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## Spiritual Voyage of Sita in Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*

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### **Abstract:**

Anita Desai creates a character in order to tell a tale and articulate her vision of life. With her works, Indo-Anglian fiction is turning to a meaningful exploration of the world of reality. Almost all her novels portray female protagonists as hyper-sensitive, self-discovery and search for identity. In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Sita's loneliness is conditioned by family and society. It is that of alienation of a woman, a wife and that of a mother. Her characters are living individuals, interested in life with its hopes, dejections, and chaotic flow. This article has explored how Desai has portrayed the man-woman relationship and how the character wants to lead a life of spiritual voyage as in the case of Sita.

**Keywords: self-discovery, self-identification, loveless marriage and symbolism.**

Anita Desai builds her novels round the struggle within the self, the dismal moods of men and women the alienation is set against a socio-psychic background. The Indo-Anglian novel has now gained an international recognition. She is a feminist writer who is sensitive writer who is sensitive to women's moods and feelings and to their predicament in society. The aim of her works is to examine about feminine sensibility as a concept of reality in this materialistic world. The noted critic R. K. Gupta comments:

Anita Desai has enormously contributed to the growth of Indian Fiction in English by bringing out her female characters who underwent lot of sufferings. Alienation has been the thematic motif that organically connects Anita Desai's fiction experience... you use it as a base but don't confine yourself to it (Gupta, R.K.163).

Desai prefers pattern and rhythm to plot, and so the fragments are so integrated and interrelated in her works to make it an organic whole. So plot development in her novels does not lead to a spatio-temporal progression but leads to the protagonist's self-discovery. As Anita Desai puts it:

My novels are no reflection of Indian society, politics or character. They are a part of my private effort to seize upon the raw material of life-its shapelessness, its meaninglessness (Vinson 348).

Desai's novels are not populated by heroic characters, whether male or female, at least in the traditional sense. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), while focusing on the interior of the mind of the protagonist, Sita, explores man-woman relationship to a great extent. Sita is a sensitive woman in her early forties if the mother of four children. She is expecting her fifth child. She lives in Bombay in a comfortable flat. But she feels she cannot bear anymore the kind of life she leads with her husband in Bombay and feels that she has lost all her happiness after marriage. Raman, her husband is a businessman. His rational nature is just opposite to that of the deep and emotional Sita.

Sita decides to go back to her father's home in Manori Island, which is a place of magic and mystery. Sita's father had passed away. She does not want to deliver the baby and she believes that in her father's island she could find the miracle of keeping the already conceived child unborn. She also believes she would solace in the island. But when she goes to Manori with two of her children, Menaka, a young sensitive girl and Karan, an obstinate little boy, she finds it unwelcoming. She leaves the island and comes back gracefully to Bombay. The relationship between Raman and Sita is based on the class values, principles, conflict between the double social standards. She is frustrated by her husband's mechanical and matter-of-fact attitude. Towards her, she finds no warmth of felling, understanding and attachment. Marriage has resulted only in her loss of identity, self-confidence, and inability to reassure love and security to her children.

Raman is "not an introvert, nor an extrovert, -- a middling kind of man, he was dedicated unconsciously to the middle way" (47). Sita could not bear his lack of feeling. She changes from a proud mother of four children, "sensual, emotional, Freudian" (31) to a woman of "rage, fear, and revolt", for "control...had slipped out of her hold" (32). Her dream of getting love and affection is lost. She likes him to treat her in a gentle and tender way is what he cannot do. Marital discord changes her into a creature who "lost all feminine, all maternal belief in childbirth, all faith in it and began to fear it as yet one more act of violence and murder in a world that had more of them in it than she could take" (56).

Under the stress of psychological confusion, Sita starts living a world of dream and fantasy and make believe. The whole situation only aggravates her introverted nature. In her state of perversion Sita gets pleasure out of the sight of strangers. A foreign tourist, who wants to go to Ajanta without knowing which direction he has to go, attracts her. Perhaps the foreigner is an example of courage Raman lacks. At heart she also recognizes her husband's disposition and his courage:

He never hesitated-everything was so clear to him, and simple: life must be continued and all its business... That was why the children turned to him, sensing him to be the superior in courage, in leadership (WSWGTS 138-39).

Discussing the psychoanalytical aspects in the novel, Mani Meitei observes:

A psychological clue to this particular fascination of Sita for strangers is three-fold. Firstly, to her such encounters are uncommon, and are not a dull repetition of her routine life. ... Secondly, they are a source of aesthetic pleasure, a means of diversion from boredom and ugliness; and thirdly, these two situations, being associated with courage and beauty respectively, give her emotional satisfaction (Meitei 37).

Sita looking for a secured life returns to Bombay with her husband. Sita's effort to say 'No' to her life with her husband and the demands it makes on her becomes significant: That is why Sita's mind keeps thinking the lines of C.P. Cavafy's poem:

To certain people there comes a day

When they must say that great "Yes" or the great "No",  
 He who has the Yes ready within him  
 reveals himself at once, and saying it crosses over  
 to the path of honour and his own conviction.  
 He who refuses does not repent. Should he be asked  
 again, he would say No again. And yet that no-  
 the right no-crushes him for the rest of his life. (139)

Her physical and mental state deteriorates as days go by. Her 'self' is in a state of fragmentation, as the trauma baffles her. Sita hates violence existing everywhere. Sita feels so protective towards the unborn baby whom she calls "frail gold fish", playing like "some soft-fleshed fish"(55), in a bowl of warm sea-water. She considers her visit to the island as "a pilgrimage to beg for the miracle of keeping her baby unborn" (20). Manori Island means ultimate rejection of the values her husband represents. Sita has always been directed by her men folk. As a child she was brought to Manori and after his death, Raman takes her to Bombay. Her decision to come to Manori under the guise of a summer vacation for her children is probably her first independent action and this is significant in the feminist context.

The characters in the fiction of Anita Desai undergo many experiences in their day – to – day chores. The most prominent feature of Anita Desai's art is the delineation of character. She is primarily interested in the portrayal of female protagonists as living in separate and closed worlds of existential problems and passions. In Desai's fiction the emotional and psychical experience is reflected as a way of life not as an escape from life. As she points out: "Literature cannot be torn away from the fabric of life as if it were a decoration, embroidery in it. (Desai, Anita. "Women and Fiction in India". The Toronto South Asian Review Vol.10, No.2, winter 1992, p.27. Print)

The title *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* shows that the “From-To” movement is highly is rightly Balanced. The initial journey that Sita takes is a reaction against the “confusion, the muddle of it all” (153). Artistically two journeys are unified: One is an immediate escape from surroundings; the other is towards the future” (WSWGTS). The novel is divided into three parts in terms of time-Part one “Monsoon ‘67” with her present and earlier past of the protagonist, Sita; Part two, “Winter ‘47” with her remote past; Part three “Monsoon ‘67” with her present and near future.

The interrogative title underscores the uncertain state of the heroine’s mind. The word’s appearing out of nowhere, worries her. “Nowhere nowhere” (127). There is a conflict in her logical and illogical dreamy side. The novel ends with Sita leaving the island to lead a life in Bombay, which she always considered aimless and monotonous. Bombay represents the world of reality and Manori Island, the world of fantasy and Sita’s coming back to Bombay is symbolic of her return to reality. To conclude, the images in the novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* highlight the ‘spiritual voyage’ of Sita. The island is the controlling metaphor and symbol in the novel. Images of sea, sunshine, colour and flowers are used with regard to the island life. The image of a magnificent sunset indicates the illusory nature of the island. The island turns from ‘white’ to ‘grey’ when she was there earlier, but in the next visit it has become completely dark, which symbolizes the end of her hopes.

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