

# Exploration of the female psyche in Anita Desai's *"Where Shall We Go This Summer"*

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**Abstract**-Anita Desai's novel "Where Shall We Go This Summer" (1975) is a thought-provoking exploration of the female psyche, delving into the complexities of human emotions, relationships, and the inner lives of women. The novel revolves around the story of two sisters, Tara and Raha, who embark on a journey to the Himalayas, seeking spiritual enlightenment and a deeper understanding of themselves.

Through the characters' experiences, Desai masterfully captures the intricacies of the female psyche, revealing the struggles, desires, and insecurities that women often face. Here are some key aspects of the female psyche that the novel explores: The novel is a journey of self-discovery for both sisters. Tara, the older sister, is struggling to come to terms with her own identity and sense of purpose, while Raha is grappling with her own desires and aspirations. Their experiences in the Himalayas serve as a catalyst for their growth and self-awareness. The novel highlights the complex relationships between women, particularly between sisters. Tara and Raha's bond is multifaceted, with moments of tenderness, rivalry, and dependence. Desai skillfully portrays the ways in which women can both support and undermine each other. The novel explores the full range of human emotions experienced by women, from joy and hope to despair and frustration. Tara's emotional struggles with her husband's infidelity and her own sense of inadequacy serve as a poignant reminder of the emotional turmoil that women often face. The novel raises questions about the tension between independence and dependence in women's lives. Raha's desire for independence and autonomy is contrasted with Tara's more traditional roles as wife and mother. This dichotomy highlights the societal pressures that women face in navigating their roles. The Himalayan setting provides a backdrop for exploring themes of spirituality and personal growth. The novel suggests that spirituality can be a means of transcending societal expectations and finding one's true self. Desai's portrayal of women's experiences challenges traditional notions of femininity. The novel highlights the ways in which societal expectations can constrain women's lives, while also

celebrating their strength, resilience, and capacity for growth.

**Key Words**- feminist, empowerment, liberation discrimination

## INTRODUCTION

Feminist ideas, woman empowerment, liberation of woman from social, cultural, economic, familial and other entanglements are some of the significant issues of the contemporary Indian society. Many of the contemporary Indian writers have dealt with these issues in their writings.

Anita Desai, one of the important writers of contemporary Indian Writing in English, has contributed her own women characters who represent this trend in Indian society. She is the author of several award-winning novels and has been honoured with many prestigious awards. Her novels delve deep into the psyche of the present day Indian women, to explore their sensibility in a realistic manner. She has given a new dimension to the feminist novels by shifting the focus from the external to the internal freedom. She has explored the workings of the female psyche in order to bring forth the sense of betrayal that many women are experiencing. Her novel "Where Shall We Go This Summer" deals with the feelings of Indian women living in the drab, insensitive atmosphere of a cosmopolitan city that does not provide any opportunity for women to nurture their own inner Self. Her novel, 'Where Shall We Go This Summer' brings forth the inward journey of its protagonist Sita. Sita is a middle aged woman with four children carrying the fifth one. She lives in a flat in Mumbai with her husband Raman, leading a comfortable life. Being a sensitive woman, Sita feels like a fish out of water in the dry and heartless atmosphere of her city. If she tries to escape from this situation through her journey to Manori, the island where she had spent her childhood. This outer journey is symbolic of her inward

movement –that eventually leads to her spiritual freedom. In Manori, Sita re-experiences her childhood, her experiences of her charismatic seer-like father, whom the people there still remember with reverence ,as also ,her sister who used to sing with a golden voice. She also recalls her brother who had left the place even before the death of her father, to become a famous journalist.

During her stay in the remote island, Sita could provide, for herself, a place of her own and leisure time, to delve deep into her own psyche, into her own inner self. Thus she pays attention to her hitherto neglected inner Self. Through her recollections the reader is made to understand the reason for her depression, which has its roots in the lack of attention towards her own Self. She finds how her own inner Self is ailing and needs her care and attention

During this inwardly rewarding period Sita recounts the so called small incidents in her husband's place, that nevertheless had left a lasting scar on her psyche. One such incident was when she had spent a whole afternoon on the terrace trying to save a wounded eagle from the crows waiting to attack it. As she remembers it, ``... it was an exceptionally cruel drama that had aroused the crow world outside and made them churn the air, joyfully screeching, and then lash with rapacious claws and beaks at something that lay struggling ... below their balcony .... she made out ... – that the tortured creature crawling unshaded in the hot sun was an eagle ,wounded or else too young to fly.”<sup>1</sup> The cruelty of the situation is brought out in a picturesque manner ; `` With glee the crows whistled ...---they laughed and rasped as they whipped it with their blue-bottle wings and tore into it with their sinister beaks .It rose weakly ,tried to crawl into the shelter of the wall's shadow and its wings ,leaf-red, scraped the concrete ,then its head, gold-beaked, fell to one side.” ( W G S ) p.35. When she was desperately trying to save the eagle with her son's toy gun, her elder sons declared it dead and went into their room. Menaka, her daughter, coming home from a visit to a friend, just shrugged her shoulder and went inside her room feeling irritated at her mother's foolish sentimentality. She maintained that this was one of the acts of drama created willfully by her mother to embarrass her family. Next day, Sita's husband had teased her that the crows might have had a sumptuous meal of her eagle. `` They have made a good job of

your eagle ‘’, he had said, coming out with his morning tea. ` Look at the feathers sticking out of that crow's beak ‘’, he had laughed. She was shocked at the insensitivity of it all. Similarly, in another such incident, Sita was deeply shaken when her daughter was carelessly nipping at the tender buds while casually talking to her mother. Sita was shocked, again, at the way her daughter was doing it, without even being aware of what she was doing. In another incident, her daughter had torn recklessly, the beautiful painting she had painted herself. Watching her daughter beautifully engrossed in painting, Sita had felt so happy, but very soon her daughter had destroyed it without a second's thought. Sita, being very sensitive, is shocked at this kind of destructive behavior another similar incident, Karan her youngest son was fighting with his brother, not out of anger or any such feeling, but because they do such `dishum' in the films. Many such instances, like when Sita encounters the fight between her servant Rosie and some other servants of the neighbourhood, or when her two maid servants were quarreling in the kitchen,---all indicate the insensitivity of the people involved .These `trivial ' incidents ,in a way lead to her decision to escape from this place of destruction, where all fine humane feelings and emotions are completely destroyed . She decides not to give birth to her baby in this place of destruction. She tells her husband that she wants to escape from this madness. She says. ``It's all a madness – the boys acting out that scene from the film they saw , fighting each other on the floor ; Menaka and her magazines and the way she has torn all those drawings of hers I'd kept so carefully ; the ayahs taking Karan to that – roadside dump where all the ayahs sit and gossip and fight ; the way you laughed because I tried to keep the bird alive ; the people here all around us , living here, all around....”(WGS ,p,32 ) That is why ,she says , she has decided to go to Manori ,to escape from this cruel and heartless life. As a typical practical husband, Raman finds it madness, on her part, to go to a remote island. While Sita is an embodiment of sensitivity, sentimentality and empathy, Raman stands for practicality, cleverness and worldly wisdom. For him Sita's behaviour seems mad, and he can never understand her feelings. He cannot even think that his sane life may seem mad to someone. Sita puts her foot down to go to Manori and eventually goes there along

with her daughter Menaka and her youngest son Karan. Her journey to the island and her sojourn there, are full of difficulties and challenges. She however does not give in, and stays there And this is symbolic of her inner journey toward inner awareness and freedom. During her stay there, she achieves an understanding of her inner self and attains spiritual freedom

Sita's symbolic stay in the island also makes her aware of the familial and social bonds that bind her to the life in Mumbai. Realising that it is not possible to break those bonds, she agrees to return to her comfortable life when Raman comes to take them back to Mumbai. Sita who had earlier refused to give birth to her child in a place of destruction of sensitivity, agrees to the same. She has gained enough inner strength and confidence after experiencing the spirit of life in the remote island Her. On the face of it, she has not attained any thing by going to the Remo remote and. But the novel has deeper layers of meaning. Her metaphorical sojourn in the island has helped her to steel herself against all odds of life and to assert her own will, whatever may be the place of her stay. Her inner journey towards the inner awareness has given her the strength to overcome the sense of loneliness and depression that she was suffering from. She thus emerges as an empowered woman at the end of the novel. Thus, though apparently, she seems to be no better than earlier, yet in reality she has attained the Spiritual freedom, the most important of all other kinds of freedom. Thus, the novel has successfully explored the female psyche through the story of Sita, a typical sensitive Indian woman.

#### REFERENCE

- [1] Desai, Anita. *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (New Delhi. Orient Paperbacks ,1982. p.35. All subsequent references to the novel in the paper are to this edition.