



LITERARY QUEST

An International, Peer-Reviewed, Open Access, Monthly, Online Journal of English Language and Literature

Harmonious Blend of Light and Darkness in Sita's Psyche in Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go this Summer?*

Ms. Subbulakshmi¹, Dr. N. Gejeswari²

1. Researcher, Department of English, Bharathidasan University Constituent College for Women, Orathanadu, Tamil Nadu, India.
2. Assistant Professor, Department of English, Bharathidasan University Constituent College for Women, Orathanadu, Tamil Nadu, India.

Abstract

Anita Desai is a dominant figure in the twentieth Century Indian English fiction. The most common theme in Anita Desai's novels is human relationship, particularly the man-woman relationship. *Where Shall We Go this Summer?* portrays, in psychological terms, the feelings of ennui, boredom, and meaningless existence experienced by a middle-aged woman, Sita, who is married to a prosperous businessman and has four children. The woman has no sense of achievement, fulfillment or satisfaction to make her life worth living. Sita turns vindictive and rebels openly against all social and domestic norms in order to feel triumphant. The conflict here is between conformity and rebellion. But her husband Raman has an admirable capacity for

accommodation and compromise. As he has a high sense of responsibility, he arrives at some sort of a compromise, and is able to continue his relationship with Sita.

Keywords

Woman; Relationship; Compromise; *Where Shall We Go this Summer?*; Anita Desai.

Anita Desai is a dominant figure in the twentieth century Indian English fiction. She has given a new direction to Indian Literature. Anita Desai's purpose as a writer is to see her women characters as humans with their weakness and potentialities, who are indeed caught in the web of their own compulsions. Her novels have been examined as the manifesto of female predicament and creative release of the feminine sensibility. She looks at the predicament of women and visualizes life of a woman as a series of obligations and commitments.

The most common theme in Anita Desai's novels is human relationship, particularly the man-woman relationship. Twentieth century novelists treat this subject in a different manner from that of earlier novelists. They portray the relationship between man and women as it is, whereas earlier novelists, concentrated on as it should be. The modern writer is concerned with the quality of life and people, with world and value. She emerged on the literary horizon after independence, focusing on the contemporary issues.

Anita Desai has added a new dimension to the contemporary Indian English fiction. She has secured a unique and significant place due to her innovative thematic concerns and deals in her fiction with feminine sensibility. The most common theme in her novels is the complexity of human relationships, particularly the man-woman relationship. She writes mostly about the miserable plight of women suffering under their insensitive and

inconsiderate husbands, fathers and brothers. So her woman characters frequently suffer from alienation, withdrawal, loneliness, isolation and lack of communication in her novels.

When these characters have to face alienation, they become rebels. Most of her protagonists are hypersensitive females. Each is presented as uninterpretable individuals. Her characters suffer from various complexes and mental diseases which resist the healthy growth of their personalities. Anita Desai talks of a woman, who questions the age old traditions and seeking individual growth. They are psychologically disturbed, morbid, self absorbed and incoherent in their manners and expression. They do not have the determination, the steadiness of will to pursue a definite line of action.

In dealing with psychic maladies, Desai strikes a new note. She explores the inner working of her protagonists' minds by unfolding the inner recesses and revealing the fundamental human condition by placing individuals in situations of extreme tension. Anita Desai has not simply created situations and characters with the predicament of an individual woman in each of her novels trying to explore her inner self for realization.

Where Shall We Go this Summer? begins in Monsoon 1967, with the heroine Sita's journey from mainland Bombay to an island (Manori) and the novel ends with her return journey from the island to the mainland, though in the middle, we have the past, i.e. her life in the island. The action and the meaning of the novel revolve around the island. The mainland-island contrast is central to the novel, though it includes contrasts such as the sea and the sky, illusion and reality, winter and monsoon, past and present. But the contrast is only obvious – there are ambiguities all the time.

Light and darkness in their various shades are employed symbolically throughout Anita Desai's novel *Where Shall We Go this Summer?* Light is mostly associated with the sky and is symbol of the romantic ideals that Sita, the protagonist hankers after, while darkness which is attributed variously to

some concrete earthly phenomena serves as a metaphor for her past which she is yet to reconcile with.

Sita's is a psyche that is divided between the murky darkness of her past and the bright radiance of her romantic ideals. The whole past of this woman in her forties is seen by herself as a "dark, muddled drama" (149) even after the sojourn she makes in the romantic and magical island of Manori. The magical transformation she hoped for before she undertook the expedition does not materialize in the end. Anita Desai unfolds the story of this futile quest through a symbolic interplay of light and darkness.

After her marriage when Sita comes to Raman's house, she finds herself in a disgusting surrounding. The family members of her husband's house "frighten" and "appal" her. Her husband Raman, who is neither an extrovert nor an introvert but a "middling kind of man" is unable to gratify her emotional demands. She also suffers from the anguish of failure in communication with her husband.

"Bored?" He had exclaimed in genuine surprise. Why? How? With what? And looked so puzzled so pained. Then it was her turn to be puzzled and pained. She could not believe that he had really believed that all was well, not known that she was bored, dull, unhappy, frantic. She could hardly believe that though they lived so close together, he did not even know this basic fact of her existence. (WSWGTS 144 -45)

The island of Manori with the vast smooth, sea all around it, symbolizes Sita's lonely life amidst her own family and the society. The sea is "silk-smooth" which bounds with enthusiasm and sparkles with hope. But the island concretizes Sita's feeling of isolation. It "primarily exists in its full reality" only in her mind and no more than a "projection of her inner psyche". The sea stands between the two polarities of the city and the island. As R.S.

Sharma aptly observes if the city is symbolic of a “rational way” of life, the island becomes symbolic of “the primitive reality”.

Sita refuses to adjust herself to her husband’s family. Her husband who is a practical man, in order to avoid daily bickering and tension, moves into a flat. Sita’s in-laws are accommodating and considerate but she takes perverse delight in teasing them. In her in-laws’ family nobody smokes openly but out of spite she starts smoking before the family. Her smoking is symbolic of her unconscious desire to harm the foetus she is carrying. Sita is childish and petulant.

Sita rejects the compromise because her psyche is divided into distinct components of darkness and light: an unfulfilled past that draws her back into herself, and the idealistic urge that calls for self-transcendence. Her is a romantic idealism that refuses to accept the given reality. This refusal springs from the schism in her Psyche. Sita’s journey to the island of Manori is in fact a quest for integration of the self. She tells Raman that “it might be possible to be same again” if she lives on the island. “I had to stay whole,” she says later analyzing the motive of her journey to the island.

The journey into the darkness of the psyche continues. Sita finds her house on the island ‘pitch dark’. It is in rains. Ashes, dust, cobwebs, odour of bats and mildew, and silence - that is what the house has come to. If her journey from Bombay to Monori was spatial, the further journey is psychological. Sita discovers through a long and painful reminiscence that the white radiance of the romantic idealism that draw her to the island was not so white in fact, when she concludes her reminiscence with the sad recollection that the attic in which her father lived was “grey, no longer white”.

A very significant question closely related to the crisis of conscience and values (CCV) is raised in the novel. It is the question of human survival, noble existence and of dignified adjustment in the society and in the married life. The question is whether one should try to face the odds and buffets of life “with

total submission and surrender to what exists,” to fate or whether one should architect one’s own future.

Sita’s survival, her existence, her adjustment are symbolical of the entire humanity. Her rebellious mood is indicative of thousands of sensitive souls who do not find peace in environs of distrust and corruption spawned by material advancements of all sorts.

Raman’s arrival to Manori and stroking Karan’s hair with gentleness stirs in Sita her own pent-up longing to be loved. Sita herself “ached to attract”. She started at him, “bored into him with her eyes wanting and not being given what she wanted” (132). The glazed irony ingrained in the narrative gives us the glimpse of uneasy equations.

He started at her with distaste her grotesque. Her face was so grey, such sharp grooves ran from her nostrils to the corners of her mouth. It was the face of a woman unloved... But whereas her beauty had turned haggard through nerves, neglect and indifference... He himself looked grey and lined and a backache still formented him. How old they were, he thought, to be having another baby (WSWGTS 133-34)

B. Ramchandra Rao studies the novel as dramatization of “the conflict between two irreconcilable temperaments, of two diametrically opposed attitudes towards life.” He concludes by saying that the tragedy in *Where Shall We Go this Summer?* arises of the inability of the characters to connect the prose and the passion in their lives. The novel is tightly structured and the island is an exertive symbol of a lost paradise, but Sita’s sudden capitulation at the end comes as an anti-climax.

Works Cited

Desai, Anita. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 2011. Print.

Desh, Sandhayarani. *Form and Vision in the Novels of Anita Desai*.

New Delhi: Prestige Publishers, 1999. Print.

Gopal, N.R. *A Critical study of the novels of Anita Desai*:

New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2013. Print.

Rao, Ramachandra B. *The Novels of Mrs. Anita Desai A study*.

New Delhi: Kalyani Publishers, 1977. Print.

Tripathi, B.L. *Anita Desai: Dimensions of Inner World*. New Delhi: Prestige Publishers, 2007. Print.

MLA (7th Edition) Citation:

Subbulakshmi, and Gejeswari. "Harmonious Blend of Light and Darkness in Sita's Psyche in Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go this Summer?*" *Literary Quest* 2.12 (2016): 76-82. Web. DoA.

DoA – Date of Access

Eg. 23 Aug. 2015. ; 05 April 2017.