

**Alienation and Reconciliation in Anita Desai's Where Shall We Go this Summer**

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**Abstract:**

Anitha Desai is one of the novelists who became popular with her feminist perspective. She also brought fame to Indian writings in English, as the modern Indian English Novelist who took Indo-English novel a step ahead. Desai's characters have complex emotional problems stemmed from the chaotic environment encircling them. *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, is her fourth novel, the plot is narrated from the female protagonist's point of view. Sitha the female lead of the novel has emotional and adjustment problems with her husband Raman. She could not get herself acquainted with the practical and urbanized life of Bombay. She has a problem with her husband's relatives and friends. Unable to adapt herself to the metropolitan life, she goes back to her father's island Manori, finally she reconciles with life. The alien feeling is evinced with emotional strength.

**Keywords:** Alienation, maladjustment, emotional stress, reconciliation

Anitha Desai stands in the forefront among women novelists who gave recognition to Indian English Writing. Her novels are replete with contemporary life and the plot mirrors the chaotic and emotionally maladjusted lives of the protagonists. A deep insight into the study of her novels reveals the truth that her novels are experimental and out and out original reflecting complex emotional state of the characters portrayed in the novel. She seems to have paid much attention to sketch the roots of the problem and also suggested a solution to the problem. Her deft handling of the plot shows her balanced and nonchalant attitude towards life. Tripathy rightly says “she possess one of the healthiest and psychologically most balanced minds in the realm of Indo-Anglican fiction and the sanity of her tastes and attitudes, is almost exemplary, a point worth emulation for her fellow religionists in the field of writing.

Anitha Desai, though she does not claim to be a feminist, she has given much importance to the complex emotions of her female lead, the concerns, fears and motifs of her characters in her realistic style which involves much skill and expertise. She seems to have delved deep into the social structure. In *Where shall we go this Winter*, she has taken her lead roles from the epic Ramayana, only the names resemble, while the characters have transformed completely into modern scenario. She is a very careful observer of human nature, her excellence lies in the tact with which she delineates minute aspect of female conscience. The lucid diction and the poetic style she employs to picture the predicament of her heroines make her stand stern as feminist writer.

Anitha Desai, stands apart from her contemporary novelists such as R.K.Narayan, Mulkraj Anand, Bhabani Battacharya, Raja Rao, etc., in the selection of theme as well as in the depiction of the plot. She has carved a niche for herself in the feminist aspect of her novels. Her first novel *Cry, the Peacock* came as an experiment from the usual novel writing style. It brought her instant recognition as a writer with substance. Of all her contemporary Indian English novelists, she is indisputably the most popular and powerful novelists. She has made a commendable contribution to the Indian English fiction. She is a novelist of urban milieu and is a fine mixture of Indian, European and American sensibilities. She writes instinctively

as if writing is an urge for her.

Writing is a process of herself discovery to go deep into the complexities of existence. She does not reflect on social issues in her works, like Mulk Raj Anand. She sees social realities from a Psychological point of view and does not look them as a social reformer or a moralist. Her main concern is to depict the psychic state of her protagonist as a crucial juncture of their lives. She creates a limited world by observing minutely what is going on around her.

Where shall we go this Summer, is her fourth novel, it reflects the world of female protagonist Sitha, her emotional state, her alien feeling and her estrangement with her husband Raman, her intrigue with her life as she was unable to adjust herself with her husband's relatives, friends and their own children. This novel makes the reader to engross himself and to empathize with the female protagonist. Her suppressed anger and her revolt as a passive partner, is obviously reflected. Rather a short but thought provoking novel, consists of four parts, viz., Monsoon '67, Winter '47, Monsoon '67, each part is concerned with the particular season, space and time.

Where shall we go this summer, is a psychological narration of the emotional ambiguity of the heroine Sitha. The first part reveals the unfolding of the plot, the present life of sitha, on the island of Manori, while the second section of the novel takes the readers back to the past life of Sitha and the last part reflects the reconciliation of sitha with all the odds of her life. Sitha is hyper sensitive, highly inflammable that is rebellious, intellectual and freedom loving.

All these qualities of her made her incompatible with her practical more rational husband Raman. As a freedom lover, she could not come to terms with the patriarchal society in which she is living. Caring and sharing her love with her four children, pregnant for the fifth time, she feels isolated and alienated. She could not tolerate the indifference and violence in everyday life. Her inability to adjust with the society and

inability to lead the normal course of life made her abnormal, and feel alienated which is natural and dispositional. Unimaginative ways of her children and her husband made her insane, as an outcome she alienates herself to her own world which consists of inner and outer isolation. Isolation leads to monotony.

She is unable to articulate the fact that this is all life; live stream has to go on continuously involving self with other people and her own people, failing which she has to face the problems of self. Similar to the character of Gautama, Maya's husband in Cry, the peacock, Raman, also fails to understand Sitha. As R.S. Pathak, rightly analyses, "the marital discord results chiefly from the dichotomy between two irreconcilable temperaments and diametrically opposite view point's represented by Sitha and her husband Rama. (28)

The part one of her novel reveals the emotional ambiguity with which Sitha, is suffering, her main reason to visit Manori is to find a way to keep her child unborn. The reason she gives is that she is frightened to give birth to the child in this otherwise dull and mundane world pregnant with wickedness and destruction. She appears to have forgotten the fact that she is destructing the life of the unborn child. Dr. T. Vasudeva Reddy, rightly points out," The novelist's incapacity in lending credibility to the complex character of Sitha is clearly discernible in the striking clash of her behavioural patterns.

She who does not tolerate her daughter Menaka crumbling a sheaf of new buds is now unequivocally prepared to crush the baby in the womb and not to let the baby be born". Part two of the novel, brings the past life of Sitha which throws light on her paranoia, she spent her childhood with her father in a spacious house in Manori. He was revered by people as he was a freedom fighter, finally when freedom was achieved he got himself settled in Manori. Her legendary father took care of his children when Sitha's mother had deserted them. She was subjected to partiality when her father used to shower his overwhelming care on her sister Rekha, while Sitha did not get even a single drop of her father's concern.

She always doubted her intimacy with her sister, when she found the truth that Rekha is not her sister, from her brother Jivan her pain was unbearable. “.....his words had dropped on her skin like acid. (79) Her childhood was a nightmare which haunts, her psychological complexities had their roots in her childhood, deprived of father's concern, she is alienated from her sister and brother, loveless childhood leads to psychic disorder. Her loveless past made her to long for pampering from her husband, who was fondling their children.

Sitha secretly wanted to be fondled by her husband, like her kids, she even gets jealous of her children. Raman, who was not aware of the psychic disorder of his wife, never knew this. Bewildered he always tried to show his love passively, he warns her not to go to Manori, and to stay in a place where medical aid is available. For those who expect love in the measure of an ocean can never be satisfied with a cup. Broken marriage breaks all the relationships and as a result she alienates herself.

The third part brings the readers to the present, from the flash back which the second part takes. As she was living alone with her children to fulfil her love for being alone, this lonely life on lonely island also became monotonous. Her initially love and belief that the island will work wonders with her life in the light of past where she had memories of her past, slowly wanes. Menaka, her daughter who could not get used to her life in this remote island, and who wanted to go back to the much loved metro life at Bombay, secretly writes to her father asking him to take them back. Raman comes to take them.

She refuses; Raman tries to enlighten the reality that life has to go on. “.....life must be continued, and all its business..... why can't you? Perhaps one should be grateful if life is only a matter of disappointment, not disaster.”(143)

Anitha Desai tried to portray the conflict in Sitha's life symbolically with an image of a crowd of crows attacking an eagle, which is wounded or perhaps it is too young to fly. Sitha's sensitivity and Raman's practicality had been successfully

portrayed. Raman says “they’ve made a good job of your eagle. Look at the feathers sticking out of that crow’s beak.” Raman and Sitha are poles apart, scientifically, opposite poles attract each other while realistically opposite poles repel. Finally, Sitha reconciles to her future.

When Raman tries to drive the point that her misgivings had ruined their family life, she tried to connect herself with reality. Sitha’s complex behaviour made Raman perplexed, when he asks if she still does want the child, she shouts at him, initially she herself did not want the child, distraught Raman finally makes her understand her mistakes. “She lowered her head and searched out his footprints so that she could place her feet in them (150) Sitha’s character has been moulded in terms of modern women, who tries to escape from reality, and later reconciles to the present. The ending is positive at least when compared to Maya, of the Cry, the Peacock, where she commits suicide.

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