



The Theme of Psychological Violence in Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer*

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Abstract

Violence on women is a very serious issue across the globe. Physical violence, psychological violence against women is a matter of concern for all classes of women. Women have always been associated with the words like sacrifice, devotion, dedication, silence, sufferer, timid and adjustable. They have been an object of oppression and suppression in the male dominated society and Indian women suffer from identity crisis and everyday they struggle to prove their identity in the family and society. My research paper examines violence faced by the female protagonist *Sita* in the novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* by prominent writer Anita Desai. It is an attempt to understand the psyche of a woman who is facing psychological violence and the reasons which are responsible for violence on women like inharmonious relationship between husband and wife, male dominated society and the rejection of woman by her family as projected by the writer Anita Desai in her novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer*. This paper also observes patriarchy as the source of violence in the novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer*.

Keywords: psychological violence, women psyche, patriarchy, rejection, female sensibility

Introduction

Anita Desai is one of the most renowned writer in Indian English literature. She is known for her extraordinary work on the psyche of the women in Indian context. The novels of Anita Desai mainly deals with the female sensibility. She beautifully draws the complex mind of a woman on pages who

struggle for her existence in the family and society at the same time tries to keep everyone happy from her side.

Anita Desai experiments with the feminine consciousness in her novels. Female protagonists in the novels of Anita Desai are based on the keen observation of Indian women in the society who faces the problems in her daily life. The works of Anita Desai mainly deals with the human realization. She is concerned with the oppressed introvert female characters clutched in the hands the male dominance. To give the readers a real picture of the characters and the situations Desai uses the techniques like stream of consciousness and the interior monologues. She narrates the flow of thoughts in mind of the characters. She dives into the mind of the characters to bring out the underlying truths.

The culture of India has influenced Anita Desai's novels. She saw the sufferings and mental anxiety of Indian women and experienced the traumatic situations faced by women in Indian society. Her characters like *Maya* and *Sita* are the mirror image of an Indian woman who is struggling for her identity. Though her characters are fictional but the situations faced by them and settings, surroundings are based on the reality as observed by Anita Desai. The characters in her novels slowly but surely take their own shape. The characters from Anita Desai's novels are the mirror image of her own thoughts. Anita Desai every time experiments with her characters. The characters in her novels are not usual they are driven to be they way they behave unusually. Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is a tale of uncontrollable conditions that leads to psychological violence against women. This doesn't stop with the mental torture but it gets continually into the form of access mental pressure which leads the female protagonist to behave abnormally.

The purpose of this research paper is to present the psychological violence faced by the female protagonist *Sita* in the novel *Where Shall We Go this Summer?* and the various reasons responsible for it. Anita Desai has raised a voice and has started a revolution against the violence faced by women. This novel presents the psyche of women and her relation with her husband and other family members. In this novel the Anita Desai talks about plight of every Indian woman facing violence, through the voice of the protagonist *Sita*. The novels of Anita Desai represent the female sensibility. She writes about the house minded Indian woman surviving in the typical patriarchal society. In this novel Anita Desai has presented some incidents which show the condition of the woman facing psychological violence.

This novel is divided into three different parts; Monsoon'67, Winter' 47, Monsoon' 67. Each part of the novel shows the journey of *Sita*. First part of the novel deals with the present and past condition of *Sita*, the second part takes us to the flash back to the repressed childhood of *Sita* where the truth of her mysterious behaviour lies, and the last part of the novel shows the struggle of *Sita* at Manori,

where facing so many challenges she realizes that it not possible to live on the deserted island without her husband and her children, and her compromising with life again.

The protagonist *Sita* in the novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer* is in her forties, is a nervous, hyper sensitive woman who finds herself lonely, being with her husband and children because of her emotional reaction to many things that happen to her. The novel deals with the story of a middle aged woman and fatigue of her meaningless existence in the family. She feels neglected by her husband and her children. The psychological stress has driven her crazy to such an extent that now she has started considering the world as a cruel place.

Sita was unable to manage in the house of *Raman* and the surrounding of her house was very suffocative for her because she was confined to the four walls of the house. *Sita* feels frustrated with her monotonous life. While living in Mumbai with her family *Sita* could not adjust. She never tried to mingle with the other people. She hardly had any friends. In early years of her marriage she behaved provocatively. Bored of the daily household affairs all the time she started keeping herself away from all this. *Sita* started smoking and she used to stand in her balcony for hours alone. This type of unusual behaviour of hers started keeping her children and her husband away from her. “*Sita* took to smoking instead of eating, to staring about her in silence, to speaking provocatively” (Desai 44)

Gradually the conditions at Mumbai became so worst for *Sita* that she became a rebel and flew to Manori. *Sita* is expecting her fifth child and her in advanced stage of her pregnancy. A woman who is in advanced stage of her pregnancy cannot even imagine of leaving her house. But *Sita* being a rebel to the rules of the society dares to leave for Manori. *Sita* wanted to keep the child in her womb only and she wasn't ready to give birth to the child. According to her the world is not a good place for her child as it will snatch away the innocence of the child so she decided not to give birth to the child in this cruel world. She came to Manori to live there under the magic spell of the place as it will help her to keep the child unborn.

She expects that:

She saw that island illusion as a refuge, a protection. It would hold her baby safely unborn, magic [for she is in her advance stage of pregnancy]. Then there would be the sea – it would wash the frenzy out of her, drown it. Perhaps the tides would lull the children, too, into smoother, softer beings. The grove of trees would shade them and protect them. (Desai 91)

Anita Desai explores the world of *Sita*, who is alone and worried about the child in her womb. *Sita* represent the personality of an Indian woman which is very complex and multilayered. *Sita* wasn't ready to give birth to the fifth child because she thought that the act of giving birth to the child in this

condition would be an act of violence. She was very much disappointed by the surroundings near her where she was going through psychological trauma and living a life of isolation.

“By giving birth to the child now so safely contained, would she be performing an act of creation or, by releasing it in a violent, pain- wracked blood bath, would she only be destroying what was, at the moment safely contained and perfect?”(Desai 50)

Anita Desai has presented the island Manori as the symbol of psychological condition of Sita. The island was once very calm and cool as Sita was in her childhood but with the passing of time when *Sita* comes back after twenty years to the island she has become a wife and mother of four children. The thought process has changed now and so is with the island. The heavy rains and the tornados on the island represent the inner conflict of *Sita*'s mental state. At the same time the island also works as the source of motivation for Sita which motivates her to live life freely and to have identity of her own. *Sita* has faced the harshness of real life so she comes to Manori to find some peace but she fails to understand that the peace of mind and happiness lies within oneself. The condition of *Sita* is the result of temperamental mal- adjustment with her husband and children.

The inharmonious relationship between *Raman* and *Sita* is major factor that affected *Sita* psychologically. When she got married to Raman she expected love and care from him for which she longed from her childhood. But Raman being a businessman was so busy that he never met her expectations and this lack of love and care lead her towards edge of psychosis. Whenever *Sita* wants to explain her feeling, her fears with Raman, he always avoids her. When she disagrees with *Raman*'s suggestion to abort the child and she tries to explain *Raman* that she wants to keep it in her womb only, he calls her insane. Whenever *Sita* wants to express her in front of her husband what she never gets a positive response. It adds as a factor for distancing the husband and wife relationship. This kind of behaviour of her husband is a major factor of psychological violence. “All through their married life they had preferred to avoid a confrontation. All that they had done, he now saw, was to pile on the fury till now when it exploded.”(Desai 30)

The major reason of difference between both of them was their background and upbringing. Raman was a modernist and Sita was from a very traditional family and she was a neglected child so she had a repressed childhood. After the death of her father Sita immediately got married to her the son of her father's friend Raman who was Mumbai based person and was a modernist. Her encounter with Raman threatened her root of existence. There is a huge difference between *Sita* and *Raman*'s behaviour. Sita is hypersensitive and emotional, pessimist and introvert. *Raman* is a person of logic and accepts the values of the society. He is social person, more or less extrovert and sometimes very lethargic with the things. *Sita* is rebel and she doesn't live her life as the set pattern of society. *Raman* is unable to understand the frustration and boredom of *Sita*. *Sita* need his attention and love but he is

a person who doesn't care much about her and treats her as a mad woman. "I won't have the baby, 'she said, at first faintly, then defiantly. You're mad,' he said, simply." (Desai 50)

Raman was a businessman and was more social than *Sita*. People used to come to their flat but they were unacceptable to her. The people were friends, colleague, his business partners and visitors. But *Sita* never tried to mingle with any one of them. According to her people living in this society were like animals. All of them were concerned about only the materialistic things and the pleasures of life like money and sex. They are not really concerned for each other. "She calls them "animals" who are neither pet, nor wild beasts but "pariahs...hanging about drains and dustbins, waiting to pounce and bill and eat." (Desai 32)

He assumed that *Sita* is behaving like this because of her physical misery but he failed to understand that *Sita* was behaving this way because of the psychological stress she was going through. *Sita* started smoking whole night because of the disturbed mental state. This kind of the reaction of *Sita* was the result of her inharmonious relationship with *Raman*. *Raman* and *Sita* being parents of four children were not close enough to discuss their problems. Because of this difference in their nature *Sita* started behaving very aggressively. Anytime she starts shouting or screaming on *Raman*. He is very patient by his nature so he tries to manage the situation. *Raman* being a responsible husband tries to calm her down but it has no effect on *Sita*. Gradually the care and patience of *Raman* also goes.

Raman calls *Sita* a coward because he thinks that she doesn't have courage to face the real life situations and this is the reason she escapes to *Manori*. She doesn't think anything wrong about her decision to escape to *Manori*. She doesn't care about *Raman*'s opinion about her.

No, no, - dissertations, that's cowardly. I wasn't doing anything cowardly", she begged him to see, with a turbulence of pride. "I was saying No, but positively, positively, saying no. There must be some who say No, *Raman*! ...Perhaps I never ran away at all. Perhaps I am only like the jellyfish washed up by the waves, stranded there on the sand- bar. I was just stranded here by the sea, that's all. I hadn't much to do with it at all. (Desai 108)

After spending few days at *Manori* when *Raman* comes to the Island, *Sita* thinks that he has come to fetch her away and this was the end of her independent life at *Manori*. She didn't want him to come to her and take her away to mainland again but she felt heartbroken *Raman* tells her that he has come not for *Sita*, he has come to take *Menaka* for her admission in medical college. The fragmented relationship with her husband broke her from inside.

Rejection from Her Children a major reason of Psychological Violence:

In the beginning when *Raman* was unable to give proper time to *Sita*, she shifted her attention towards her children. She found self satisfaction in loving her children. Her children helped her releasing her restless energies. But gradually the behaviour of her children started changing. *Sita* started behaving abnormally and the children of course became scared of her behaviour and considered her as insane. The children separated themselves from her and they accepted the real world of their father in which there was no existence for *Sita*.

The rejection from her children is a trigger for psychological violence on women. *Sita* made an enemy of her children. In her views all of them were self-centred, and they never took interest in her. She wanted support of her children in the struggle of hers against the psychological violence she was going through. She never felt the warmth of the love her children.

In the early years of her motherhood she behaved normally but with the passage of time, the journey of her motherhood led her towards the bitter realities of life. As her children were growing up and they started understanding the conditions of their familial relations and they saw the weird behaviour of *Sita* with her husband, and with the other people in their social sphere. *Sita* who felt rejected and isolated herself in the middle of so many people behaved abnormally and this kind of behaviour of hers made her children hate her. She didn't like to be with her family members and she also started avoiding the guests at home. In her journey of her motherhood *Sita* came to know the bitter realities of life. With the passage of time she had lost her identity, existence and personality just for the sake of taking of her family but now she is left with is rejection from her husband and children and a meaningless existence in the family. "She was amused to turn from the album to the mirror and see the layers of experience and melancholy and boredom that had settled upon her face since then, like so much grey sand."(Desai 48)

She decided to go to Manori with her children *Menaka* and *Karan* but they didn't want to accompany her but were forced to join *Sita*. Even after reaching Manori they were constantly complaining about the things there. Manori was a deserted Island where, there is no medical facility or any other general facilities are available she decided to live there when she was about to give birth to a child.

She came to Manori after twenty years and expected it to be magical as it was before twenty years. Earlier she was trying to convince her children with the beauty of the place but she herself knew that this place was not worth living for her children. They have seen an urban and comfortable life and in Manori they didn't even have proper food to eat. While living a deserted life at Manori she expected her children to be with her at Manori but her children *Menaka* and *Karan* were not interested in living on the abandoned Island.

"It was clear that they accused her of every mishap and misfortune. Whenever she turned or looked up, she saw them staring at her ,watching her as though waiting for her to break down and admit failure."(Desai 95)

Listening to the complains of her children, living on a deserted island in such a heavy monsoon without the essential facilities, facing the hatred of the her children and of the villagers and taking the risk of being on such a abandoned Island in advanced stage of her pregnancy all these are the signs that she wanted to prove her decision right of coming to Manori but she herself knew that it wasn't. "It can't go on like this, it's impossible! She cried every day, several times a day, in a choked voice that fought speechlessness at the grotesquery of their situation."(Desai 95)

Menaka was mature enough to understand the conditions and her future at Manori. She finds out that there was no sense of living on the Island so she writes a letter to her *Raman* and urges him to come to Manori and take them away from here as she wants to take admission in medical college. When *Raman* comes on the Island and tells her about the letter of *Menaka*, *Sita* being so emotionally vulnerable took the letter incident as betrayal of *Menaka*. Watching her children very excited on *Raman*'s arrival to Manori Island She thought that they were being disloyal to her and the island. *Sita* felt cheated because of her expectations from her children, to support her decision, to live with her in adverse conditions.

The everyday situations presented in the novel displays the violence which is hidden in all regular activities and which is very natural in the novel. Some small incidents in the family deeply affected the psyche of *Sita*. As she was facing psychological violence she took each and every small thing as a negative object that affected her in a bad manner. The fall of the block tower made by *Karan* while playing or the *Menaka* tearing her drawing in long strips, and the image of a woman crying over the grave are very general things but *Sita* could relate herself with all these things. *Sita* is not able to bear the sight of the destruction of "new buds on the potted plant she had been labouring to grow on the balcony" (Desai 41) by her daughter *Menaka* who does it unconsciously, and the "lustful joy of throwing". *Sita* didn't like the way *Karan* pushed the block tower and was laughing over it. *Sita* compared her own downfall as an individual with the block tower. Anita Desai has presented the violence with various symbols in the novel which directly affected the psyche of *Sita* in a negative manner.

They all hammered at her wither cruel fists- the fallen blocks, the torn watercolours, and the headlines about the war in Vietnam the photograph of a woman weeping over a small grave, another of a crowd outside a Rhodesian jail; articles about the perfidy of Pakistan, the virtuousness of our India..They were hand-grenades all. (Desai 49-50)

She feels very disturbed when she find out that her sons are very much influenced by the cinemas, "hurled their bodies at each other as if they were made for attack and combat" (Desai40). They are even severe when she cries for stopping the game. She feels deeply sad that her children are strongly

overpowered by the desire to destroy. This is a common fight between children but Sita took it very seriously because of her over reaction to every small incident.

The crow incident presented in the novel is the perfect example of *Sita's* disturbed psyche. The crow act in front of her flat on every Sunday was too brutal for her that she started calling it "Black Theatre". Watching the brutal act of blood between the crows and eagles she starts screaming and shouting abnormally. The concept of life and death can be seen in this act and the reaction of Sita towards this act of violence was very sensitive and concerned.

"Crows formed the shadow civilization in that city of flats and alleys... There was always much black drama in this crow theatre-murder, infanticide, incest, theft, and robbery, all were much practised by these raucous, rasping tatterdemalions"(Desai 38)

The novelist here beautifully presented the act of violence on *Sita* through the crow scene. She compared Sita with the rebellious eagle. She was a rebel in nature but was getting a cruel treatment by people around her. The group of crows symbolises the society. When *Sita* tried to scare the group of crows with her son's gun and when the crows left that place shows the state of Sita as she was struggling against the violence and the death of the eagle symbolised her victory over Raman. "They have made a good job of your eagle," "Perhaps it flew away?" she cried, Knowing it had not (Desai 41). *Sita* was horrified with the act of crows and eagles. She could not accept the world full of brutality and violence. She feels "*Destruction came so naturally; that was the horror*". *Sita* was unable to tolerate that her action and existence was being unnoticed by her family members. *Sita* didn't want to live in the where the violence was so persistent.

The Indian society never accepts the rebels and especially a woman who goes against her father or husband and lives without him is generally not accepted positively by people. This rejection by her family and society is responsible for the stress and psychological violence against women. In this novel Anita Desai has skilfully projected the Indian patriarchal society and the orthodox people through various situations which are responsible for *Sita's* neurotic condition.

Anita Desai has beautifully presented the orthodox Indian society .In Indian society, woman after marriage is considered as a subordinate to her husband and she is expected to go out only with him and to agree with his opinion always. If a woman takes a decision to live alone after marriage people starts criticizing her without any reason. In the novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, also the rigid Indian society has been shown through the various characters and situations. The women are pressurised psychologically in the name of traditions and the culture.

Male dominance in the society is presented in the novel skilfully by Anita Desai in the novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer* incidents like, arrival of *Sita* at the Island without her husband was not accepted by the society and the childhood of *Sita* where she spent her life. *Sita's* arrival in Manori

and the negative reactions by her caretaker *Moses* and the villagers is a perfect example of the biased Indian society. *Sita's* decision to come to Manori wasn't supported by her own husband and children.

The arrival of *Sita* at Manori with her two children in her pregnancy was the big decision was taken by *Sita* and she expected that the place Manori and the villagers would love her. *Sita* wasn't welcomed at her own Manori Island and not even by *Moses* her caretaker and by the other villagers. The people of the Island weren't astonished that *Sita* was returning at the Island after twenty years. They expected that the elder daughter but to the surprise it was *Sita*. "So she is coming, the memsahib, Which one? The younger one of course, the elder one is too famous to come here."(Desai10)

After *Sita* arrives at Manori, *Moses* instead of asking about her life, asked about *Raman*, and this incident shows the male dominance over woman that the woman is supposed to be with her husband only. *Moses* observed the behaviour of *Sita* and children with each other, there were rifts and dissensions in the family and he felt that this was because they didn't have guidance of any male with them. This is a sign of an orthodox mind that woman alone can't handle the house and the children; she always needed a man to guide her and protect her.

In Indian patriarchal system the condition of every woman is like *Sita*. Before marriage a woman is known by the name of her father and after marriage by the name of her husband. In her childhood *Sita* was depended on her father and after marriage she was depended on her husband. Woman living under male dominance cannot imagine her life living without her father or husband. When *Sita* dares to leave for Manori and decides to live there without the support of her husband, she got criticized not only by the society but by her own husband and children. After spending some days at Manori she started facing challenges and the unwillingness of her children to live there with her. She came to Manori in search of mental peace but after her arrival Manori she became more frustrated. Gradually *Sita* also understood that her decision to coming Manori wasn't right. When she gets the news of *Raman's* arrival at Manori she feels happy and at the end she gets ready to go back to Mumbai for the sake of her children and family.

Her compromising with life and going back again to Mumbai is a perfect example of a woman's so called existence in the male dominant society. *Sita* who took her decision to keep her child unborn, to come to Manori, to live life in her own way but at the end of the novel *Sita* loses the battle against the patriarchal society. This is with every woman in Indian society, the woman can't take her decision and if she does so she keeps trying to prove it right in the male dominant society. Her lost identity, the so called existence and the sacrifices are major reasons of psychological violence on women.

Conclusion:

To conclude it can be said that the psychological violence faced by *Sita* is the result of various adverse conditions against her. Her mal-adjustment in the male dominated society and her fragmented relationship with husband and children leads her towards psychological trauma. *Sita* is a very complex personality and she represents every Indian woman who is stuck in the clutches of orthodox Indian society. Her life full of boredom, sluggishness, unfulfilled wishes and her search for the existence in the family drives her to escape to Manori. She escaped to Manori in search of peace and to live under the magic of the Island Manori and to find an answer to her problems but soon she realizes that the magic of that place was just in her imagination. The betrayal of her children and her husband makes her understand that her escape to Manori was nothing but it was a step full of cowardice. *Sita* was facing the mental trauma and *Sita* took years to get the confidence to react against the situations. *Sita* expected love and care from her father and after marriage from her husband but she longed for love and care till her last breath. The disenchantment from the island and *Raman's* concern for the family helps her to resolve her confusion about living on the Island. She realizes that avoiding the situations is not the solution but facing the realities of life with courage is the right way to solve the problems. Though she came on the island by her own decision but at last she admits that “She had escaped from duties and responsibilities, from order and routine, from life and city, to the unliveable island” (Desai 128). She came to know the value of being together with her husband and realized in order to achieve a strong relationship with her husband she have to adjust with the situations. *Sita* comes out as a mature woman and *Sita* chooses her family over her. Anita Desai has presented *Sita* as the victim of Indian patriarchal society where sacrifice and the adjustment with situations are expected from women only. *Sita's* mentality is also affected by the male dominated society where she realized that it was impossible for her survive without the support of her husband. . Therefore, she decides to surrender and goes back to Mumbai with her husband *Raman*.

Anita Desai's major concern is to depict the real condition of woman through her works and she has raised a voice against violence on women in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*. She presents a woman searching for her identity imprisoned in so called social bonds. Her novels present the effect of family relations and the social bonds on the psyche of woman. Anita Desai has given a voice to the silent sufferings of a woman facing psychological violence everyday and who doesn't dare to raise her voice against it through her novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer*.

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