



THE CONFLICT BETWEEN PATRIARCHY AND EFFEMINACY IN ANITA DESAI'S *WHERE SHALL WE GO THIS SUMMER*

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ABSTRACT

Ecofeminism as a literary movement emerged to annihilate patriarchy and anthropocentrism and establish egalitarianism. Women and nature always shared the common ground of suppression and oppression. These two entities invariably experienced victimisation perpetrated by patriarchal supremacy and cultural dominance. Anita Desai in her novel Where Shall We Go This Summer portrays the subjugation of women and nature and goes further to emancipate them from the patriarchal ties.

Key Words: Patriarchy, Ecofeminism, Anthropocentrism, Egalitarianism

INTRODUCTION

Women and nature have a long standing association and they are often perceived as victims of patriarchy. They are invariably viewed as the frailest and most submissive entity of the ecosystem. Ecofeminism emerged out to fight patriarchy and debunk the conventional roles assigned to women and nature. It intends to dismantle the oppressive structures of the patriarchal society which denies equality to women and imposes supremacy of culture over nature.

Women and nature are often juxtaposed with man and culture, and are seldom found to be an equal. Patriarchy and technological advancement confines them in the sphere of servitude and effaces their identity. There are innumerable writers who have attempted to voice the claim of ecofeminism and fought against male domination through their writing. Anita Desai is one of the stalwarts whose vehement protest against patriarchal dominance and cultural intrusion dethrones anthropocentrism. Most of her novels are centred on the problems encountered by

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women and nature. Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer* brings to limelight the most burning issue: the intrusion of culture into nature ultimately leading to an ecological disaster which would result in a conflict and chaos; subjugation of women and nature perpetrated by male chauvinism.

Where Shall We Go This Summer is in three parts: Monsoon'67, Winter'47, Monsoon'67. The novel is set in an island called Manori. The central theme of the novel is the protagonist Sita's escape from the world of patriarchy and civilisation into the charismatic world of wilderness. Sita's husband Raman is portrayed as the male chauvinist who tries to exert his superiority over Sita's ideology. Sita believes in the miraculous power of the island whereas Raman debunks her belief.

Where Shall We Go This Summer presents an untainted world: the island of Manori is free from the influence of modern technology. It is this purity which sustains Sita's faith in the island and draws her to the island. She inherits from her father an innate love for nature. Sita's life in an urban setting creates a void and confines her in an alienated world. She craves to return to the world of Manori island where she experiences a sense a belongingness and feels at home.

The Manori island reminds Sita of her delightful childhood days, a life lived in perfect harmony with nature. She becomes nostalgic and reminisces about her father's perception of the island, his unflinching faith in the miraculous power of the island. The island provides solace to her aching soul and induces a healing effect on her. In Bombay she felt lonely though she was surrounded by people, but in Manori she becomes ecstatic in the company of nature: "She never felt alone. She felt surrounded by presences-the presence of the island, of the sea around it, and the palm trees that spoke to each other, and, sometimes even to her..." (WSWS 52). Sita finds the company of the island exhilarating and relieving from the agony of her confined life in Bombay.

Sita's intense love for the island springs from the fact that Manori is devoid of the debilitating effect of technology. The island rejoices in its primitive nature and uncivilised way of living as civilisation in the modern parlance could mean the intrusion of culture into nature. Desai provides an interesting picture of the island and its inhabitants: people do not prefer electricity as they use lanterns; Diseases and illnesses are treated with the medicinal water from the well without seeking cure from the modern medicines. Through the portrayal of the pristine nature of the island Desai showcases and highlights the importance of preserving primitivism and mutualism.

Desai depicts Sita as a personality whose love expands even to the smallest beings such as birds and animals. When she finds a wounded eagle on her balcony she feels pained and

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rushes to protect it from the murderous claws of the crows. Sita's anxiety and spontaneity in saving the eagle exposes her earnest fight against victimisation because she identifies herself with the wounded eagle. This episode symbolises Sita's conflict with her husband and her struggle for liberation:

The incident in which a number of crows assault and kill an eagle becomes symbolic of Sita's own plight...The symbolic situation of the eagle-crows fight reveals very subtle personality clash between Raman and Sita. It is observed that the use of bird symbolism in the novel, Sita sees herself as a wounded eagle. (Iyengar 31)

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. Sita's love for the island is juxtaposed with Raman's disbelief in the miraculous power of the island. Sita becomes elated and joyful in the island and desires never to leave it but she is forced to succumb to the command of Raman. He debunks and ridicules Sita's faith in the island and calls her insane. Sita's children Menaka and Karan dislike the island and they long to return to Bombay. They wait for Raman's arrival with eagerness and are desperate to leave the island. Karan and Menaka, being brought up in an urban set up fail to experience the pleasures of the island. They are enmeshed in the mundane pleasures of the urban culture and refuse to recognise the exhilarating ambience of the island.

Where Shall We Go This Summer concludes with Sita's return to Bombay along with her husband and children. She returns not as timid Sita but as the valiant one who has confronted her fears and conquered them. She returns not as a slave to patriarchal supremacy but as the master of her soul and individuality who would not allow anybody to efface her identity. She returns with the realisation that life must be lived on but not in the stereotyped way of playing the roles of submissive wife and mother; she repudiates her former roles to embark on a new journey with roles not dictated by patriarchy but by her 'self'. Having attained absolute freedom, she returns to Bombay as the victorious Sita.

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