

Research Article

“An analysis of Sita’s Existentialist Sensibility and Alienation in “Where Shall We Go This Summer?” by “Anita Desai” Where Shall We Go This Summer

S. Saranyadevi,

I M.A. English

Immaculate College for Women, Chinnakanganankuppam, Cuddalore.

Abstract

This paper focuses on deals with Where Shall We Go This Summer? It the fourth novel written by most prominent Indian novelist Anita Desai. This novel was which deals with women oppression, existence and also environmental factors. Anita Desai is a diasporic writer from India. She has been three times shortlisted for Booker prize. In this novel, she explores the deep understanding of human emotions. Especially the female characters of Anita Desai’s novels were more sensitive and struggle to overcome anxiety. In this novel, she used themes such as alienation, incertitude, existentialism, instinct and feeling. The primary focus of this paper is to bring out the existence of man in this world through Sita’s character.

Keywords: Existence, Alienation, women, Anxiety, family.

Introduction

Indian literature which is also referred to as Indian writing in English, is the amount of works produced by an Indian origin writers. India is a nation of diversity which has their own cultures, customs and beliefs in various part of India. The India Where Shall We Go This Summer?” with the themes of existentialist sensibility and a lie nation. Anita Desai whose original name is Anita Mazumdar was born in 1937 in Mussorie, India. She is an Indian novelist. She was born to a German mother and an Indian father. She was brought in Delhi.

She was well versed in three languages including English, Hindi and Urdu. She published her first story at the age of nine. She worked as a Professor of Humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Anita Desai's debut as a novel is where writers explored the magnificence and significance of their own state and circumstances. They also showed off the modern themes of urbanization, globalization, women's empowerment and the discrimination. The Indian writing began early with works of Michael Madhusudan Dutt followed by Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, R.K.Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao who have contributed the growth of Indian literature in the

1930s. Followed by the forerunners, Anita Desai is also a most important figure who expressed her thoughts on her works more lively and skillfully.

This research paper is going to analyse Anita Desai's novel “Where Shall We Go This Summer?” with the themes of existentialist sensibility and a lie nation. Anita Desai whose original name is Anita Mazumdar was born in 1937 in Mussorie, India. She is an Indian novelist. She was born to a German mother and an Indian father. She was brought in Delhi. She was well versed in three languages including English, Hindi and Urdu. She published her first story at the age of nine. She worked as a Professor of Humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Anita Desai's debut as a novelist was cry.

The Peacock which was published in 1963. Followed by voices in the city, fasting, feasting, where shall We Go This Summer? *Games at Twilight* was published. She was shortlisted for Booker prize for her third novel *Fasting, Feasting* which portrays the contrast between two cultures. In 1978, she received Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel *Fire on the Mountain*. Though she is a diasporic writer, Desai's novels are predominately set in India as she was immersed in Indian life.

She has a deep understanding of human emotions and life which was skillfully dramatized in her works. She mainly focused on the inner life of human primarily women, children and elderly.

Especially, the female characters of Anita Desai's novels were more sensitive and struggles to overcome anxiety. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is a novel published in 1975 which deals with the mundane life of Sita, the protagonist. It is generally considered as "the shortest existential novel" by the scholars. Sita, the protagonist who hangs between her married life and herself fulfillment or existence. It is also an environmental novel which cardinally contrasts between the life of modern day technopolis and conservative village life. The major themes employed in this novel are uncertainty, alienation, instinct, feeling, existentialist sensibility and explosive emotionality.

The structure of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is compared to Virginia Woolf's "To the Lighthouse" as it has three divisions such as Monsoon⁶⁷, Winter⁴⁵, and Monsoon⁶⁷. Each chapter has the title which represents season. This novel is also reminiscent of D.H. Lawrence's short story "The Woman Who Rode Away" which also deals with unspirited woman who escaped from her boredom life to self discovery and self acceptance.

Theory of existentialism

Existentialism is a theory or movement started after the Second World War. Due to the destruction of huge amount of people through holocaust and atomic war, some of the writers and philosophers started to witness the indifferent world which startled them. As a result, they were questioning about the existence of human beings which primarily led to existentialism. This philosophical movement is all about inquiring an individual freedom and choose what kind of freedom an individual have. Many theorists and philosophers presented their ideas about existentialism. Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish theologian and philosopher is known as the father of "Existentialism".

He believed that individuals find meaning in their own life rather than on society or religion. Some of the main existentialists are Franz Kafka, Jean-Paul Satre, Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir and Samuel Beckett. In the

theory of Existentialism, there are four basic concepts implies such as death, freedom, isolation and emptiness. According to existentialists, human beings spend their life in alienation, despair and absurdity. They do not understand that little things matters in the whole world. The main purpose of human beings is finding meaning when there is no meaning in their life. They should choose from worthless to fullest and live it passionately and sincerely.

Existentialists believed that the world is absurd so it is an individual's responsibility to give a meaning and freedom to their own world. The inability to identify purpose in one's life causes existential crisis. This paper will analyse how the protagonist Sita overcome the existential crisis.

Existential sensibility in Sita's life

Sita who is a sensitive, emotional and middle aged woman. She finds no genuine happiness in her married life. She was married to Raman who experienced a metropolitan city life where as Sita is from a conservative village where she under goes a happy and peaceful life. She gave birth to four children and she expected with her fifth child to be born. She revealed him with a quite paranoiac show of rage, fear and revolt. As a middle aged woman, this pregnancy led her to most depressed state yet she does not deny her fetus. However, she doesn't not want to give birth to her child in the city which is surrounded only with pollution, chaos and a rote lifestyle. She doesn't feel any sense of calm and happy in her living circumstances.

So, she decided to give birth to her child in the Manori island where she born and brought up. Anita Desai artistically portrayed the beauty and features of Manori Island in this novel. This island which also symbolises Sita's childhood and her father. She was peacefully enjoyed her life in the Manori island. Her father who is a humble man contributed a lot to their village which led to Sita to expect a humanity life rather than a urge and inhuman life. Sita and Raman both are completely two different characters.

Sita who always urge for love and emotionally connected woman whereas Raman practically approach to his life which leads them to always repulsion. Here arises the sense of existence in Sita's life. Sita lives a suppressed life along with mundane tasks so that she could not find meaning for her existence in this world. She

does her wifely and motherly duty everyday basis. She felt subhuman placidity where no one to talk. She spent most of her time alone in the balcony, looking out the sea. Her husband does not understand her feelings on the other side her children who just grown up like their father. It clearly highlights rote life of every family woman in India. As Sita also a housewife she finds that her present state did not give her any sort of respect, love and even a humanity.

As existentialist's views, the story turns. As they said that the world is absurd it's an individual's responsibility to find their purpose in life, Sita turns in to a revolt. Anita Desai also developed the topic of alienation which arouse of lack of communication in married life. Desai's feminine characters are uncomfortable with their reality, they usually have a sense of alienation, incertitude and pessimistic in mind. A relationship with lack of communication led to angry, sad, aggressive and alienated. It can turn small disagreements into a massive argument. In the life of Sita, she was not only alienated by her husband but also her children which shows the modern society which runs too fast in order to achieve something emotionless, by the way they forgot about the soulful human. Her fear of swamped by sub humanity expressed as "The more stolid and still and calm they were, the more she trimmed, as though frantic with her fear that their sub humanity might swamp her."

Desai also explores the environmental issues in this novel which shows that she was more conscious about both human emotions and natural crisis. Nowadays the detachment towards nature and its beauty is occupied among children since they were addicted to the materialistic world. When Menaka and Karan went to Manori island with Sita, they did not excited about the island whereas they blame the insecurities and unsophisticated way of doing certain things such as using boat to cross the river and no facility of light. But they failed to enjoy the real essence of life which Sita acquired in her childhood days. Sita also concerned about the materialistic thoughts of her children.

This is one of the main reason Sita refused to give birth to her child in the city. This argument takes to the question of what existence actually needs. In this fast forward world, the ultimate purpose of people are to lead a wealthy and pride life whereas they forget that existence of human life is purely depends on the thing in which they really get happiness without for sake of world.

Conclusion

Autonomy of man, defiance of reason and logic, denial of conventional values, institutions, and philosophy, and his sense of life's absurdity and nothingness are some of the existential themes represented in the writings of existentialism's proponents. Anita Desai's books

contain existential thinking so that she may called as existentialist grassroots. She said articulately in a Yashodhara Dalmia interview, "One's concern can only be a continuous quest for meaning, fort worth, for daring to express it, for truth." Such a developmental process creates a connection between the work of Anita Desai and existential thinking. In conclusion, no matter who you are, whatever you are gone through, a part from gender, age, time and restrictions, it is an individual's responsibility.

To find and inculcate happiness and meaning in their life. Because existence preceds an essence in everyone's life. This concept of Existentialism in sita's life concludes with a statement that man cannot endure his own littleness unless he can translate it into meaningfulness on the largest possible level.

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