Women’s emancipation continues to take an important place in patriarchal society. Women have faced many problems and the issues of discrimination in Indian history. They are subjugated by male dominated Indian society. As Virginia Woolf observes it: “The history of men’s opposition to women’s emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself” (72). Anita Desai’s novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer* exposes the emancipation of Sita who tries to escape into senseless lonely life.

Sita, the Protagonist

Sita has been pregnant for several months. She is bored with life in Bombay with her husband Raman. She has been hurt in several ways in her previous delivery and so she does not want to give birth to her fifth child. She would keep the baby forever in her womb. She imagines in her mind the process of hospitalization and the procreative procedure and therefore she wants to escape from the quandary. She decides to go to Manori island where she thinks she would be able to live under a magic spell. She considers her visit to the island as a pilgrimage. Anita Desai is distinguished for her portrayal of psychological insight and feminine sensitivity through her female character. As she puts it:

She had come here in order not to give birth. An explanation she had repeated to herself and her husband so often that, instead of acquiring lucidity --- ‘Ah! Oh, *now* I understand!’ --- it seemed steadily more strange, mistaken. Yet she had arrived, she was on the island, in order to achieve the miracle of not giving birth. (28)

Suffering of Middle-Class Woman

Anita Desai depicts the sufferings of Indian middle-class woman through character of Sita. She is a young sensitive woman and she could not tolerate the violence in her life. She is a fidgety, receptive woman with unstable mind. She does not want to face responsibility of a family woman and so wants to escape from realism. Her inability to adjust with society makes her feel isolated. She experiences strange aloneness and restiveness in her life. She finds her life dull and tedious. She is fed up with her life and she always spends her time standing on the balcony and looking out at the sea. But Raman is a realistic man and he is very busy in his business. He pays much attention to his business without caring his wife. He does not fulfill her wishes and ignores her feelings. She is dissatisfied with her husband and she has marital friction with him. Anita Desai here presents marital disharmony which is existing in tradition bound male dominated Indian society. As R.K. Gupta comments:

The marital discord between Raman and Sita is based on the conflict of values, of principles, of faith even, or between normal, double social standards and the iconoclastic temperament of uncompromising honesty. (109)

Sita feels herself dull dreariness and hopeless dissatisfaction in her life. She finds her surroundings too horrible and nasty to survive with. The incidents such as fighting of her children with one another, ayahs quarreling on the streets, tearing beautiful pictures to pieces by Menaka make her unhappy. These activities appear to her as mad and meaningless. It paves a way for psychological conflicts and problems into her mind. She tried to save a wounded eagle from the attack by a horde of rapacious crows. As M. Maini Meitei puts it: "Sita's words "perhaps it flew away?" against her husband's caustic remark that her eagle has been eaten by the crows, suggests the future course of her action following her defeat and loss of identity"(35). She does not want to deliver her fifth child in a world of violence and disgust where "a woman who had once stood all day on the balcony, keeping away the crows that were attacking a wounded eagle on a neighboring roof top, and who winced dreadfully every time she heard a child cry" (31).

Sita is distressed with her husband and begins to rise up against her family. She is woman of deep emotion and fine sensitivity who is ensnared in marriage with Raman. She agrees for the marriage with Raman hoping that it would be relief from the droning life in Manori. She is married to Raman not for true love and affection but for pity and lust. As Anita Desai writes it:

When Deedar's son came to cremate her father, shut the house, fetch her away, send her to college, install her in a college hostel and finally – out of pity, out of lust, out of sudden will for adventure, and because it was inevitable married her. (89)

After the marriage, Sita and Raman live in small flat. Her urban life in Bombay is entirely different from the rural life under the protection of her father. After taken away from her native place, she expects more love and affection from her husband. She wants to live alone with her husband away from his friends and visitors. Raman's friends, businessmen and visitors come to meet him. Raman respects them with happiness but he ignores the feelings of Sita. She is quite disgusted with them and she remarks them as:

=====
Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:3 March 2018

Dr. T. Deivasigamani, Editor: *Indian Writing in English: A Subaltern Perspective*

P. Sakthivel, Ph.D. Research Scholar

Emancipation of Woman in Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*

They are nothing – nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matter. Animals’. ‘I thought you liked animals.’ ‘My pet animals – or wild animals in the forest, yes. But these are neither – they are like pariahs you see in the streets, hanging about drains and dustbins, waiting to pounce and kill and eat. (43)

Sita hates Raman for his lack of feeling and she scorns the subhuman placidity, sluggishness, and the routine life in her family. She remains restive and discontented with her monotonous domestic life. She often sits alone smoking gas if waiting for someone. As Anita Desai observes it: “She sat there smoking, not even looking at the sea any more, till he exclaimed, ‘Bored? How? Why? With What?’ and could not begin to comprehend her boredom” (32). Her trip to Manori is the result of her wish to indulge in dream rather than to face reality. She isolates herself from the daily activities as a homemaker. She thinks that illusion is only alternative to escape from the existed rules of family and society. Her frustration and havoc atmosphere in Bombay drive her to the island, Manori. After sometimes, she realizes that her effort from the harsh reality of the world proves to be failure. As she says: “I think’ she said, going back to the suitcase and the filling of it, ‘what I’m doing is trying to escape from madness here, escape to a place where it might be possible to be sane again” (32).

Sita came to Manori after twenty years to fulfill her desire. She considers her visit to the island as place of shelter from the tedious life of Bombay. Sita recollects her father’s dubious life and accomplishments. She is disturbed by her daughter, Menaka’s tearing to shreds her fine drawings and her son, Karan’s arranging blocks laboriously and then tumbling them down. She could not get any satisfaction in the island and she is unable to achieve compatibility there. She experiences turbulence and conflict instead of tranquility and harmony. She initially escapes from reality later settles to the situations. As Hariom Prasad puts it: “Sita has come to accept the prosaic nature of life which runs through difficult human situations in different ways. She finds the courage to face life, in the end, with all its ups and downs” (119). Sita has passed carefree life on the island under the control of her father. Sita’s father is a freedom fighter. Her mother runs away to Benares. She is denied the standard life of a normal child. She lives a weird life in the island of Manori. She is suspicious of her father’s relations with her step sister Rekha. She loses her faith on life and develops in her mind unrealistic attitude towards life. As R.K.Gupta puts it:

Sita’s condition is symbolic of the unrelieved loneliness of a modern woman, in the garb of a wife, a mother and a daughter. Her insanity is the direct result of clash between the hypocritical outer world of her wedlock and her inherent honesty that resists any opportunistic compromise. (111)

Conclusion

Anita Desai presents the depressed condition of highly perceptive and emotional women besieged by seclusion. She portrays the familial dissonance in traditional Indian families and the silent suffering of women in a largely patriarchal world. She analyzes the complex nature of female protagonists who resist against a patriarchal concept of regularity. This article brings fresh insights to the presence of the existential dilemma of a woman as an

individual. It has explored the situations and experiences of middle class Indian woman who wants to escape from norms of the society and fights for her liberty. Thus, this paper has illustrated the inner world of Sita and her rising tone for self-emancipation.

Works Cited

- Desai, Anita. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1982. Print.
- Gupta, R. K. “*The Novels of Anita Desai – A Feminist Perspective*”. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2013.
- Meitei, M. Mani. “*Anita Desai’s Where Shall We Go This Summer? A Psychoanalytical Study*”, *The Novels of Anita Desai: A Critical Study* Manmohan K Bhatnagar and M. Rajeshwar (Ed.) New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2000.
- Prasad, Hariom. *Anita Desai’s Where Shall We Go This Summer? As a Critique of Existentialism, Studies in Indian Writing in English*. Ed. Rajashwar Mittapalli. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2004.
- Tripathy, J.P. *The Mind and the Art of Anita Desai*. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1986.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One’s Own*. London: Penguin, 2002.

P. Sakthivel, Ph.D. Research Scholar
Kandaswami Kandar’s College
Velur, Namakkal District
Tamilnadu
India
sakthisangeetha18@gmail.com