

**Anita Desai's *Where shall We Go This Summer*: An Ecological perspective**

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**Abstract**

*The Earth is not only a planet of living but also a mother, caretaker and life giver to the living world. The modern man always thinks of exploitation of Earth or Nature without thinking of its existence, well - being and contribution to our living condition. The great litterateurs, social activists, humanists and ecologists have been raising their voices against ruthless and careless behaviour and activities of materialistic cruel man. The popular writers like Amitav Ghosh, Margaret Atwood, R. K. Narayan, Ruskin Bond, Arundhati Roy, Geeta Mehta, Gieve Patel, A.K. Ramanujan and Anita Desai have shown their concern over the decadent condition of Nature and its harmful effects. They have tried to create ecological consciousness among the people to save our Nature or Earth in broader Perspective. Anita Desai has been widely recognized for raising her voice for the Protection of Nature. Her Sahitya Academy winning novel *Where Shall We go This Summer* depicts the contrasting living condition of the island and modern metropolis. Sita, the protagonist tries to go back to the island where she was born and spent here pre - married life to experience the miracle of island. The paper aims to present the mystery and bountifulness of Nature in contrast to the sophisticated materialistic condition of city life.*

**Keywords:** Island, Nature, Environment, Eco-criticism, Materialistic world.

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The Present century claims success in information technology, exploration of Nature, luxurious living style, rapid development, communication and transportation etc. Unfortunately, we pay less attention to environment degradation, pollution, depletion of natural resources, climate change, natural disasters and other harmful effects of careless attitude towards Nature. A person is born and brought up in the earth. S/he gets everything in the earth to fulfill his or her needs without realizing the safety and importance of the earth. The great environmentalist, humanists, socialists, litterateurs express their concern over the decadent condition of Nature. They project the relationship between Man and Nature and the need of sustainable environment. The decadent natural surroundings have troubled the mankind. 'Eco-criticism' regards earth as of great importance. The word 'Eco criticism' first coined by William Rueckert in his seminal critical writing "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in criticism" in the year 1978. He defines "Eco-criticism" as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature". (Rueckett 71) It is popular in literary arena as it echoes the silenced and oppressed voices of Nature and Nature lovers. Eco criticism takes an earth centred approach to literary studies (Giotfelty, XVIII). The literary texts awaken the readers and human society as a whole to pay the attention towards the decaying environment. They criticise the cruel and oppressive attitude of materialistic People towards Nature. The self - destructive motive of man in pursuit of excess pleasure and success appears to be suicidal.

Anita Desai has a distinctive role in portraying Nature as a great healer and rescuer from the disease of materialism. Like her other popular literary works, *Where shall We go This summer* provides solace to the human beings fed up with polluted heartless city life. The protagonist sita in this novel is elated to see "the massed rocks and the palms of the island" (Desai 17). Nature is

ignored in modern city in pursuit of materialistic pleasure and success. Modern city people rarely get chance to think of natural surroundings. The natural sights provide pleasure with feeling of wonder. The sky and glittering stars in dark island appear to be enchanting.

She exclaimed, 'Look, how dark the island looks against the sky, that shining white sky. See how exciting it looks! 'Dark', the boy whimpered, peering over her shoulder. 'Oh yes, it is so dark on the island. At night you see stars that you never can see in the city', she assured him. (Desai 18)

The experiences in the midst of Nature are long lasting and can provide inspiration in in difficult moments. The novelist presents picturesque description of the different parts of the day at island. The description of 'bullock cart', 'the ever changing sky', 'the sunset radiance on the piled clouds', 'the island looking a small dark blot during evening' depict the multiple beautiful sights of island. The days in the island passed at "a slower pace now-the lazy, idle, leisurely pace of relief, a lull (Desai 128). The seaside mornings are marked with "their infant tints of blue and pink and milk- grey" (Desai 128) which gradually becomes hard and "heavy glittering metal of the staff afternoons" (Desai 128). The evening is as charming as the day in the island.

Evening would rustle up through the Casuarinas, clatter the palm leaves together and start up a murmur of pleasure, of animation, in the house on the knoll and out on the beach. (Desai 128)

The inhabitants of the island are uneducated and deprived of basic amenities. The novelist presents the miserable condition of living of the islanders through the protagonist's eyes. Sita sees "the children sitting amidst the pigs, as naked and muddy as they, at women squatting in the thick smoke of damp fires, and men slack with monsoon idleness" (Desai 23). The village in the island has no electricity and they have to depend on the light of the



moon and the stars. The rich light of the sun disappears after the sunset. The trees appear “like columns of darkness” with “their black fans closing together above them” (Desai 25). When Menaka, the daughter of Sita complains about the lack of light in island, Sita draws her attention to the simple living in the midst of Nature. “Moses will light the lanterns but you can still see the sky lit up” (Desai 25). She and her children watch and enjoy the floating and shifting of mass clouds during the monsoon. The clouds cast a shadow over the salty sky and turns a “trough of green – black chill” and again moves on to “Let a shaft of white sunlight stream down and scatter its dull silver coins upon the waves” (Desai 123).

Sita, the protagonist is a sensible person who gets fed up with the polluted and self centred city life. Like the British Romantic poets, she longs for Nature and tries “to escape from the madness *here*, escape to a place where it might be possible to be sane again” (Desai 35).

Modern city is full of dust, noise, quarrel, chaos and devoid of peace and tranquility. The children and sensible people do not have any opportunity to live in eco-friendly set up. The novelist expresses her dissatisfaction to the city life.

There was no park nearby, not a patch of green anywhere. ...  
There was a sudden sound like the screeching of brakes, a commotion.... There was a clamour of shouts and accusations, screams and shrill, tooting sounds as the argument gave way to action. (Desai 42)

Modern people are proud of their sophisticated belongings and behavior. They live in their self-centred world. They lack fellow feeling, sympathy, understanding, mutual, trust for healthy sociable life. “The novelist expresses intense resentment against the absurdities of modern world” (Ushamni 199). There is insecurity and barbarism in day to day life. “It is like living in the wilds....one may be attacked.....one’s children may be attacked in the streets..... Everyone fights. They are all violent” (Desai 44).

Destruction of the beauty of Nature is a common phenomenon of city life. Children to elders always do damage to Nature consciously or unconsciously. Sita feels shocked to see her own daughter Menaka “crumbled a sheaf of new buds on the small potted plant she had been labouring to grow on the balcony” (Desai 45-46). She is also horrified that “she had done it unconsciously, had not meant to destroy anything at all” (Desai 46). Her smallest son Karan enjoys the down fall of architecture of a tower of blocks than its preserve. In another occasion Menaka lost interest in painting and spoilt her picture. When sita seeks the reason, “She kicked the board into corner and said, carelessly. Nothing” (Desai 117). The novelist observes the less importance of creativity in city life. “The creative impulse had no chance, against the overpowering desire to destroy” (Desai 46).

The unsecured city life craves for the secured and peaceful life. When sita, the representative of sensible society gets restless in the materialistic society, she dreams of the island as the only alternative. “If reality were not to be borne, then Illusion was the only alternative. She saw that island illusion as “a refuge, a protection” (Desai 102). She loves free life in the island like a free sea bird. She has come to the island” on a pilgrimage to beg for the miracle of keeping her baby unborn” (Desai 31).

A true environmentalist views Nature as an abode of magic, rest and peace. Sita wishes to be from drudgery and to enjoy freedom and peace in the island. She feels diseased as well as insecure for which she leaves” the routine-ridden mainland as for a rest in a sanatorium..... the streets and walls ceased to offer security or safety but implied threats of murder instead” (Desai 101).

When a person fails to reconcile to the materialistic mechanic life, she thinks of the relief which can be provided by Nature. The call of Nature is heard by sita, the admirer of Nature. “Nature seems to have embraced her and redeemed her. It is on the island that she attained psychic equilibrium and mental poise which she had nearly lost in the mainland (Fouzia 202). As

William Wordsworth in his poem 'Tintern Abbey' depicts the healing power of Nature, the novelist Desai thinks of island as a place of solace and comfort.

She knew it was because ordinary life, the everyday life, the everyday world had grown so insufferable to her that she could think of the magic island again as of release (Desai 101).

There is a great difference between city and undeveloped rural life and the latter does not provide as much comfort as the former. However, there are certain God gifted unique things which we do not find in sophisticated artificial city life. When Karan in this work complains about darkness on the island, his mother assures. At night you see stars that you never can see in the city" (Desai 18). The light of lantern in the island is contrasted to the electric light in the flat of Bombay. Similarly, the simple tasteless meal at the island is a contrast to the meal served in white china disk by the servants in city. The children get the comfort of sleeping in smooth bed of city, but life in the island is void of it.

The attitude of the people of city towards Nature is quite different from the people living in the lap of Nature. Raman, the husband of Sita does not enjoy the monsoon air in the island. Sita observes him not getting any pleasure in his walk on the island. He represents the fun loving city people, but she cannot accept easily things happening in the modern city. She expresses her resentful voice about city life as ".....boys beating each other for fun, horrible things happening on the streets and in the flats all around us – everything so ugly and cruel? How can I "(Desai 146). As a lover of Nature, sita hardly enjoys her time in Bombay a metro city of India.

The novelist expresses deep shock over the carelessness of present generation towards Nature. Sita feels offended at Menaka's carelessness towards Nature. Her attitude towards Nature hurts Sita. She feels her mother's love for island life is full of "disorder and nonsense" (Desai 121) and she wishes to "escape it wholly" (121). The island no more attracts Karan, but only thinks of city life of Bombay. He feels joyful at the thought of going



back to Bombay. "Papa, I want to go to Bombay now" (Desai 139). Menaka does not enjoy her time in Island. She thinks of her career in medical science which is of quite lucrative in materialistic world. Sita, the representative of simple being of the Island feels being betrayed by her daughter as well as her husband. Her two children and husband are quite apathetic to the living in the Island.

The materialistic world concentrates on luxurious life at the cost of Nature. The present generation hardly realizes the contribution of Nature to our existence. Sita, the embodiment of Nature is misunderstood and left deserted. The novelist calls upon the inhabitants of the earth to realize the importance of Nature which is source of our living. We must think of sustainable living instead of merciless living. This work displays the permanent love and offering of Nature to the earthly creatures.

Like Ruskin Bond, the novelist Anita Desai gives description of trees and Nature as living human beings. Nature is full of activities, music, beauty, soothing effects and responses. Nature reciprocates to human attitude and nurtures the mankind. It echoes William Wordsworth's message in 'Tintern Abbey'. "Nature never did betray the heart loved her" (lines 122-123). A person like Sita never feels alone if she is in the natural landscape. "She felt surrounded by presence the presence of the Island itself, of the sea around it, and of the palm trees that spoke to each other and, sometimes even to her. They were so alive" (Desai 129).

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