

A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF INDIAN SOCIAL CULTURE AND PROJECTION OF WOMEN IN ANITA DESAI'S NOVELS "FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN", "CRY, THE PEACOCK" AND "WHERE WE SHALL GO THIS SUMMER?"

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on Anita Desai's literary feminist approach towards the place, adjustments and psyche of women in Indian social culture. Her main concern is to peel off layer after layer the human mind. Her novels, "Fire on The Mountain", "Cry, The Peacock" and "Where Shall We Go this Summer?" presents the factual picture of Indian socio-cultural atmosphere of the metropolitan life in relation with feminine sensitivity in particular. She highlights the pain and suffering of the women that result in the mark caused by the torment of various members in the family and the society. Married women are chained and shouldered by all heavy responsibilities throughout her life. Women plan and work for the welfare of the family without any relaxation and rest. Her stories of the noble women in the cruel hands of mismatched husbands in a realistic way and it not only reflects the wounds of the women but also her search for solutions through her stories. The main focus of this paper is to show how feminine sensitivity, marital disharmony, family relations and Indian socio-cultural atmosphere are responsible for creating the feeling of loneliness and compelling women to alienate themselves from family and society.

Keywords: *Indian English Fiction, Feminine Sensitivity, Marital Disharmony, Loneliness, Indian socio-cultural atmosphere.*

INTRODUCTION

Indian writing in English has produced a galaxy of women writers touching various facets of woman's life. Women's writings in India with its varied dimensions and themes have occupied a very important place in the field of

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literature. The Sita-Savitri image expected of women due to the patriarchal society had kept women bogged down for ages, curtailing their intellectual expressions. But today women have realized the tricks played by the patriarchal society and have come out in the open to show to the world that their work is not just limited to child-bearing and child-rearing, but that they can do wonders when they are given opportunities. Women writers due to the virtue of their feminine sensibility have been able in portraying women characters with greater understanding, deeper insight and stronger impact. They are asserting themselves by expressing their feelings through their creative works. Indian women writers in English like Kamala Markandaya, Rama Mehta, Arundhati Roy, Namita Gokhale and many other hordes of women writers have shown through their writings the changing faces of woman from the pre-independence era to the present.

Indian English Literature has earned widespread reputation not only in India but in abroad too. The place of Anita Desai among the Indo-English novelists cannot be overlooked. The Indian novels bring forth the micro cosmic India caught in the crucible of traditions, conventions and social changes. Anita Desai added a new concept to the India English fiction. She has emerged as a very serious, skilled and promising novelist in India, of the entire contemporary Indian novelists. She really deserves, compels and invites plenty of critical attention. Desai is no doubt a great artist with a remarkable and astounding technical efficacy. Her technique enriches the novel by lifting it above the mere narration of a story or depiction of a character and provides it the very life, blood and the soul. She is interested in exploring life and illuminating the depth of visible world. Her women characters unfold a new vista with their unique nature of sufferings. Through her novels she tries to project the agony and predicament of women in a male dominated, conservative and taboo-ridden society. A well-known critic, K. Meera Bai in one of her critical writings on Anita Desai says:

"Anita Desai breaks a new ground in the world of Indian-English fiction by shifting the emphasis from the external to the internal world. She creates a world of her own which she fills up with extraordinarily sensitive beings. She eschews social documentation and moralizing. It is not as though her novels are devoid of social purpose. Her novels delineate the inner lives of hyper-sensitive women who are in eternal quest for meaningful life in a way- the true significance of things." (Bai, 1996, p.14)

Anita Desai is not interested in picturing the 'surface reality'. She is more interested in discovering the unknown, untapped, dark regions in the human mind in a given social milieu. But the back ground of social setting does not interfere with the minute probing of individuals. The vehicle of expression is in the stream of consciousness mode and Anita Desai follows the foot step of masters like Henry James, James Joyce and Virginia wolf in creating a particular style which suits her material. The method adopted by a writer to present life in the process of living may be described as the narrative technique. Though the novel gets its main sustenance from the story. It intends to tell; its success depends on how it is narrated. The quality of readability, the most important of all the desirable qualities of a novel, may be achieved when there is compatibility between the narration and the narrative technique. Being a woman and a creative writer, she has some special qualities to comprehend the world. But Anita Desai refuses to be straight jacketed into any brand which includes the role of feminism. A feminine style is not to be confused with feminist that is associated with 'flowery style, trivial themes and a frivolous tone'. Many contemporary women, writers have very prosaic style and masculine concerns.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Anita Desai's novels "FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN", "CRY THE PEACOCK", and "WHERE WE SHALL GO THIS SUMMER" presents the stereotypical image of Indian women and posits an orthodox social identity to her female characters. The undertaken research highlights the subservient female role and the gender biased that hampers the Indian women to play their conservative roles in society.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the undertaken research are following:

1. To identify the traditional and stereotyped image of Indian women.
2. To identify how has female agency been asserted in Anita Desai's novel "FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN", "CRY THE PEACOCK", and "WHERE WE SHALL GO THIS SUMMER".
3. To explore how the third world women are reduced to certain essentials by a patriarchal society.

Research Questions

1. To what extent Anita Desai peels off the latent layers of female subjugation in Indian society?
2. How patriarchal society does hamper the role of a female in the developments of its social fabric?
3. Why have the women of Indian cultures been reduced to certain essentials?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To analyze their research problem, the texts of Anita Desai's novels "FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN", "CRY, THE PEACOCK" AND "WHERE WE SHALL GO THIS SUMMER" have been deconstructed. The leading versions of feminist analyses have been arranged to expose the hidden ideologies of the Indian society. The primary sources of the analysis are the actual texts of the novels while the secondary sources of the data are the articles and the supporting criticism done on Anita Desai's novels. The approach, undertaken for the research is qualitative.

THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

The conceptual framework originates from the distinguished feminists, who have delicately dismantled the weak notion of the third world women, especially Indian women. Leading among them are Mary Wollstonecraft, Betty Friedan, Julia Kristeva and Bell Hooks, a part from the above mentioned feminists, there are a number of others whose theories of feminist analysis have been applied to lay bare the argument. According to them, it is strong possibility that some women in the first world scenario may have the same experiences with some women in the third world countries, especially in the Indian context.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the undertaken research lies in the need of asserting the real identity of the Indian women. The research reflects the challenging spirit of dismantling the male dominated practices of the Indian society. It further motivates to ponder that the orthodox presentation of women in the Indian society has been one of the reasons of the backwardness of this region. This research also triggers to revisit the gender position in Indian

culture. It will also bring to light the problems faced by women in the Indian society. It will highlight the awareness among society in general about the honor of women, their fundamental rights in different capacities. The research will raise a voice in favor of those NGO's, working for the women rights in the Indian culture.

CRY, THE PEACOCK

Here, the central focus is steadily laid on 'Maya' the female protagonist and the disintegration of her psyche under a variety of pressures; the chief of which is marital discard or temperamental incompatibility. In the novel, "Cry, the Peacock" (1963), Maya is the pivot character whose father's excessive care and concern makes her behave abnormally in her later life. Maya's sorrow begins with her marriage to Gautama who is a rational, middle-aged, busy lawyer and the pupil of her father. Gautama is insensitive to the desires of his young wife and therefore she feels lonely, isolated, alienated, neglected and frustrated. The vast difference between their ages creates a wide chasm between them. Maya expects more attention from Gautama, like the one that is given to her by her father. Her husband is busy in his professional preoccupations and has no time to spare for his wife. Maya is childless even after four years of her marriage. She naturally gets attached to her pet dog, Toto. One day, the situation becomes worse with the death of her pet dog; Toto is enough to create an emotional upheaval in her life and she becomes inconsolable:

"Childless women do develop fanatic attachments to their pets, they say. It is no less a relationship than that of a woman and her child, no less worthy of reverence, and agonized remembrance." (CTP, p.10)

Gautama's indifference towards the death of Toto makes Maya neurotic which further worsens her condition. When Gautama does not heed to her feelings, his indifference upsets her terribly and she becomes highly reactive. Though he arranges burial of Toto, it is without any attachment. Maya and Gautama suffer from their temperamental differences that cause alienation between them. The novel, "Cry, the Peacock", depicts incompatibility between the husband and wife as there is no harmonious relationship between them. Maya suffers from hypersensitive fantasy. With her husband, she is not able to lead her normal life.

"Toto's death is the first sign of her abnormality which evokes A series of consequent reactions. The usual decay in g flesh seems unusually terrific to her and it is this peculiar insight that suggests her highly emotional and hysterical response to worldly events. Soon after the incident, the agony of missing the pet lurks in the blank spaces of her mind, making her more and more restless." (Choudhary, 1995)

Gautama's professionalism and utter lack of tender care makes Maya drift further away from him. She is unable to strike a note of compromise between her inner self and the realities of the outer world. Her tragedy is solely due to her not coming in terms with life. It is this incompatibility that brings disharmony in their lives. Maya's tragedy further worsens as a result of her father's fixation, coupled with the haunting fear of the prophecy of the albino astrologer who portends that in the fourth year of marriage either of the partners would die. This childhood prophecy remains deep-rooted in her mind which becomes one of the causes for her abnormal behavior. Maya has nothing to keep herself busy and does not have anything to fill the long lonely hours. She feels neglected by her husband. She reflects:

"Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me, to either the soft, willing body or the lonely, wanting mind that waited near his bed." (CTP, p.9)

Maya is childless, even after four years of married life. It gives rise to frustration and the temperamental incompatibility makes Maya unhappy, unfulfilled, lonely, disappointed and alienated from her husband. It is this temperamental crisis that makes their relationship inconsistent. Neither make a sincere effort to over-come this jarred relationship and their conjugal happiness becomes a total failure. Maya wants Gautama to love her very intensely. Gautama advises Maya to practice detachment, for attachment leads to self-destruction.

Gautama's indifference towards her desires and above all the albino astrologer's prophecy results in the psychological pressure in Maya. Both Maya and Gautama have opposite views on life and are not able to see beyond their own points of view. Maya is governed by strange obsessions and becomes hypersensitive. It is Maya's desire to live and the fear of death haunts her that makes her to push Gautama down the parapet.

“Like Lady Macbeth, she becomes a victim of hallucinations which speed up the process of disintegration of her consciousness. (Bai, 1996, p.14)

Gautama's death took away even the last straw of hope without which life to her appears meaningless. It is Gautama's detachment from Maya and Maya's detachment for more involvement in life leads to the killing of her husband.

“Anita Desai views Maya's plight as an inextricable paradox of love and death. Maya must love in order to exist as peacocks do, and like peacocks again, she must tear the mate and be torn by him.” (Paul, 1988)

This novel which depicts the neurosis of Maya who becomes a psychic and pathetic figure and in the end kills Gautama as she thinks that he is the cause of her suffering. The women characters in Anita Desai's novels are shown to have sensitive and emotional nature which is too fragile to cope with the dehumanized and artificial urban surroundings and with the hardened unfeeling nature of the in-laws. It is a difficult situation for these sensitive women to adjust themselves to the changing scenario, a troublesome transit from the protective nests of the parents' family after their marriage to a totally different family in the urban surroundings, it is also a true representation of Indian socio-cultural picture.

FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

‘Fire on the Mountain’ (1977); Anita Desai assumes delights in such scenes of nature, her novel is set in a hill station named Kasuli. Life experience of three women has been projected in this novel. Nanda Kaul, however, takes no pleasure from them. Ila Das is truly a pathetic creature, unwillingly during that afternoon tea, she brings into Nanda Kaul's life, unwanted painful memories of the past. Raka, in revolution, watches the old women recount meaningless memories. In ‘Fire on the Mountain’, Nanda Kaul, voices dissent but does not qualify in terms of self-assertiveness or counter action. She fulfils her job as mother, wife and the vicarious achiever, and only afterwards, withdraws from the task she feels are alien to her nature. Raka is the crazy one, her protest is unheard and unseen. She cannot find a signifying self and only protest through violence by setting fire to the mountain. Ila Das is an example of women's courage and strength when confronted by male dominance in terms of inheritance and education which perpetuate dependency from her own experience. Ila Das realizes the importance of

education that will prepare women for the world outside of the home and the need for women to look after their own wellbeing. By challenging male authority, Ila Das espouses the feminist cause through her conscious need to empower women, tries to restructure the lives of the poor and oppressed village women.

Anita Desai wizardry is once again established by the study of the beginnings of her eight novels, each novel presents a unique aspect of life, handled in the peculiar manner, the theme demanded. Mostly psychological studies the narration is aimed at delineating character through the objective world. In *Fire on the Mountain*, Anita Desai uses it as a subtle narrative strategy, which reveals much about the teller and at the same time highlights the functionality of the fiction thus created. At one point in the novel Nanda Kaul feels the need of some delusion. When Raka wants to know her mother is ill in nursing home again, Nanda Kaul is immediately repentant.

"In the silence that followed, Nanda Kaul bitterly cursed her failure to comfort children, her total inability to place herself in another's position and act accordingly. Fantasy and Fairy tales had their place in life, she knew it so well. Why then did she tell the child the truth? Who wanted the truth? Who could stand it? Nobody. Not even her. So how could Raka?" (FOTM, p.176).

This is how she has described the use of fantasy and various purpose for which it is used in the novel. From the very start the most noticeable aspect of the novel is its sense of geographical space. At the opening of the novel the author carefully and elaborately introduces the Kasauli and Carignano, the mountain and the house on its ridge.

At the beginning the mountain seems to be not only a real empirical space, but also a symbol of shelter, freedom, and fulfilment which Nanda Kaul at last receives after long years of fulfilment. Paradoxically, even this space has not been free from violence as is shown by Ila Das's gruesome death. The mountain has been made vivid and fascinating with its varied sights, its wide range of sounds, its smell, its occasional dust-storms, long spells of rain, sudden flowers bursting out after a night of rain. The reader can, as it were, share Nanda's peace, her cool solace, in this mountain seclusion. However, the mountain has not been envisioned here as an idyllic place. The threats of disharmony, cruelty, and violence are also there, and cannot be ignored. The author carefully weaves a network of details in order to bring out this duality,

although the mountain is far way and high up from the mundane plains, yet painful memories of life in the big cities, remembrance of other locations where Nanda Kaul had suffered. At the end we also learn that coming to the mountain was not Nanda's own choice, that this was but the appropriate closure to her inwardly barren life, though after being compelled to settle down here all alone. She had persuaded to believe that she had at last found her real home and fulfilment. As J. Jain observes:

"The world of Anita Desai's novels is an ambivalent one; it is a world where the central harmony is aspired to but not arrived at, and the desire to love and live clashes- at times violently-with the desire to withdraw and achieve harmony. Involvement and stillness are incompatible by their nature, yet they strive to exist together." (Jain, 1985)

The geographical location of the mountain has been clearly indicated. At the same time, it is also apparently a fictional space. This fictional space is marked by an essential ambiguity, furthermore, corresponds to an ambiguity in Nanda's approach. Nanda seems to incarnate self-assurance; at the same time, she is also haunted by innate uncertainties. She reflects both firmness and hesitation, both withdrawal from, and reaching out to, life. The mountain as fictional space does not scaffold a political, social ideology; it rather to a feminine consciousness which is essentially ambiguous in its ambivalences between stark truth and the lure of fantasies. Pandey said:

"Anita Desai's gifts as a prose are now acknowledged. What is perhaps overlooked in the process is the fact that most of her problems as a fiction writer begin with her insistence on too much style on too small a canvas." (Pandey, 2009).

In 'Fire on the Mountain', Nanda Kaul, voices dissent but does not qualify in terms of self-assertiveness or counter action. She fulfils her job as mother, wife and the vicarious achiever, and only afterwards, withdraws from the task she feels are alien to her nature. Raka is the crazy one, her protest is unheard and unseen. She cannot find a signifying self and only protest through violence by setting fire to the mountain. Ila Das is an example of women's courage and strength when confronted by male dominance in terms of inheritance and education which perpetuate dependency from her own experience. Ila Das realizes the importance of education that will prepare women for the world outside of the home and the need for women to look

after their own wellbeing. By challenging male authority, Ila Das espouses the feminist cause through her conscious need to empower women, tries to restructure the lives of the poor and oppressed village women.

WHERE WE SHALL GO THIS SUMMER?

Anita Desai's fourth novel "*Where Shall We Go This Summer?*" (1975), is shorter in size but deeper in meaning and it is this novel that artistically unifies two journeys. One is an immediate escape from surroundings and the other is towards the futures. The plot and structure of the novel is extremely attractive and similar to that of Virginia Woolf's "*To the Lighthouse*".

Desai's novel is well structured into three parts, first part is "Monsoon 67" that deals with the present and earlier past of the protagonist, Sita; second part, "Winter 47" portraying with her remote past; third part, "Monsoon 67" that displays her present and near future. Anita Desai's "*Where Shall We Go This Summer?*" is yet another novel depicting the mental disturbance of Sita, the protagonist. Her husband Raman, a busy factory owner, belongs to an upper middle class and being engrossed in his work has no time for his wife. She feels frustrated due to the neglect by her husband. As a child too she feels herself unfortunate for being a neglected child and the same feeling arises on her marriage to Raman. Sita's alienation from her husband is due to her loneliness. Sita is already burdened with four children and is expecting her fifth child. She becomes psychic and starts smoking in order to overcome the neurotic disturbances. She tries to assume her individuality by escaping to Manori Island to keep her child unborn.

The island is supposed to be a place of miracle and an enigma of her father. When she understands the reality she makes up her mind to return home. Sita was not like Maya of "*Cry, the Peacock*", where her psychological frustrations and abnormal sensitiveness led her to the act of homicide and self-annihilation. Sita learns the hard realities of life and compromises with it. Sita's return to her family does not depict her failure, but shows her courage and patience to face the ups and downs of life.

The feminist consciousness or sensitivity is the consciousness of victimization. A feminist is one who is awakened and conscious about women's life and problem. The women novelists and poets such as Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Jai Nimbkar, Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande and others have raised the voice against women's oppression. The novel "*Where Shall We Go This Summer*" presents an incompatible marital couple in the

form of Raman and Sita while having the Indian social cultural effects. In all her novels internal conflict of female characters, conflict between characters and conflict of characters with society is skillfully portrayed. The internal struggle is between a character and his/her own confusion and fears and their existential quest. External struggle is between a character and his/her societal norms and culture; their attempt to be true to themselves and consequently their revolt. About the psychological conflict in human mind, Usha Rani remarks:

“The psychologists believe that every individual has an intrinsic Nature which is the outcome of different factors, and it is unique in itself. These different states of mind produce different reactions in different situations.” (Rani, 2006)

The protagonists of Desai are not free of these mental agonies. They often come in clash with the outside life, with others at individual level or with the society at large. With the passage of time and experience their mental perspective changes and it produces a psychic strain in them.

The novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is full of instances of psychological conflict. The study of Anita Desai's novel reveals that she wishes to project the psychological temperaments of the human mind. Sita lives in the metropolitan city, Bombay, she is not happy in the present surrounding. She finds modern life full of violence and commotion. Moreover, her husband, Raman, does not pay attention to her feelings. Her children engage themselves in such activities, which are disliked by her. The incidents which upset her, the fighting of cook and her ayah, ayahs quarrelling on the streets, breaking of buds by Menaka, and tearing the paintings to strips and dropping them on the floor by Menaka. All these instances upset and frighten Sita.

It stirs Sita's feminine sensitiveness. She decides to leave Bombay and go to the island Manori to save her fifth child from the noise and bustle of metropolitan life. She doesn't want to give birth to her child in such atmosphere.

There is an incident of eagle-crows fight in the novel which reveals extreme feminine sensitiveness of Sita. From the balcony of her flat she sees that some crows are attacking on an eagle. The eagle is struggling to save himself from the attack of crows. Looking this scene, she decides to save the eagle from the attack of crows. She shouts for her sons and asks Karan to bring the

toy gun. While fetching toy gun Karan falls down and his chin is cut; but Sita ignores it and she herself fetches the toy gun and shots it at crows. This shows how she is eager to save eagle. They reach to eagle to see whether it is dead or alive. The older boys declare it as dead. Next morning there is nothing on the ledge but some feathers and some stains of blood. It indicates that the eagle is eaten by the crows. Raman with his morning cup of tea says to her:

"They've made a good job of your eagle." (WSWGTS, p.37)
She replies to him: "Perhaps it flew away." (WSWGTS, p.37)

She is sure that it might not have flown away. Through this episode, the novelist wishes to reveal Sita's feminine aspects sensitivity. This part symbolizes that Sita struggles for supremacy over her husband at a very profound level. Here, eagle is the symbol of Sita and Raman is the symbol of crows that attack on the helpless eagle. Sita's desperate effort to save the eagle from the attack of the crows is her fight against the masculine values represented by her husband, Raman. On this eagle- crows fight episode Dr. M. Maini Meitei, aptly remarks:

"Sita's words, perhaps it flew away? against her husband's caustic remark that her eagle has been eaten by the crows, suggests the future course of her action following her defeat and loss of identity." (Meitei, 2000, p.30)

After this incident Sita's urge to leave Bombay and go to Manori increases. She hurriedly packs and leaves for Manori Island in complete defiance of her husband's hostile and hypocritical world. She returns to her father's island, charmed by him. This is, indeed, her last effort to try to save her identity by showing her faith in her father's magic world. The theme of marital disharmony is also noted in this novel. The marital life of Raman and Sita is not smooth.

"The contradictions, the enthrallment of India, it's exhilarating and rawness that so easily fascinates the non-Indian readers, rather, she looks at the invisible and private, and shall we say darker, world of the self. It is a comment on Desai's great skill and artistry that her work has such an enthusiastic following everywhere." (Prasad, 1981).

Almost all female protagonist of Anita Desai are the victims of marital disharmony. Desai has presented marital disharmonies as they exist in Indian male dominated traditional families.

Desai's women characters are full of deep emotions and fine sensitivities who are entrapped in marriages with men who are never out rightly cruel, who carry out their husbandly obligations diligently but are impervious to their wives' pleas for understanding, communication and respect for their individuality. Such emotionally incomplete relationships have a fatal effect on the finely turned female psyche and Desai's women find themselves tortured by a painful sense of isolation. Sita notices that her husband pays too much attention to his business without caring her feelings. Sita finds her life dull and monotonous. She anticipates Raman to be the life lover, making her realize how valuable she is to him. Raman however does not fulfil her wishes. He focuses his energies on his business and becomes an escapist, he has his own morals and standards. Consequently, the temperaments of Sita and her husband remain poles apart. Sita is quite disgusted with the friends and businessmen who come to meet Raman. She remarks about them:

"They are nothing--nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matter. Animals." (WSWGTS, p.43)

Sita observes that the people in Bombay are just for materialistic life. When Sita finds her life lack of love of Raman, she starts smoking. It indicates Sita's psychic balance is disturbed.

When Raman does not fulfil her wishes, Sita feels marital dissatisfaction with her husband. She is not happy with her present life. The root cause of marital discord between Sita and Raman lies in the fact that Raman marries Sita not out of love but

"Out of pity, out of lust, out of sudden will for adventure, and because it was inevitable married her." (WSWGTS, p.89)

After marriage, Sita lives with Raman's family members for some days. But she feels uncomfortable with her in-laws. The people who come to visit Raman are his friends, visitors, business associates, colleagues or acquaintances. He regards them with little humor and with restraint. With some friends he does business, with others he eats a meal. Just for the sake of his friends, visitors and business associates he ignores the feelings of Sita,

his routine hurts Sita. This strange behavior of Sita is the exhibition of psychological conflict created in her mind. Over Raman's lack of feeling for Sita, Dr. M. Maini Meitei rightly says:

"In the long-run the husband-wife relationship is dragged into difficulties that come out in the form of identity crisis, for both Raman and Sita stand for binary oppositions."
(Meitei, 2000, p.31)

As Sita is disgusted with the strange and insensitive nature of Raman, she finds a kind of pleasure in the common scenes she happens to see. Firstly, the sight of a foreign tourist who wants to go to Ajanta without knowing which direction he has to go. Once, Raman and Sita are coming "back from a week's holiday exploring the Ajanta and Ellora caves." (WSWGTS, p.45) Their car is stopped by a foreigner for the lift for going to Ajanta. Raman replies to the foreigner, "I'm sorry, we've just come from Ajanta we're going the other way." (WSWGTS, p.46) The foreigner apologizes. Raman advises him gently "If you want a lift to Ajanta, you had better cross the road and stand on that side." (WSWGTS, p.46) This reveals that Raman is a kind and co-operative person. After this incident Sita thinks repeatedly of that foreigner. Raman asks her "why she had once more brought up the subject of the hitchhiking foreigner, months later." (WSWGTS, p.47) Over this, Sita blurts out: "He seemed so brave," (WSWGTS, p.47). To this, Raman replies: "Brave? Him? He was a fool _ he didn't even know which side of the road to wait on." (WSWGTS, p.47) Sita replies quickly: "Perhaps that was only innocence, and it made him seem braver not knowing anything but going on nevertheless." (WSWGTS, p.47) Here, Sita wants to compare the foreigner with Raman and thinks that foreigner is braver than Raman. When Sita says that the foreigner is a brave man, Raman replies to her with annoyance in his voice, "you seem to admire him a lot. You would have liked to know him better, it seems." (WSWGTS, p.47) To this, Sita replies instantly, "I would. I would like to travel that myself." (WSWGTS, p.47) This discussion between Raman and Sita marks that they do not tolerate each-other's remarks very easily. And this creates a kind of rift between them. It leads their marital relationship towards disharmony. Furthermore, this incident also marks Sita's firm decision to go to island Manori, like the foreigner who travels without knowing anything about the place Ajanta. Second instance is noted when Raman comes to Manori island, to take Meneka back to Bombay. Sita complains to Raman about her past life in Bombay and says to him:

“Do you know in all these years we’ve lived together, in Bombay, I have known only one happy moment?”
(WSWGTS, p.132)

She narrates the incidents of Hanging Garden to Raman. One evening she took her children to the Hanging Garden. There she saw a young Muslim woman in the lap of an old man, an unworldly sight. She says:

“They were like a work of art _ so apart from the rest of us. They were not like us - they were inhuman, divine. So strange _ that love, that sadness, not like anything I’ve seen or known. They were so white, so radiant, they made me see my own life like a shadow, absolutely flat, uncolored.”
(WSWGTS, p.133-134)

These words of Sita indicate that she desires the love from Raman, like that of Muslim woman and the old man, but she is heartbroken as she doesn’t get that kind of love from Raman. All these incidents make her think that her identity is lost in this kind of atmosphere, where she finds no feeling in Raman’s heart and the metropolitan life of Bombay. It shatters the husband-wife relation. After analyzing this novel, we can agree with the view of B. Chitra about the novels of Desai. She remarks:

“The novels of Anita Desai catch the bewilderment of the individual psyche confronted with the overbearing socio-cultural environment and the ever-beckoning modern promise of self- gratification and self-fulfilment.” (Chitra, 2010)

Thus, like the other protagonists of Desai’s novels, Sita also becomes the victim of socio-cultural and family atmosphere and loses her psychic balance. The incidents such as fighting of cook with ayah, quarrelling of ayahs on the streets, disturbances of children at home, Raman not paying any attention to her feelings and her problem to adjust with Raman’s family members, lead the way for psychological conflict in her mind. And in the attack of psychological conflict she desires for loneliness. She alienates herself from Raman and society and leaves for the island Manori with her daughter Meneka and son Karan.

CONCLUSION

Desai is no doubt a great artist with a remarkable and astounding technical efficacy. Her technique enriches the novel by lifting it above the mere narration of a story or depiction of a character and provides it the very life, blood and the soul. Technique is a matter of predominant concern for Anita Desai. The women characters in Anita Desai's novels are shown to have sensitive and emotional nature which is too fragile to cope with the dehumanized and artificial urban surroundings and with the hardened unfeeling nature of the in-laws. It is a difficult situation for these sensitive women to adjust themselves to the changing scenario, a troublesome transit from the protective nests of the parents' family after their marriage to a totally different family in the urban surroundings. How Desai handles these stereotypes becomes an index of her intentions, and, I would argue, even a measure of her success. With other women, Desai so renders their inner lives that cultural formulations about gender seem to have little bearing on their subjective reality. Their problems, we are to assume, have a human dimension beyond the bounds of gender. So determined is Desai to represent the issues confronted by these women as androgynous that she also offers men with similar responses and following a similar course of action.

Thus in these three novels the women characters react differently due to their hypersensitive nature. Maya in "Cry, the Peacock" kills her husband, Gautama as fear lurks in her mind because of the albino astrologer's prophecy. Sita of *"Where Shall We Go This Summer?"* like Maya and Monisha too reacts hysterically and escapes to Manori Island, far away from the humdrum and the mundane routine of everyday existence, to experience the magical aura of the place. She returns with her husband when he comes to take her back home and compromises with the realities of life.

Anita Desai's novels deal with women where they appear to be troubled and tormented as the milieu in which they are placed, does not seem to be suited to their taste and aspirations. The life of Indian women-passive and dependent-spent in waiting is subtly evoked in all her novels. The myth of the Indian women as a strong, self-sacrificing is not for Anita Desai, to isolation and insecurity that her characters suffer from, is her real force. The most pertinent issue in her novels is the condition of the Indian women sequestered in a male dominant society. The women in her novels are extremely intense, they feel and live but are governed by a sense of fatality. In spite of that inability to maintain 'contact' with the world, they aspire to seek harmony in it and move towards trying to achieve such harmony.

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