



**CHAPTER – III**

**SITA :**

**WHERE SHALL WE GO**

**THIS SUMMER?**

**Sita : *Where Shall We Go this Summer?*.**

Sita is the central character in *Where Shall we Go this Summer?*, a shortest novel of Anita Desai. Sita lives in Bombay with Raman, her husband. She tries to create her own world for herself. She has four children and she is worried over the present pregnancy. Sita, a sensitive, an emotional wife of Raman lives lonely. To Raman she appears to be unhinged. Raman is a businessman and Sita's life is apparently comfortable with him. But she feels lonely.

Sita prefers to live in an isolation. She does not bother about the values and attitudes of the society. Though not an insane, as her husband feels, she lives in her own world. If at all she wants to enjoy her life then she has to adjust her ideas with others. Sita, always criticizes people around her and finds them leading their lives full of boredom: "They are *nothing*-nothing but appetite and sex.

Only food, sex, money matter. Animals "(WSGS, P. 47). Perhaps she thinks that the present situation may change. She hopes to emerge a new aspect of life outwardly she seems to be calm and quiet but:

"Physically so resigned, she could not inwardly accept that this was all there was to life, that life would continue thus, inside this small, enclosed area, with these few characters churning around and then past her, leaving her always in this gray, dull-lit, empty shell". (WSGS, P. 54).

It is rather surprising that her husband does not understand her properly. Perhaps Sita also does not understand him. Raman tries to convince her that she should not feel frightened as every thing is going to be well.

Often times her husband promises her that he would take care of the child. He tries to bring her out of the

loneliness. Sita, on the contrary makes the situation more chaotic. She becomes restless and she tries to make everything disordered.

It is their misunderstanding about themselves, makes each one of them disturbed. Probably Sita seems to be a romantic and hence she has her own dream. On the contrary Raman is a realist. Sita decides to go back to the island of Manori, a land in which memory and desire, romance and reality, the beautiful and sinister are mixed together. Raman on the other hand is an average, busy, practical man of the world who avoids extremes: "Not an introvert, nor an extrovert-a middling kind of man, he was dedicated unconsciously to the middle way" (WSGS, P. 47). He does not understand what Sita means when she describes his friends and relatives "as pariah you see in the streets".

Being, subjective engrossment, Sita has no solid grasp on outer reality. The most ordinary day-today happenings make her react sharply and vehemently. She is terrified by the violence that she observes around her - the ruthless chase of helpless eagle by the blood thirsty and greedy crows. She does not tolerate the sarcastic comments of Raman in her family. She strongly dislikes the initiating behavior of *ayahas*. In domestic life-the couple who reminds her of nothing but appetite and sex. All these incidents make her despair and total lack of control. Sita's unexpected showing of rage, fear and revolt disappoint Raman. He annoys that she has no self control despite her matured age: "Control was an accomplishment that had slipped out of her hold, without his noticing it, over the years, till now she had no more than an infant has before he has begun the process of acquiring it, and so she

wept and flung herself about, over-forty, Grey and aging". (WSGS, P. 32).

Sita gives little importance to orderliness, neatness and tidiness. Being self-centered and vain she is unable to comprehend that "Her husband, with a greater capacity for accommodation.... had grown, over years, immune to the shocks and suspicions, she contrived to create". (WSGS, P. 130).

Due to inability to communicate and lack of understanding between Raman and Sita, there is frustration in their life. When Raman asks Sita how she could face discontents in the earlier phase of their married life, she explains; "In those days".... "I thought I could live with you and travel alone - mentally, emotionally. But, after that day, that wasn't enough." (WSGS, P. 148). It is obvious that from the very beginning, she selects a life in which the need for sharing understanding or togetherness hardly any

place. Raman, like Gautama in *Cry, The Peacock* is always engrossed in his business. Hence he does not get any opportunity to peep into her thought and feelings. He is unable to understand Sita's frenzy about her fifth pregnancy yet, he knows that there has been a lack of communication between them:

"All through their married life they had preferred to avoid confrontation. All that they had done, he now saw, was to pile on the fury till now when it exploded. Perhaps there had been incidents, thoughts during the day, he had not known about, would have left undisturbed had he known. It was as though for seven months she had collected inside her all her resentments her fears, her rages and now she flung them outward, flung them from her." (WSGS, P. 33).

Though married for over twenty years they do not have any mental affinity or feeling of closeness. They are

still strangers: "They stared, uncomprehendingly, at each other more divided than they had been on the balcony that day". (WSGS, PP. 34-35). All this obstinate nature affects their equation. When Raman comes to know what Sita means by wanting to keep the baby he thinks she has gone mad. Sita, on the other hand, thinks she is taking sanely possible step when she tells Raman, "What I'm doing is trying to escape from the madness *here*, escape to a place where it might be possible to be sane again." (WSGS, P. 35). This outrageous remark of Sita again perplexes Raman who has, so far, not notified any madness in their house hold affairs.

Adaptability or adjustment is far away from Sita. Nobody pleases her and nobody fulfils her expectations: "She never got used to any one" (WSGS, P. 48). When after her marriage, Sita goes to live with her husband's family, she finds them terrible. Living in their age-rotten



flat, they appear to be leading and inauthentic existence. Their "Sub-human placidity, calmness and sluggishness" infuriates Sita. For Raman humanity is not so discontending. He enjoys the company of people. "People were, to him, friends, visitors, business associates, colleagues or acquaintances. He regarded them with little humor and with restraint.... He found them very like himself and not worth much thought and introspection" (WSGS, P. 47). Sita is frightened for all these people. To make Sita comfortable and happy, Raman takes a flat of their own, where they could live by themselves. Even it is futile attempt as people continue to come.

However Sita is unhappy with this unrelated detached existence. She feels that her children, her husband all others tolerate her out of a sense of responsibility. She therefore develops no sense of belongings and feels fragmented. She does not take sudden

decision to escape to island. The idea has been simmering since long time. When Raman comes to know this, humorously he remarks: "So you're running away-like the bored runaway wife - in a film" (WSGS, P. 36). But sita is no mood to cut the jokes. She takes it seriously. She quickly replies: "It can happen in real life, Raman," ..... "I will go. I am leaving tomorrow. On the island - it'll be different" (WSGS P.36). Sita states that there is no life, no understanding, no bond between them, which can keep her tied to him in Bombay. She disillusioned with him. She is attracted by the beauty and the sinister charm of the island. She feels more meaningful and satisfying existence". "She wants to offer herself and her unborn child an alternative a bewitched life" ,<sup>2</sup> Says B. Ramchandra Rao.

It is miraculous that Sita goes to the Manori island, a second time after twenty years of her marriage. Now after two decades her tide has turned. She is sick of living with

Raman a life "of dull tedium, of hopeless disappointment. - She had no longer the nerve or the optimism to continue. No, she refused to walk another step. She would turn, go back and find the island once more" (WSGS, P. 58).

However, her journey to the island is a failure. The road, the bullock cart, the grove, the men and women of the island reveal the ravages of time. The people on the island are also equally disappointed her. Moses addressing to the islanders remarks: "After all, she is not like her father"... looks *plain*. A plain woman, Nobody. Not like her father. *That was a man* " (WSGS, P. 156). The simple village folks do not like her emotional outbursts. Jamila too, thinks of her as an " old, plain woman"... "Got angry, too, just like that, for nothing all the time" ( WSGS, P. 157).

Sita too comes to know about her rashness. Her arrival at Manori coincides with the arrival of Monsoon.

The island is incessantly lashed by the fury of the rain. The children, Menaka and Karan feel miserable there. Sita is disappointed that the island cannot provide her even minimum necessities to live. All she gets from the island is a cold welcome. Madhusudhan Prasad says, " it is a remarkable piece of fiction which provides us proudly with a panacea for an endemic existentialist, predicament, threatening to assume epidemic proportions in our country".<sup>3</sup> Now for the first time she agrees that the life in their flat on Napean Sea Road is comfortable. She confesses her mistake to come to Manori. She can not tolerate even her children's unsympathetic attitude to her foolish adventure:

" 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... She realized with a painful sloughing off of disbelief, it was life in their

flat on Napean Sea Road that had been right and proper, natural and acceptable; it was this so called "escape" to the island that was madness (WSGS, P. 102).

Sita is confused and ashamed at the grotesque of the situation: " Where *was* the magic of the island that she had promised herself, promised the children? Was *this* it?" (WSGS, P. 103).

Sita's return to the island is, indeed a journey to her past - to her childhood. This makes her incapable of enjoying her adult relationship with Raman. She is still childlike, as Raman tells her: " But you're not leaving for such small incidents, Sita? They occur in every one's life, all the time. If you are an adult you know how to cope with them- they are only *Small* incidents" (WSGS, P. 37). Due to the mounting psychic pressures, Sita herself undertakes a journey to her past and her childhood.

According to her the island is shown of all its magic charm and glitter. Now there is no magic at all.

Sita's escape to Manori is futile. Because she lives away from Raman. Her short stay on the island makes her heart grow fond of Raman. She feels extremely happy when she knows the news of Raman's arrival. It makes her wonder at her own emotional upsurge:

"It's all over-" and then a warm expansion of relief, of pleasure, of surprise- She began to laugh for the children were already shouting, "When? When? Has he come?" Everything stirred, tumbled, rose around her. Strange, she thought - the man so passive, so gray, how could the very mention of him arouse such a tumult of life and Welcome. She felt it herself - unwillingly, unexpectedly - but she felt it (WSGS, P. 128).

Sita eagerly waits for the arrival of Raman. She finds it very difficult to control herself. She supposes that something unusual happens to her. Raman has been sincerely concerned about Sita's welfare. When he comes to the island, first of all he asks Sita "How are you?" (WSGS, P. 130). Sita feels happy and comfortable. This is for the second time that Raman has come to rescue her from the island:

"She felt comfort, security, and dull, safe routine walk in, in quiet, gray strides. She remembered it was the second time he had come to fetch her from the island. She felt so weak, she wanted to lay down her head and weep, " My father's dead - look after me", she cleared her throat. "All right" she said hoarsely (WSGS, PP. 130. 131).

Sita now loves Raman and desires his intimate company. Once again she feels disappointed when Raman

tells the truth that Menaka has called him. She feels hurt deceived and disillusioned. She is doubtful that Raman perhaps does not need her. She feels betrayed. Raman tried to console her. Raman says, "Let us have our lunch in peace", he said helping Karan to sit up to the table and arranging his dishes for him. (WSGS, P. 135).

Then all of a sudden Sita tries to see things from another perspective. She, for the first time in their married life, realizes that the worries and anxieties must have made him tense about her and the unborn child. She admires him for his courage to shoulder his responsibilities so ungrudgingly. She admits his superiority over her. They both begin their communication with a great interest. Now they both have mutual understanding. She is free at last; at liberty to love her own style. He lets her go: "not in a passion, but out of pure weariness with her muddle, her dark, muddled drama. He had no part in it, she had said, so



he could leave her to it. He released her and at last she was free". (WSGS, P. 149).

Sita is highly surprised for this relief. Now she is in a mood of compromise. Indeed they have come to closer. Sita finds new charm and goodness in Raman - and "thought how nice he really was, ... how much the nicest man she knew.... together they walked up the stone steps to the grove. (WSGS, P. 131).

The storm is over. Sita shakes her head angrily at the confusion, that muddled that her life has been for the last twenty years. Here on the island she becomes aware of the real worth of her relationship with Raman. As Sita thinks that "Neither sea nor sky were separate or contained - they rushed into each other in a rush of light and shade, impossible to disentangle" (WSGS, P. 153). Sita prepares to return to Raman and his world of comfort. Sita finally rejects independence and opts for togetherness.

Sita then realizes the meaning of life. She knows that there are no values outside the life. She considers an autonomous self can develop only when the self flows out to the world. Though Sita is high strung, introvert and highly complex she tends to reconcile with life and its problems. She strikes a balance between her inner self and the outer world, her prosaic self and her poetic sensibility, her individual self and the social consciousness. Unlike Maya's alienation is bio-psychic, not temperamental. B. Ramchandra Rao observes: "The novel may, thus be seen as a parable on the inability of human beings to relate the inner with the outer, the individual with the society..."<sup>4</sup> This tendency saves her from psychic disaster faced earlier. She rises out of her frustration dejection and by reclaiming her power to "contact" in the Forsterian sense.

Sita is in predicament. At first she stands up to say "No" to the dull tedium of a meaningless existence and in

the end she realizes that "Yes" is the sensible word to accept life. She resents her fifth pregnancy. In order to give birth to her child by revoking the magic, she goes to Manori. Her stay on the island awakens her life's reality and she accepts the routine of her existence. Her mental, moral and emotional issues oscillate the two polarities of "Yes" and "No". Sita at a later stage, tells her husband, that she did not desert them. "No, no-desertions, 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!" (WSGS, PP. 148-149). Although distressed by the fifth pregnancy, she acts neurotically. Her desire to hold back the birth by magic is weakness of her mind. In this sense Sita seems to be nearer to Maya and Monisha. With her paranoiac rage, riddling demands and quarrelsome behaviour, she makes her family miserable.

The insane stubbornness of her wish to hold back the child increasing despair are the causes for her neurosis and sudden end. But her final decision to reconcile with life, saves her from a drastic end.

This reconciliation with life is obtained after a long period of intra-psychic conflicts. Sita shifts from compliance to rebellion and there to withdrawal, again coming back to compliance. Since she hangs between her changing strategies and inconsistent behaviour. In the beginning Sita rebels against her family and decides to go to the island. Because of quarrelsome nature there is no redemption from her madness. In the second part of the novel we know Sita's life twenty years back, her life with her father. Here she grew as a compliant person.

Taking into consideration Sita's unusual childhood is necessary to arrive at a proper evaluation of her character. Sita, a motherless child experiences partially, neglect and

uncertainties, through her childhood. Sita's situation is just the reverse of Maya's in *Cry, The Peacock*. Maya's father is over - protective who creates a conflicting situation, where as Sita's father neglects her completely. He is always busy in social work. He has no time for his children. There was always an "impossibility of talk between her and her father"(WSGS, P. 79). He is always immersed in his self-glorification and regards Sita just as he considers his *Chelas* and devotees. But he certainly loves Rekha, his eldest daughter. Sita lives and grows in the atmosphere of neglect, hypocrisy and partiality This partial treatment makes Sita nervous and despair. Sita feels discarded and unwanted when she notices her father's tenderness towards Rekha. Sita lives in the world of hypocrites, the islanders, the *Chelas*, Deedar, Rekha and her father. There, only Sita is courageous, who obviously declares that water of the well is not sweet. Her

environment shatters her belief in life. It is " a strong life, unusual life"; it does not offer her the freedom to acquire unique individuality but lets her "withdraw into the protective chrysalis of childhood for longer man is usual for most", (WSGS, P. 63). After the death of her father there is disintegration of the family. The most injurious situation for Sita is complete lack of parental matrix. Her father can not provide her a home, mother is missing in her life. Unknowingly she has insecurity. This leads to an alienation from self. She desperately, needs some one to belong to. Raman gives her the required security social as well as psychological. Naturally Sita leans on him. She leaves the island with some relief. She is a helpless, isolated young woman, in need of support.

Sita is good, modest and lovable woman. Raman loves her. She is a self-effacing person who poses to be good. We come across Sita's bargaining when she submits

to the marriage proposal of Raman who marries her, "Out of pity, out of lust, out of sudden will for adventure, and because it was inevitable" (WSGS, P. 99). She admits that she has given birth to four children, "with pride, with pleasure - sensual, emotional, Freudian, every kind of pleasure,...." (WSGS, P. 31). Sita's relationship with her husband is based on the "deal" - she will be an obliging wife; and Raman will honor her self-image for her lovable qualities. For Sita love is an engulfing passion, like the scene of the Muslim couple she sees in the Hanging Garden:

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" (WSGS, PP. 146-147).

Sita considers that a love goes beyond the limits of the self and human finite. The Muslim couple are real human being on this world. She expects Raman to be like the lover, making her realize how valuable she is to him. Raman, however, does not consider the chains of her bargain, and the dream is never realized.

Sita rebels against the women in Raman's family. Initially it is only a verbal attack, later she is aggressive. To torture them she begins smoking, which is not practiced by any woman in the family. While living with her in-laws :

" She behaved provocatively -it was there that she started smoking, a thing that had never been done in their household by any woman and even by men only in secret". (WSGS, P. 48).

Sita is discontented with Raman's business associates. Here it is appropriate to remember Maya, in



*Cry, The Peacock*, Maya shows disgust for the people at the Lala's party. Gautama is irritated and warns her to learn to bear every day mediocrity. Sita also baffles Raman by her behaviour and gets happiness in annoying him. She feels her triumph in this attitude.

Again, Sita enjoys her victory when she often, opens the subject of *hitch-hiker*. "She not only thought again and again of that trial wanderer's mirage-like appearance and disappearance but spoke too often and too much of him." (WSGS, P. 52). Sita has no physical attraction for the stranger, but mentally she feels a kinship with him. This episode contains Sita's quest-urge personified in the wanderer. As per psycho-analysis this shows her hostile-aggressive drive, not only for a vindictive victory over Raman but also to restore her neurotic pride.

Sita thus, vents to her fury in order to protect herself from the onslaught of her self hate. At the same time, there

are clear signs of "Self tormenting interest" working within her psyche. Her desire to keep the child inside her is a kind of procrastination, meant to continue her sufferings. Since her basic drive is self effacement, the urge to increase her suffering is a part of her mental make-up. Horney calls it "Schaden fende", that means vindictive satisfaction at the self-inflicted pain. It is confirmed by Anita Desi's observation in an interview with Jasbir Jain that in Sita's wish to perpetuate her pregnancy there is a kind of "rebellion right through the last moment". She goes to Manori rejecting all norms and advice. Militantly she becomes aggressive towards all - Raman, her children and later towards Moses. This single motif presents the combination of her compounded solutions, withdrawal and self-effacement. Sita wants to protect her child from the callus world. Hence she becomes rebellious not to give birth to the child.

When Sita is failure in all expansive remedies, she turns to withdrawal. She is almost bored with and disinterested in life. A mental and physical inertia pervades her spirit. Her own children mean only "anxiety, concern- pessimism. Not happiness" (WSGS, P. 147). She becomes onlooker on life, curious only to guard her freedom. Her idea of leaving the island and going back to Mainland means compromising freedom. When ever she is in tension she tells her fetus "I'll keep you safe inside. We'll go nowhere" (WSGS, P. 127).

Sita's is not a healthy man's concept of freedom. Spontaneity is the pre-condition of positive freedom. It overcomes solitude, insecurity and helps in affirmation of life. Sita on the contrary, takes shelter of the "mechanisms escape" as Erich Fromm says it. She accomplishes only freedom from conflicts. She is successful in making her life only a condition of exile, uprooting herself from her

setting. The compulsive nature of Sita declares itself in neurotic fear of violence. She grows panicky at the "Small incidents" of life. e.g. the boys fighting, Menaka tearing her painting or crushing the tender buds of a potted plant, *Ayah's* brawling. Her strong reactions make Raman disturbed. Sita spends long hours in guarding a wounded eaglet. Failure in life makes her vindictive. Her own fury and revengeful nature frighten her. She is now obviously frightened of all outside violence because she feels her violent tendencies.

At the end of the novel we see Sita's perception clear. In W.H. Lawrence's verse she finds an answer to her problem. According to her giving birth is an act of violence but now she considers that a seed fallen from the tree of life into the cosmic womb, germinates. There is no life without growth. Bursting out of the enclosure of the womb in a violent activity; but it is a creative process. In

his *Fantasia* Lawrence explains that pure passionate destructive activity and pure passionate constructive activity are the same, religiously. She thinks that "the strange new knocking of life at her side" is indicative of a flow of energy, which must be released to fertilize a new life. Due to this awareness, Sita's self-consciousness gets busy in the task of self improvement. " When the self - flows out in a spirit of creativity and spontaneity, she grapples with her new life. On the island in the company of nature, she gets an experience of oneness with her surroundings. She becomes aware of "presence" -"She felt surrounded by presence - the presence by the island itself of the sea around it, and of the palm trees that spoke to each other and, sometimes, even to her" ( WSGS.P.126). She does not feel lonely even when the children are away from her. She feels one with them "considering how much

and how close together they were in that isolated house-  
she never felt alone" (WSGS, P. 126).

In Sita there is a temporary blockage of  
consciousness, but she has steady signs of a dynamism for  
construsctiveness. There is no break down of her power to  
wish and will. Her latent urge is creative. She tells Menka  
that if she had the talent to paint or sing she would have  
nursed it to full growth. Creativity would have given  
meaning to her life:

If only I could paint, or sing, or play the *Sitar* well,  
really well, I should have grown into a sensible  
woman. Instead of being what I am, "She said with  
stinging bitterness, rubbing the ash this way and that  
with her slipper." "I should have known how to  
channel my thoughts and feelings, how to put them  
to use. I should have given my life some shape then,  
some meaning". (WSGS, P. 117) .

Sita is capable to reach out for full humanness.

One cannot say that Sita is a fully self actualized individual. Only she has a potential for that. She looks within. There are human limitations. She feels stranded like a jelly fish; symbolically representing her inner self. In one way Sita feels herself as the jelly fish; in another, the fish and her foetus become one as the "opaque" brain of gigantic sea-monster. This is the symbol of the amoeba of life. To understand the central point within the psyche is the core of personality; the source of energy which manifests itself in man's urge to become the "Self".

Sita compromises with life to recognize reality. She decides to think positively to their lives. Sita's existential anguish is displayed in the thoughts, " Life had no periods, no stretches. It simply swirled around muddling and confusing, leading nowhere" (WSGS, P. 155). Here her personal problems transcend into existential ones.

We find Sita's affirmation and reconciliation too unassertive signifying a death of individuality. At the end of the novel, one can not know, whether she manages to lead a healthy life after her return to Mumbai (Bombay), or she simply strides back into her former neurotic rages and fears.

Sita's escape to the El-dorado, her childhood home on the island reflects a longing flee from a dull and worldly life in Mumbai (Bombay). Unlike the legendary Rama and Sita the couple here (Raman and Sita) do not represent an ideal husband-wife relationship. Raman approves the norms and values of society while Sita does not accept the rules and authority of the society. Sita's escape is rather her retreat from life which leads her to existential plunge on the island.

Sita's voyage is a quest for discovery, her 'pilgrimage' to the sources of life, the hidden aspect of



experience, a reality, which can only be thought but never put into practice. Raman and Sita blame each other of madness as they look at reality from two different perspectives. Ironically, this going back to the island with the promise of renewal and regeneration implies at the same time alienation. Sita's estrangement from her husband was inherent in her relationship with her father. The discussion between Raman and Sita regarding the stranger, they had encountered on the route, while returning from Ajanta and Ellora is not coherent :

"He seemed to brave," she blurted out... "Brave ? Him?" Raman was honestly amused, "He was a fool - he did not even know, which side of the road to wait on", "Perhaps that was only innocence", Sita flattered"....(WSGS, P. 52).

The incident alienates Sita from her husband.

Sita's illusion of escaping from her experience are shattered by the intrusion of a reality which she desperately wants to avoid. Sita's awareness of the island, deeply grows as she comes to realize the distance between illusion and reality, herself and island, herself and father, the island and the sea. The relation between identity and alienation keeps disturbing. Sita still discovers that differentiated life is like a jelly fish; live and objective but shapeless. She identifies her quest in the jelly fish and considers that one can not get rid of from the reality as she had tried to do. Sita's tragedy arises out of her unwillingness to grow up and accept the responsibilities of an adult life and her failure to connect the prose with the passion. She accepts to accompany her husband back to the prosaic life, not as before but with a regenerated spirit.