

An Inner Journey of Sita in Where Shall We go this Summer? By Anitha Desia

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Abstract

Anitha Desia's novels reflect social realities from Psychological perspective and examine the emotional world of womankind. In dealing with the thoughts emotions and sensations at various levels of consciousness, Anita Desai uses the technique used by D.H.Lawrence, Virginia Wolf and Henry James i.e stream of consciousness technique and flashbacks in her novels.

Literature reflects not only the social reality but also shapes the complex ways in which men and women organize themselves, their interpersonal relationships and their perception of the socio-cultural reality. The most significant being the man-woman relationship.

A glimpse into the fiction written during the last three decades is seriously concerned with changing perceptions of man-woman relationship. Where shall we go this summer? is essentially a study of the marital discord resulting from the conflict between two diametrically opposed attitudes towards life. She projects the theme of alienation in marital life in a more controlled manner. The problem of male female dichotomy - Sita represents a world of emotional and feminine sensibility while Raman is a practical man with an active view of life. The focus of this Paper is Communication between husband and wife, between individual and the social world. There is aching void in the life of Sita as a Woman, a wife and a mother in Anitha Desai's. Where shall we go this summer?

Introduction

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A glimpse into the fiction written during the last three decades is seriously concerned with changing perceptions of man-woman relationship. Where shall we go this summer? is essentially a study of the marital discord resulting from the conflict between two diametrically opposed attitudes towards life. She projects the theme of alienation in marital life in a more controlled manner. The problem of male female dichotomy - Sita represents a world of emotional and feminine sensibility while Raman is a practical man with an active view of life. The communication between husband and wife, between individual and the social world. There is aching void in the life of Sita as a Woman, a wife and a mother. Sita and her husband react as if they belong to two denizens of different worlds. Rediscovering the self / unsuccessful tryst with summer. Anita Desai has obviously delineated a sense of alienation in where shall we go this summer? Sita's state is a representative of the alienation of a woman, a wife, a mother – a loneliness conditioned by family and society. Marital incoherence is a sticking feature in the present novel.

Sita, the main character in the novel is oppressed and depressed with loveless wedlock with Raman. The couple have four children, the fifth child yet to be born, yet plays an important role in the story. As a matter of fact the whole novel is occasioned by the fifth pregnancy of Sita.

Sita's childhood plays an important role in shaping her personality, her mother had deserted the family and the father, a freedom fighter and social worker, was too busy to take care of his children. Sita lived a life of austerity with limited material comforts and yet she enjoyed the Arcadian life on the island of Manori in her father's house before her marriage.

After the death of Sita's father, Sita was married to Raman, the son of her father's friend Deedar. Sita's father is neglectful and partial the relationship between Sita and her father is more or less a love-hate relationship in the light of Horney Psychological tenets. Karen Horney's psychological theory states that each individual/human being is unique in himself/herself and has a real self. This real self can lead him to self realization which is the goal of human life, provided he finds a warm environment to grow from an acorn into an oak.

Karen Horney says that if the human beings are themselves absorbed in their own conflicts to the point where they can neither love the child nor see him as an individual, he will experience this world as hostile and feel insecure and helpless. Horney calls it a state of "basic anxiety" wherein a child feels "profound insecurity and vague apprehensiveness that do not let him develop a feeling of belonging, of we". In the fact of this intolerable anxiety, a child first abandons his real feelings and looks for defensive strategies with which to pull on in this hostile world. Sita's father is responsible for ingraining insecurity by his neglect. He is a public figure, admired and revered by the people, he is too far off and formidable a person for Sita to approach him with filial affection. There is always an impossibility of talk between her father and her. He is immersed in self – glorification. His two Children Jivan and Sita mean nothing special, they are as important and unimportant as his sycophant chelas and devotees.

Not that he is incapable of extending love. He showers all his love on his eldest daughter, Rekha, to the point of suspicion of incest. Sita notices her father's arm lying fondly across Rekha's shoulders; she catches "an exchange of that heavy lidded look between father and daughter and she feels uneasy. Not only because of her father's partiality but also because it is hard to digest the fact that her father should have a shady side. Sita cannot digest her father's dubious ways. She has seen her father grinding her mother's jewels for medicine, she knows of the night time aspect of his daylight practical Charisma (P55). These are some of the bad human experiences which Sita experiences.

Sita's world is full of people with hypocrisy and hypocrites – the islanders, the Chela's, Deedar, Rekha and her own father.

The only innocent and plain Sita who has the courage to declare that the well water is not sweet. All other in the island come under the spell of her father's charms but Sita refuses to be hypnotized by his charms. (Maya), when all others are under his spell.

Sita's childhood experiences shatter her faith in life and in the goodness of the world. Her's is "a strange life" it does not offer her the freedom to grow and acquire her unique individuality but lets her "withdraw into the protective chrysalis of childhood for longer than is usual for most" (p63)

The Strangeness of Sita's behaviour and the uncertainty of her temperament which irk Raman, her Children and others is partly due to her insecure childhood. Sita spends her childhood in the midst of a crown and her girlhood in the midst of hypocrisy and partiality. She does not have a home to belong to. With all the bitter experiences she fails to feel personal involvement in life, with an individual, an idea or a group.

A family is the most important internal group to condition a person's interactions and relationship to himself and then to the others. One belongs to a family and belongingness gives him a feeling of personal involvement to the extent that one feels himself to be an integral and indispensable part of the system. Sita has bitter experiences in her childhood and girlhood, she feels discarded and unwanted when she sees her father's tenderness towards Rekha her step – sister

Sita a middle aged woman craves for liberty. She always has the feeling of being tied with a chain which can only throttle, choke and enslave.

B.RamchandraRao studies the novel as a dramatization of "the conflict between two irreconcilable temperaments, of diametrically opposed attitudes towards life

He says “The tragedy in where shall we go this summer / arises out of the inability of the characters to connect the prose and passion in their lives. They have lived only in fragments. The novel ends with a defeated and despondent Sita unable to rediscover the passion of life and deciding to accept the prose of life. But the book ends with the implicit comment that this need not have been the only ending. It could have turned out otherwise. Sita expects Raman to be like the lover, making her realise how valuable she is to him. Raman, however, does not honor the claim of her bargain, and the dream is never realized

Raman marries Sita out of pity and lust. When the initial stage of lust and pity wears off (like Shelley and Harriet West wedlock) Raman finds his mundane activities more fascinating and fulfilling.

Raman is a perfectionist; he shifts his energies towards business so that he can escape his intra-psychic and inter-personal conflicts.

Raman’s failure to recognize Sita’s self effacing drives and honour her capacity for surrender and love, injures her self image . Her hopes of getting Raman’s love are frustrated . She tells him once “ I thought I could live with you and travel alone- mentally, emotionally. But after that day, that wasn’t enough. I had to stay whole, I had to “ p 148.

Sita, here does not bother about self realization or individualization , she wants to feel her glorified self. Raman’s inability to honor her claims of love, impinges upon her pseudo self, she turns vindictive because her neurotic pride is hurt.

To restore her damaged self-esteem, she tries to attract attention by being plaintive, and complains of her unhappiness; secondly, she openly rebels against all social and familial norms in order to feel triumphant. She makes a verbal attack on the vegetable existence lived by the Women of Raman’s family, then she takes recourse to a more flagrant, disregard for their way of life by taking smoking, by shocking Raman’s family members, Sita enjoys a sense of superiority.

Raman is startled when Sita describes his business associates as animals.

They are nothing- nothing but appetite and sex . Only food, sex and money matters Animals “ p47

Coleman rightly observes: “ Destructive criticism and vindictive gossip are frequently only disguised methods of expressing hostility “ 2

Sita’s behaviour shows signs of violence intra personal conflict inside her, she finds fault with everyone, her children and husband. Her indulgence in verbal aggression and open criticism of others and her habit of smoking show her vengeance and sadistic impulse to hurt the sentiments and self respect social prestige of Raman.

The compulsive nature of Sita’s attitudes discloses itself in her neurotic fear of violence “ small incidents” of life – the boys fighting, Menaka tearing her paintings or crushing unawares the tender buds of a potted plant, Ayah’s brawling. Her strong reactions disturb and astound Raman. “If you are an adult you know how to cope with them- they are only small incidents “ p 37.

Raman is a successful businessman with a pragmatic view of life, he is sociable and extrovert and thinks only of the immediate present. Sita is an introvert foresighted , oversensitive , keen eyed, poetic and imaginative and has higher notions about life. These temperamental differences result in their marital discord.

Sita’s anxieties and neurotic fears make her terribly aware of the violence around her. She becomes intolerable, and feels that they are a threat to her identity and sanity. She, therefore, takes a refuge in the Manori Island. She is not able to accept violence in any form.

The crows described in the earlier part of the novel symbolize fear and destruction which evoke contempt and disgust in her mind as they “ formed the shadow civilization” p 38 . she is amazed to notice that “ the crows were used to a certain amount of opposition and aggression from the human population of the city; they could

tackle it ignore it, choking with laughter” Her failure to protect the helpless eagle from the attack of the crows, her husband’s comment. “ They’ve made a good job of your eagle” 41 .
Menaka’s indifference to life in plant she had been laboring to grow on the balcony” 45 , all make Sita anxious and “ unable to bear the sight of unthinking destruction anymore “ 45 it naturally clashes with her protective attitude. Needless to say, she impresses upon Raman the need to keep her baby safe.” I want to keep it – I don’t’ want it to be born p35

Sita’s unusual childhood is necessary to arrive at a proper evaluation of her character. As a motherless child, she experiences partially, neglected and uncertainties in her childhood.

Sita’s father neglects her completely, as he has no time for his children. A freedom fighter and a public figure, he is revered and admired by people. He is too busy, far off and formidable person for Sita to approach him with filial affection.

There is always an “impossibility of talk between Sita and her father “79

Sita’s father is so immersed in his self-glorification that he regards Sita and her brother Jivan as he considers his sycophant chelas and devotees. But, he certainly loves his eldest daughter Rekha.

The atmosphere in which Sita lives and grows, in her childhood is that of neglect, hypocrisy and partiality. She feels uneasy. She always questions herself. Why had how is it that there is no resemblance between the two sisters?

Conclusion

Sita feels discarded and unwanted (unwanted ness of 5th child), when she observes and notices her father’s tenderness towards Rekha.

This experience breeds a feeling of worthlessness, and its consequent strategy in rebelliousness.

When Sita’s brother Jivan discloses to her that Rekha is not their real sister crops on her “ Skin Like Acid and she felt them burn whenever she caught an exchange of that heavy lidded look between father and daughter, or his arm in its five while sleeve lie fondly across her round shoulders “ 79

Sita cannot digest her father’s dubious ways. It seeps down her psyche as a bad human experience. Her world is with people who are hypocrites- the islanders and the chelas. Deedar, Rekha and her father.

The only sane and innocent voice is that of Sita who has the courage to declare that the well water is not sweet. The environment in which she lives is injurious. It shatters her faith in life and in goodness of the world.

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