

INDIVIDUAL VERSUS SOCIAL SYSTEM: ESTRANGEMENT IN ANITA DESAI'S *WHERE SHALL WE GO THIS SUMMER?*

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Abstract

The Indo-Anglian fiction of the Post-Independence period marks fruitfulness in variety of themes. The writers like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Pawar Jhabwala, Nayantara Sehgal and Anita Desai appeared on the literary scene with a range of pertinent issues of social concern. The issues of caste, class and marriage had strongly gripped the Indian society despite economic and political changes. They affected Indian society to a large degree. Literature concerns with an individual's social world, his/her adjustment to it and his wish to modify it.

*Desai's novels cover a wide range of themes such as marital discord and estrangement resulting from and in marital relationships, the seclusion and loneliness, alienation and the theme of family relationship in society. An analysis of her novels, undoubtedly, is a rewarding critical enterprise which will bring to surface a number of features of her novels by concentrating on her approach to marriage, society, and alienation caused by social systems. Her novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975) deals with the theme of alienation. It tells an intense story of a sensitive young wife wavering between the desire to abandon the boredom and hypocrisy of her middle class and seemingly contented life and the awareness that the ties that link her to it cannot be so easily broken. She becomes extremely disgraceful of her own painful situation and flees to Manori with the intention of evading from her "duties and responsibilities, from order and routine, from life and city (Desai: WSWGTS? 128). At Manori, she realizes "what a farce marriage was, all human relations were" (Desai: WSWGTS? 89).*

Thus, Desai's novels present a picture of the disturbed psyche of women who are the victims of alienation and male supremacy in marital relationships. The present paper endeavours to examine the middle class values concerning marriage and its hypocrisy.

Key words: *Middle class, hypocrisy, marriage, alienation, class system, wife and Indian society, etc*

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Introduction:

Anita Desai is amongst those novelists who are committed to the depiction of tribulations of the middle class. Her novels depict the attempt to unite the olden traditional viewpoint with the rapidly evolving realities of the contemporary existing circumstances. She is a post-independence writer who explores the interiority of her characters' mind and gets increasingly psychologically envisioned. She attempts to evaluate the sociological effects on the consciousness of her characters. Desai is a leading voice among the women writers of post-Independence period who takes external crude realities to inner obscurities through her fiction. She is one of those women novelists who have been gifted with perceiving Indian complexities very closely and shows constrictions of diverse descriptions and shadows working upon subtle characters. Desai has an extraordinary ability to tell stories about individuals who have to live a life that is too complex and perfidious to cope with easily. One surely discovers account of predicament confronted by an individual in the Indian metropolitan conditions in her fiction. She does not acknowledge herself to be a feminist though she is a woman writer. On the other hand, the present novel is a manifestation of the suspicions and apprehensions, the optimism and ambitions of Sita, the protagonist of the novel. Desai has a microscopic vision through which she observes society around her thoroughly and competently. Desai's prominent novels divulge the interiority of human mind instead of depicting the social realities. The theme of a crisis of values is a recurring and an encompassing strand in Anita Desai's novels.

The unique feature of Anita Desai's fictional talent is her use of descriptions to convey theme and to bond structure to create a sense of unity. She puts her female protagonists in the patriarchal stance and deeply enquiries into their minds to explore the torment quietly tolerated by those unlucky individuals. Her novels deal with the subject of matrimonial disharmony in consequence of estrangement disturbing the relational understanding. The theme of loneliness, seclusion and family relationship in the society pervades *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975). It is one of her noteworthy novels that deal with the theme of estrangement. Her major concern in the novel is essentially with "the enduring human condition" which the middle class Indian women commonly face. The novel undertakes unfeigned inquiry into the issue of consciousness and middle class morals that are pervasively significant. Anita Desai is distinct from other Indian Women novelists in English for her unique concern of "the enduring human condition" (Heinemann

1953:178) which is the reality about women chiefly contemporary women of the Indian middle class.

The novelist is sincerely absorbed in discovering the social structure through the central characters of Sita. Sita is a middle-aged woman who does not expect her fifth child to be born at all into the world replete with obliteration and emptiness. Therefore, she moves to the island of Manori and spends her life there. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) is Anita Desai's fourth novel. It narrates the story of a troubled mind. It demonstrates the breakdown between family members and the seclusion, separation and the distressed psychological state of a middle class lady named, Sita. Her hindrance of the choking four walls is understood as taking shelter from her marriage at the ultimate spot of Magic Island. When Sita senses that she is pregnant for the fifth time she gets irritated and the desiccation of life becomes fairly excruciating for her. Hence she makes an effort to shut down willingly and cuts off herself from the diurnal household tasks. But it does not last long and she progressively resumes to reality and picks up the situation where she had left off her own conditions. The story concludes giving the feeling of intense pain of a young wife who fervently desires to exit from hypocrisy and monotony of her day-to-day reality. This is roughly the plot of the novel.

Using this issue, Anita Desai has created a germane model of morals such as understanding, conviction, uprightness, love, devotion, benevolence and a sense of insight, etc. which are indispensable to endure the human temperament. The chief women characters like Maya, Monisha, Sita, Bim, Lila, Nanda Kaul, Ila Das in *Cry, the Peacock, Voices in the City, Where Shall We Go This Summer? Clear Light of Day, Village by the Sea* and *Fire on the Mountain* correspondingly have basically a visitor which is the common visitor of human being employed in order to know the predicament of human beings through those human morals. Her novels evidently demonstrate the contiguous connection with Indian social and cultural ethos in post nineteen-sixty period. The Indian women at large after this period appear to be persistently becoming aware of their distinct privileges and responsibilities as well as human values

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) the characters like Sita, Deedar, Moses and Miriam suffer from the agony of faith which is scrupulously associated with human existence and his/her proper adaptation in society. These characters shiver just because they find that their values and beliefs are at peril and they are confronted with the dilemma of where shall they go? It is so because the stronghold of consciousness and values has nearly collapsed. The despicable agencies of money, technologies, mechanizations, cheating and violence have resulted in suspicion, breaking up of marriages, rapes, unlawful sex and emotional and psychological breakdowns. All live under various coercions and even the women feel afraid of giving birth to children in the existing confused social and cultural circumstances. There is a complete downfall of society and its values leading to a steady vanishing of faith. The situation deteriorates to the point that it becomes almost a prison

where civilization exists as imbued in the debauched image, minion, violence, incest and robbery etc. Sita's existence and coping with the world is representational of the entire humankind. Anita Desai tells about her pursuits as a writer:

One's preoccupation can only be a perpetual search for meanings, for value, for--- dare I say it--- truth. I think of the world as an iceberg— the one tenth visible above the surface of the water is what we call Reality, but the nine tenths that are submerged make up the truth, and that is what one is trying to explore. Writing is an effort to discover and then to underline and finally to convey the true significance of things.

(Belliappa: 1971, 1)

Her novels express a close engrossment in the country's existing crisis and its social and cultural circumstances. Desai takes the readers into inner depths of her female characters and makes every attempt to direct them to self-awareness. Her illustrious novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) unambiguously familiarizes the readers with a gulf between self-actualization and social values using characters like Sita, Deedar, Moses and Miriam. She creates the characters like Menaka, Karan and their father Raman as a literary device to intensify the effect of juxtaposition. There remains the question of human noble survival and the individual's appropriate fine-tuning in the society. Anita Desai's chief interest in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) is with psychological reality of her characters. Her shaky female characters find that their principles and values are at risk which obstructs individual's self-recognition. The title of the novel without "This Summer" hints at a perennial question Where Shall We Go? and the question creates confusion as every individual today appears to meet and astound with such an issue.

The novel represents the fact that luxurious life procured through money power reduces one to be flimsy in case of just ways. Sita, the central character of the novel, is enormously bewildered and fails to get a fitting society where she can unperturbedly live and can conceive her child. She, in a troubled psychological condition, speaks with a perplexed alertness:

Beginning to pace up and down, up and down, she would strain to catch the precise language of this invisible unquiet. "Where shall we go of this summer?" The words, appearing out of nowhere; worried her and plagued her. "Nowhere, nowhere," she made an effort to control herself and quietly reply. "I'll keep you safe inside. We'll go nowhere."

(Desai: WSWGTS?, 127)

The novelist presents civilization like a multi-level structure, depraved revelation, obsequiousness, strange love, burglary and assault like a prison. Anita Desai, in this connection, writes:

How civilization could survive, how could the child? How could she hold them whole and pure and unimpeached in the midst of this bloodshed? They would be wounded, fall and die.

(Desai: WSWGTS?, 55)

Sita despises the society of metropolitan nature, a culture of the acquisitions and gluttony shorn of inner comfort and feeling of emotional well-being. The novel examines the distress of ingenuous woman who is incapable of accepting the orders and demands of a male-dominated wedded life but eventually comes to terms with it. It delineates the psyche of a woman under social power. It is a story of female consciousness, woes and her laden within the structure of matrimonial period.

Thus, the novel deals with the upper middle class situation. The economic freedom is not a key concern for the characters. Sita interrogates the established system of patriarchal society directly or indirectly. She declines to unthinkingly submit to the social norms designed by orthodox social conventions. The unstinting system like marriage becomes a ridiculous and tough for her. The women in Desai's novels reside in a world of mirage like the shield of childhood. They lack the capacity to change and accustom herself effortlessly and rightly to a renewed cluster of conditions.

Conclusion

Sita, the heroine novel of the novel, has been engineered as a victim of estrangements to the circumstances in which she finds herself than her own wish. Nevertheless, Sita does not let her personality to get fractured and finally comes to statuses with her own life. Incongruent to Maya's behaviour in *Cry, the peacock*, who misses herself into the furore of her own compassion, Sita arises from the tempest of her feelings with fresh consciousness that "ripeness is all" and regains her domestic chord. Her receiving demonstrates progress, suggesting her skill to bond the vestiges of life. Therefore, it can be said that the gentle ending of the novel speaks of the maturity of sensitivity achieved by both Sita as well as Anita Desai. The optimistic ending of the novel is greatly inspiring and life-augmenting which becomes one of its significant merits. It is amply evident that Anita Desai, as a novelist, deals mostly with feminine consciousness and her female protagonists repeatedly come around violence at the end. Sita neither takes anyone's life nor commits suicide, nor dies, nor goes mad but modestly negotiates with her destiny and picks up the audacity to face life confidently with all its turbulences. Sita's finding of the middle ground with life tells on her part a step onward to admit truth. She expresses the significant awareness that life is not to be spurned but to be breathed. Thus the life of Sita is a study of feminine consciousness, sorrows and besieged within the structure of marriage system. The character of Sita tells the intense account of a delicate young wife wavering between the cravings to throw the monotony of any pretence of her middle class.

Sita's negotiation with life establishes an undisputable stride onward to know truth. Her life makes open the fact that life is not intended to be spurned but to be understood and involvement in it is an endeavour of existing that takes one to become conscious of broader accountability. In this type of understanding, one can recognize progress in Desai's view of woman struggle for her existence. It is reasonably conceivable that the name of the heroine reminiscences with the name of her nobler namesake in the epic, *The Ramayana*. Resembling the Sita of the epic, Desai's modern Sita accepts her practical yearning to assert her individuality by finding the middle ground. Bidulate Chowdhary comments:

"Between two uncompromising attitudes of Maya's madness and Monisha's suicide, Sita is the only heroine of Mrs. Desai to understand and succumb to the world 'only connect', the only compromising link between the prose and passion of her life. Her reaction proves that it is very difficult for a woman, however modern to get rid of the situation she is once placed in. In spite of her dislike to the ways of the world, to the traditional life of royalty, she resumes her return journey to adjust to the role of a wife and mother. Hence she accepts defeat, crumbles her passion and mingles with the prose of life for betterment of human relationship."

(Chowdhary 1995:77)

Most of Desai's women characters return to their husbands regardless of the ideas off feminist viewpoints but in each case, their choice to return through life's test seems accurate because the men in most of Desai's novels are realistic, unassuming, solicitous and primarily sensible different from the women, who in most cases display a propensity to go insane under the slight stress. It can be stated about Sita that the remote channel is not always lucid but reasonableness is hidden in returning to a usual family life and the duties bound with it. The present novel is distinct from other novels of Desai where the system of patriarchy and traditional marriage disturb her mentally but Sita is woman who does not end her life in despair or death but the novel closes with reunion and satisfaction.

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