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## ANITA DESAI'S NOVEL: WHERE SHALL WE GO THIS SUMMER? - A FEMINISTIC PERSPECTIVE.

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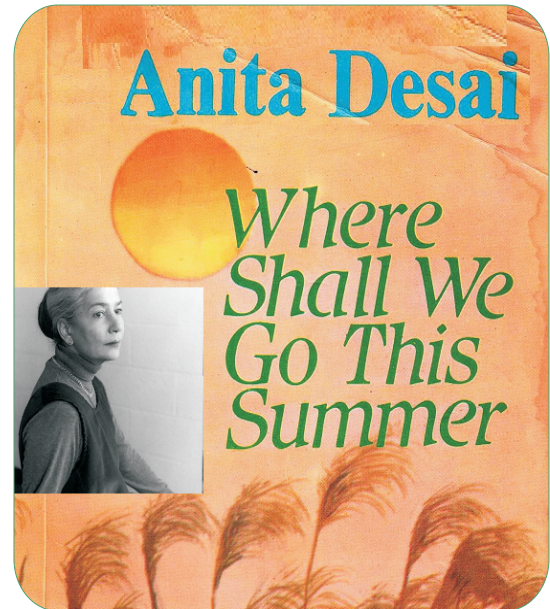
### ABSTRACT

**F**eminist criticism, basically, is a new trend of thinking about literature. This new wave is no longer a new wave and is common in recent times that every critic writes about feminist view of all possible literary works. So it has lost its ability to jolt readers and is acknowledged inside the critical tenet as a valued approach to literature. The history behind its success reminds one of what F.R. Lewis wrote in 'Retrospect' to New Bearings in English Literature. It illustrates how "when resistance to the new thing collapses, the readjustment is affected and the world made safe again."...<sup>1</sup>

**KEYWORDS :** Anita Desai's Novel, literature, Women realized, society.

### INTRODUCTION:

Oxford Dictionary defines feminism as 'The advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes'. Although feminism came into existence long ago, there is no evidence for it. In 1948 first women's conference was held in Seneca Falls, America. Abolition of slavery, Social Purity and Temperance movements were the issues discussed in the conference. Women realized that it wasn't easy to change the society and its ways. Society cannot be transformed overnight and so they have to unitedly fight for their own rights. Women recognized that campaigning was limited whilst women could not make their voices heard directly. Women fought for suffrage. As the movement took pace and a mass of women workers contributed during war, the Government was forced to grant limited suffrage, a 'Crucial Landmark in the History'. Anita Desai is one of those few Indian authors who have tried to understand women and depict predicament of female characters. Her forte is the quest of sensibility and her writings explore inner realities and psychic echoes of characters. Anita



Desai once said that "She is interested in peculiar and eccentric characters rather than every day average ones". She prefers psychological approach while writing her novels. She presents an explanation to the long smothered wait of a lacerated psyche.

'Where Shall We Go This Summer?', Portrays the painful vacuum in the life of Sita by analyzing her life as a woman, a wife and a mother. Sita the protagonist is a very complex, extremely emotional woman, who is a mother of four children and is expecting her fifth child. She is unable to connect with her husband and her children. Her husband is a practical minded, unromantic person and both their natures are poles apart. Her husband's visage is devoid of all emotions and she compares it to a locked gate. He is unable to comprehend her sensibility and explosive emotionality and due to this she looks aged, with a 'dry, worn face'. She was very depressed and due to this she has no

control over her emotions and broke down quite often.

Sita, the protagonist is portrayed as an eccentric woman, who most of the time lives in the world of fantasy. She is bored with her life. To Sita marriage and human relationships are farce. The novel stresses upon the theme of alienation of Sita from the world of horror and hypocrisy Sita is emotionally and spiritually alone throughout the novel. She fails to communicate her inner feelings with her family. Sita seeks solace to her boredom, in her world of fantasy. The plot is not given much importance. It is only a tool to analyze Sita's emotions.

The physical journey of Sita, from Bombay to Manori and Manori to Bombay is symbolic. Sita's journey towards Manori, is symbolic of her escape from the world of reality. and her journey towards Bombay suggests her reconciliation with the world. This is the major theme of the novel. The author has divided the novel into three time bound divisions. 'monsoon 67' where the protagonist talks about her present and immediate past. 'Winter 47' this section is where Sita talks about the frozen details of her life, the remote past, her childhood up to marriage. 'Monsoon 67' This section is where she comes out of the fantasy world and accepts reality. She comes out of her past, to the present and goes to the future. The author has chosen an idyllic setting, Manori Island. M.K.Naik equals this symbol to that of lost paradise in 'The Tempest'. The poem of C.P. Cavafy keeps on recurring to Sita's mind and we can call it a recurring theme where Sita is trying all through to say 'no' to her marital life.

"Sita state is the representative of the alienation of a woman, a wife, a mother—a loneliness conditioned by family and society. Sita's psychic perturbations are the perceptible outcome of an encounter between the hypocritical world and her inherent honesty that repels any such compromise. Marital incoherence clearly strikes us in the present novel. Sita is transformed from an ordinary wife and mother into a creature who lost all feminine, all maternal trust in childbirth, all faith in it and began to be afraid of it as yet one more act of vehemence and murder in a world that had more of them in it than she could take."...<sup>2</sup>

Sita's father had settled down in Manori, after Independence. His character is something of an enigma. He tries to bring about certain changes in the lifestyle of the villagers. People gradually come to believe that he has some divine power and can cure diseases. All the people consider him as a demi God. Sita does not like her father's behavior. She is of the opinion that all he does is farce. She recalls his words which he said when he landed on Manori "I always wanted to find a village which I could put my social theories into practice. I have been theorizing for too many years. I should like to experiment now. Manori will be perfect." These words give her impression that all he does is some kind of an experiment on the villagers. A tinge of jealousy is expressed by her because her father likes her step sister Rekha more and is always fond of listening to her music. One gets a feeling that her father is not interested either in her or her brother Jeevan. Her father's neglect and mother's desertion has made Sita lonely. When he ladled the first waters of the well, she found it bitter while all others found it sweet. She confessed to its awful taste to Jeevan and fest contrite all night, for her betrayal, her father to find the well water sweet. She dislikes his encouraging people of Manori to consider him as a demi God. When, Phoolmaya, a childless woman begets a child, she suspects something evil about it.

Whatever his intentions are he was doing something good to the society. She once says that while her father preaches the villagers against idol worship he himself likes to get garlanded. When she sees her father use her mother's jewels to prepare medicines, she is shocked. In her book Nimmi Poovayya says "The father's use of crushed jewels has two fold implication. He is symbolically avenging himself on the wife who had dared to defy him by running away, thus placing her actual passion outside the orbit of his control; Simultaneously he is using the jewelry to enamor the women folk of Manori even more firmly in his power." She longs to find out more about her mother but was afraid of questioning her father. She assures herself that she could not find her father alone. She tries to think of the occasions when her father was affectionate to her. She could recollect one two such incidents but refused to think deep and accept the fact that he was actually showed her his affection.

After her father's death when Raman comes to take her with him, Sita looks back from the boat and

then thinks that " He had been a wizard, he had cast an illusion as a fisherman casts a net, with faintest susurrations of warning, upon a flock of fish in the sea. His chelas were the first to be caught, then the villagers, most inescapably the women. His wife had torn a hole in the net and escaped into the dark depths of the ocean. The others he had held in his net and smiled upon, most inscrutably. Fed them with pearls, caressed their long hair, fondled their fingers, whispered magic chants into their ears and then as he lay dying, released them, saint like into their nactive sea."

She was probably looking for a father figure. She was longing for security and she thought she would get it from Raman. Raman being a business man could not devote his time to Sita as much as she wished. When she could not get the father's affection and husband's love from him, she was unhappy. Being introvert she couldn't express her absolute feelings. She gave vent to her emotions by being insolent, supercilious and outrageous. So Raman took her away from the joint family to an independent flat. She could never be happy and her discontent increased. Since Raman was not aware of her feelings he took her for granted. She has had four children before. She considered them a 'large placid joy of glazed satisfaction.' Sita was expecting her fifth child. Now she was not happy with the fifth one which was on its way. She retaliated by smoking continuously. She hates Raman and hates him for considering her a baby making machine. She considers the world as an unfit place for a child. She seems to have become insane. Her loneliness, her alienation from the society has caused an existential problem. She has no mind to compromise her principles with the marriage. She is suffocated in the claustrophobic institution of marriage. This changes her into a woman who lost all feminine all maternal belief in child birth, all faith in it and began to fear in it as yet one more act of violence and murder in a world that had more of them in it than she could take."

Sita out of the blue informs her husband that she does not to give birth to this fifth child. She is shocked at his suggestion of abortion. Sita doesn't want to give birth to the baby nor does she want to abort it. She just wants the baby to remain safely in her womb. Raman fails to understand this irrational behavior of Sita. She does not want to accept the realities of the world. The author depicts this nature of her in the scene where she tries to protect a young eagle from a flock of crows. When the eagle was tired of defending, it just was quiet and still. She considers herself to be the eagle and people around her to be the crows. She does not want to accept the death of the eagle. To keep her fantasy alive, she goes to Manori island against her husband's wishes, taking with her, her two younger children Menaka and Karan.

Manori, the island where her father's magic worked. It's the place where she spent the best part of her childhood fantasizing. Manori, is a place of awe, magic and mystery. She has this feeling that the magic of her father might work once more and restrain the natural biological process of childbirth. Bombay the steady land is a symbol of fantasy. The reality-fantasy dichotomy is recurring theme. She reversed to the world of fantasy from a real world once before and now again she has come back to the real world again. But her dreams were shattered when she saw the dilapidated house and the dire state of the village. This shock brings back her the memories of the past. The people, who respected and worshipped her father, do not consider her a suitable daughter to such a great man. The magic is gone. As the author says "The cold remains of the bonfire her father had lit here to a blaze. Ashes white and waste, that lay as casually as sand on a beach"

Her children are not happy with the island. They are bored of the constant rain. Menaka spends her time sketching and later tearing them. Sita wants her daughter to be an artist. She is surprised at her daughter's behavior. Menaka tells her that she is sketching only because she has nothing else to do. She wants to join a medical college. Karan is also bored of the island. She thinks of her baby as a fish. She is affected by the jelly fish that she sees in the sea. It reminds her of the child, helpless and alive, swimming inside. Sita's rational mind knows that her wish cannot be fulfilled but her irrational mind takes an upper hand and keeps her fantasy still alive.

When Raman arrives she is irritated but happy at the same time. When she learns that he has come at Menaka's behest, to take her back and get her admitted to the medical college she is her old self again. She again has an argument with him. She tells Raman that the happiest moment in her life was when she saw a couple in the park where the man was looking at her with an expression of love, and that expression made her

happy. Their love signified life. She is trying to convey that love transcends life and death. It is something eternal. She is trying to convey Raman that pretenses and hypocrisy causes unhappiness. Sita finally tells Raman that she was not a coward like mother who deserted her family and when in search of that fiery happiness which she herself is longing to experience.

She is ready to return and is packing. She now even envisages herself in the hospital bed. Sita has finally resigned herself to lead a normal life and give birth to her child.

Sita's mother had deserted her family and gone away seeking true love and happiness. When Sita comes to Manori she realizes why her mother deserted the family. She feels that life is only a pretense in a loveless relationship. She wants her husband to understand her state of mind and why she behaves the way she behaves. Sita realizes that her husband is not even aware that she is unhappy all the time. He is surprised that she is unhappy when she has no monetary problems, she is provided well by him. Raman is of the opinion that if a person gets all the material comforts then the person must be happy. He is shocked to know that Sita was never happy, and wonders why she couldn't be normal like others and lead a normal happy life like all those millions of people in Bombay. Sita on the other hand feels the futility of relationships without love and understanding. Sita wants to say no to her relationship, 'even if it crushes her for the rest of her life.'

'Anita Desai describes the intense feelings of her characters and portrays their inner psyche with the use of symbolism which appears to play an important part in her novels. In this novel, Desai's characters suffer from various complexes and psychic diseases. Anita Desai show her depth in human nature by delineating the gradual change of trait into a psychic block which undertakes the form of a disease, making her characters neurotic.'...<sup>3</sup>

The novel depicts a mismatched marriage. Sita is longing to be loved by her husband. She wants him to understand her feelings and act accordingly. Her psychic perturbations are the direct outcome of a clash between the hypocritical world and her inherent honesty that resists any such compromise. She is for separation but lacks courage to actually let go her family and lead an independent life. She is constantly made to feel that she is nothing without her family and she is unable to lead an independent life.

### CONCLUSION:

The novel depicts a mismatched marriage. Sita is longing to be loved by her husband. She wants him to understand her feelings and act accordingly. Her psychic perturbations are the direct outcome of a clash between the hypocritical world and her inherent honesty that resists any such compromise. After realizing that Sita was unhappy all the while and the actual reason for her unhappiness is the lack of love and understanding. Sita does come out of her fantasy life and gets ready to go back to the real world, the world which according to her is farce. A thin ray of hope is also seen when we learn that Raman intends to visit the island once more during the vacations. This might be a sign of understanding, by Raman.

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