

## UPPER-CLASS INDIAN WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI: A STUDY

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Among the women belonging to the upper class Indian family, in the novels of Anita Desai, Nanda Kaul in "fire on the Mountain" is one of the most representative. This novel came out in 1977 and fetched her the Sahitya Akademy Award. The title of the novel is, perhaps, derived from William Golding's famous novel, Lord of the Flies, the second chapter of which is entitled "Fire on the Mountain." The novel has been divided into three parts. Nanda Kaul, the stay of the heroine of the novel at Carignano, Raka the heroine's grand daughter's arrival at Carignano and Ila Das, the childhood friend of the heroine, departure from Carignano. Part I has Nanda Kaul hovering between past and present when the future obtrudes in the shape of a letter announcing the arrival of Raka. Part II is the longest one. It has twenty – one chapters and is devoted to Raka's arrival and sojourn at Carignano. In this chapter we see an attitudinal change in Nanda Kaul towards Raka from sheer hostility to acceptance, admiration and finally to affection for her visitor, Part III describes the visit of Ila Das. This has thirteen chapters, and the number has superstitious connotations of doom and disaster. The theme of the novel appears to suggest that any attempt to define human existence in a cut- and- dried formula would be futile. In fact, human volition is meaningless because man often finds himself on the horns of dilemmas, and suffering is inevitable for him. Nanda Kaul shuns the world but the world clings stubbornly and tenaciously to her. Raka also affects the life of Nanda Kaul. Ila Das, a welfare officer, is also unable to offer any solution and consolation. Then the tragic and

unnatural death of this former friend proves almost unbearable to her, and she is shocked at the news, the last words of Raka are highly symbolic: “Look I have set the forest on fire”. Look, Nani-look the forest is on fire” (FOM-145).<sup>1</sup> It is the fire, which burns in the heart of an old lady; a great grand mother, Nanda Kaul, the exploration of whose inner emotional world is the leitmotif of the author in this novel. And the male characters that play some important role in the novel are: Nanda Kaul’s servant at Carignano, Mr. Ramlal and a Punjabi Gurpreet who kills Ila Das, a friend of Nanda Kaul. The whole novel seems to be a story of Nanda Kaul, the protagonist, and Raka. This novel has been described as the story of a woman struggling to cope with her dreams and fears. It is an attempt to give viceto that “long muted silence which has been a hallmark of Indian womanhood under patriarchy”.<sup>2</sup>

Nanda Kaul in “Fire on the Mountain” is an unsentimental old widow of a Vice-Chancellor in Delhi University. After the death of her husband, she shifts from Delhi to a house at Carignano on the ridge of mountain in Shimla.

1. **Anita Desai, Fire on the Mountain, London: William Heinemann Ltd. 1977. p.145**  
**All subsequent citations are from this edition, hereafter referred to as FOM.**
2. **Ranu Uniyal, The Fiction of Margret Drabble and Anita Desai: Women and Landscape. New Delhi, Creative Books, 2000. p.169**

The house at Carignano gives the impression that Nanda Kaul was socially so well off that she could purchase a bungalow with the non-native residents of India. “She was the first in the long time or maiden ladies who inhabited Carignano, all English of course for n those days all the houses along the Mall were owned by English people and the Indians were not so much as allowed to walk on the Mall but were expected to keep foot paths on the hill sides and respectfully cast their eyes down when the English sahibs and memsahibs cantered by on their horses” (FOM p. 8). She comes here for having a quiet and peaceful life: “Everything she wanted and prepared for all her life—as she realized on her first day at Carignano with a great cool flowering of relied—and at last, she had it.

She wanted no one and nothing else. Whatever else came, or happened here, would be an unwelcome intrusion and distraction. (FOM p.03)

One day, leaning over the gate, she remembers the scholastic nature of her learned husband. She gets a letter from her grand-daughter. Raka, with information of her arrival at Carignano for recovering from ill health. Unwilling to be disturbed in her peace, Nanda Kaul suffers pangs for the intrusion of this newcomer. However, she asks Ramlal, a servant of Nanda Kaul, for arranging a separate room for her: “To Nanda Kaul she was still an intruder an outsider, a mosquito flowing up from the plains to tease and worry, with a blatant lack of warmth, she sighed. ‘well, better come in,’ and led her across wavy tiles of the veranda to her room”. (FOM p.40)

Nanda Kaul has no wish for human company, which has pained and troubled her. She wants to be left alone in Carignano just entertaining “Calm” and “Stillness”. Have I not done enough and had enough? I want no more. I want nothing; can I not be left with nothing? But there was no answer and of course, she none.”

(FOM p.17)

Nanda Kaul cries in agony and asks herself, question unanswered. To her, nature is dear companion and she asks to be left with the pine cicadas alone. She fancied she would merge with the fine trees and be mistaken for one: “to be a tree, no more and no less, was all she was prepared to undertake”. (FOM p.4) And from the present contest we presume Nanda Kaul to be unemotional from the very beginning, but that is not true. Previously, she tended her children with pleasure and pride, entertained her husband’s colleagues and students. “Looking sharply to see if the dark furniture all rosewood, had been polished and the doors of the gigantic cupboards properly shut.” (FOM p.18)

The appropriateness of her lovely, haunted and rather dismal existence is verified for her when she reads a quotation from ‘The pillow Book of see Shonagon (“When a woman Lives Alone”): When a woman lives alone, her house should be overgrown with water plants. It is not essential that the garden be covered with sage-brush, both weeds should be growing through the sand in patches, woman’s house when it is clear, she has scurried about with a knowing look on her face, arranging everything just as it should be, and when the gate is tightly shut.” (FOM p.27)

This is her wish to be left alone. Perhaps, her experiences as a human being have compelled her to think like this. People make a lot of fun and glory about the romanticism of life, but Nanda Kaul is disillusioned with this life. She takes refuge in the world of nature: “Nanda Kaul being strange “had no wish for letters messages and demands, requests, promises, and queries, she had wanted to be done with them .... At Carignano.” (FOM p.3)

Nanda Kaul is disturbed even at the sight of a postman because contacts and connections, sufferings and relations, she has enough of them. Now she has no wish for any relation, close or distant, because it means duty and responsibility. Moreover, following a certain routine, she finds quite boring. The world does not go according to one’s own wishes and thinking. Instead of her strong desire not to have a letter, the postman delivers one and Nanda feels the helplessness of human existence. Now, “Here is a letter and she would have to open it “(FOM p. 12) She shows her reluctance in getting the news and before opening it she decides to say No. No. No; (FOM p. 13) the emphasis on ‘no’ with its repetition reveals Nanda Kaul’s strong personality.

Nanda Kaul seems to be quite happy in her isolation but it is difficult to separate oneself completely and avoid all human company, at all times. Someone close or distant does drop in and forces one’s company which one has to accept whether one likes it or not. Raka, the grand – daughter of Nanda Kaul, is coming to disturb Nanda’s privacy and shatter the peace of Carignano to pieces. Nanda will have to attend a sick child and talk to her while she prefers silence:” Now to converse again when it was silence she wished, to question and follow up and make sure of another’s life and comfort and order, to involve oneself, to involve another.” (FOM. 19)

Nevertheless, Nanda Kaul finds that Raka is a strange child like herself. Raka’s love for solitude is as intense as her own. Raka, like Nanda. Wants only one thing- to be left alone. Raka’s very entrance, dragging her foot, despairing in her attitude and saying nothing disappoints Nanda. She finds Raka so different from other average children and more sensitive than herself. Raka listens to the wind in the pines and cicadas all shrilling incessantly in the sun and though she had never heard the voice of silence. Raka has better power of observation of both nature and people and sees her grand mother, Nanda Kaul, as a part of the lovely setting:” as another pine

tree, the graysari a rock-al components of the barrenness and stillness of the Carignano garden”. (FOM p.40)

There is hardly any dialogue between them. Moreover, Raka has correctly estimated Nanda and her lovely barrenness. In this way, Desai has presented Raka as a perceptive child who needs no words for her dialogues. She speaks in the language of silence.

Raka ducks her head and lifts the cup to her mouth and Nanda Kaul is left to interpret the motion, as she likes. Raka expresses herself in gestures and not in words. Ducking her head can mean “Yes” as well as “No”. It can express her unwillingness to talk or that she hardly cares for Nanda Kaul. Nanda Kaul also “did not want to be drawn into a child’s world again—real or imaginary. It was bound to betray”. (FOM p. 45)

All relatives and all intimates real or imaginary close or distant have betrayed Nanda Kaul and she wants no more disappointments. She decides to leave Raka to herself and becomes very reluctant from the very beginning. Raka lives alone in the world of silence and gets used to disappear suddenly and silently not to return for hours together. Then she would emerge all of a sudden from the dark: “Like a soundless moth .... Her eyes very still and thoughtful as though she had visited strange lands and seen fantastic, improbable things that lingered in the mind.” (FOM p. 40)

On the part of Nanda Kaul it is like those women who are mature, experienced, practical and worldly-wise. They have been taught in the school of life and the course has given them a balance, a poise that has made them shrewd and reasonable. All their romantic exuberance has curbed and what remains is stark reality. Life has given them a paradoxical appearance. Nanda Kaul knows this weakness of her character of going away from human beings. In circumstances, incidents and events it is not the one to mould according to the human desires; it is the human being who has to accept life as we have it, if he wants to live in happiness.

It is clear to Nanda Kaul that Raka is a girl with a marked personality and not a puppet or doll that can be handled as she pleases. Therefore, there is a strange living together under the same roof, yet apart, each resenting and avoiding the presence of the other. However, it is not so simple, “to exist and yet appear not to exist” (FOM p. 47) so they played hide and seek with each other they

dodge each other as much as they can. This is some what difficult but both are masters of this art, the old woman and the child rotates round one another in a state of well mannered way: “each guarding her independence and space to yourself”.

(FOM p.15)

In cases where mental conflict does not resolve, frustration follows; it manifests innumerable ways, anger, hatred, rebellion, and moroseness and sometimes turns inward to the subconscious. Anita Desai has been successful in projecting a movie of such conflicts in the minds of her women and she is good at her analyses of a brooding or a rebellious heart. Her protagonist, Nanda Kaul has separated herself from the external world but she cannot cut herself off totally from her past memories. At Carignano where she has come for peace and calm of mind, her memories of past haunt her. Although it is a house purchased for her by her husband, yet she never feels it belongs to her. Nor does she feel any attachment with the persons living there. She seems to have lost her identity. She performs certain duties; even those go unnoticed and undefined. Her position seems to be no better than that of a dignified servant surrounded by luxuries, it is because, and generally, the status of a married woman inside the house is not that of a queen of her little kingdom. She is not treated as an equal partner except in conjugal relations. She bears children, any number, to further the race, irrespective of her capacity to cope with its burden. In fact, she is treated as a commodity. It is the relation between the possessor and the possessed in the upper class families. To speak with Jung Annes, who had gone door to door for knowing women at close quarters: “She is like a diamond. If you have something precious, you do not wear on your cap and show off. You preserve it, guard it. Moreover, if you have a wound you do not expose it. You bandage it, look after it, and hide it. That is the way a woman is.”<sup>3</sup> We come to know Nanda Kaul’s painful memory of her husband playing badminton: “He had been to drop one of the guests. She had watched him cross the veranda go in to the drawing-room, and waited till the light there went out and another came on in the bedroom that had been only a small dressing-room till she had it but put there. Then she paced the lawn a go in, slower and slower.” (FOM. p. 26)

In addition, some times she remembers her husband’s life long affair with a lady professor whom he could not marry. This memory that comes at the sight of a lapwing

gives Nanda Kaul a feeling of loneliness.” That nervous, agitated bird, thought Nanda Kaul, watching its uneven flapping flight through the funereal moonlight, what made it leapt so in flight descend again on nervous feet, only to squawk and take off once more, making the night ring with its cries? That hunted, fearful bird distracted and disturbing” (FOM. p. 26)

Thus, while analyzing characters, Desai displays the vision of multiple movements in her novels. To borrow the words of

### 3. Jung Anees, Unveiling India, (N. Delhi, Penguin, Books) 1988, P. 30

KunjBalaGoyal: “those of Mrs. Desai’s characters who get physically disintegrated to a comparatively greater extent like Monisha commit suicide. A few others who are capable of maintaining their psychic balance to some extent even against the absurdity of the traditional patterns of life generally lead a life full of despair”<sup>4</sup>

Like other protagonists of Anita Desai, Nanda Kaul tries to fight her suffering. She is in the habit of lying down for an hour absolutely still in the afternoon. And this shows that Nanda Kaul has a habit of isolating herself from the outside world from her early years. This habit of isolation is the result of unsatisfied behavior and lack of communication with her husband. The extremely busy world of her husband had not pleased her; the old house, the full house, of that period of her life when she was the vice-chancellor’s wife and at the hub of a small and busy world, had not pleased her. Its crowding had stifled her”. (FOM. p. 29)

Nanda Kaul leaves crowd and confusion of her life and prefers to live in Mountains. However, the coming of her grand child Raka would mean the opening of that troublesome ledger again. She has led a life of a responsible and dutiful woman.

### 4. KunjBalaGoyal, Language and theme in Anita Desai’s fiction. (Jaipur, classical pub. House) 1989, p. 28

Now she wants to discharge all her duties. “Discharge me, she groaned. I’ve discharged all my duties, Discharge”. (FOM. p. 30)

The arrival of Raka brings back the memories of Nanda Kaul’s past. This curious girl desires to know all about this place. Ramlal, a servant of Nanda, makes her understand about the surroundings, scenes and situations, which are worth noticing there. Ramlal informs Raka the empty bones and ashes of the dead animals down in to the ravine thus: “Jackals come at night to chew the bones, then they go mad and bite the village dogs, The mad dogs run around and bite the people. Keep away from there huh? Especially at night, you hear jackals howling and people have seen ghosts. He lowered his voice. The ghosts of people who have died of dog-bite lowered his voice. The ghosts of people who have died of dog-bite and snakebite roam on the hillside, it is not safe, hear? (FOM. p. 44)

For fulfilling her eagerness to know the different things make Nanda Kaul nostalgic about the happenings of her past life. She tells about her father who used to live in Kashmir. He always led the life of “an explorer”; He had traveled all over Tibet and had the strangest experience: “He went to Lhasa, saw the Potala, there he collected scrolls, bronzes, carpets—she touched the silent Buddha with a long finger—and there he enjoyed to the strangest people of all lamas and sorcerers.” (FOM. p. 84)

The information about her father given to Raka actually forms the consciousness of Nanda Kaul. Nanda Kaul’s arrival at Carigano is with a definite purpose. She desires to lead her remaining life in realizing its deeper mysteries. As a daughter and as a wife, she has led a peaceful and spiritual life. In Kashmir, she had experienced the deep mysteries of Nature and enjoyed the fructiferous message emanating from these objects of Nature. Even the flowing water in Kashmir rules the life of those who live there. All these natural objects brought an arresting influence on her psyche as a girl, determining the future shape of her mind: “In the rains, the stream would fill and sometimes overflow in to the garden so that the back door opened onto a lake. The adults would cry and worry, the children splash and laugh.” (FOM. p. 93)



Raka's behavior and way upset Nanda Kaul. Raka's long absences are as perturbing as her presence is irksome. Nanda Kaul walks from room to room and from one end of the garden to the other. Raka ignores Nanda Kaul so calmly and so totally, that it makes her breathless. Nanda wonders; "She eyed the child with apprehension now, wondering at this total rejection, so natural instinctive and effortless when compared with her own planned and willful rejection of the child... It made her nostrils flare and her fingers twitch but she had to admit that Raka was not like any other child she had known, not like any of her own children". (FOM p. 47)

What appeals to Nanda Kaul most is the fact that what she acquires after practice and efforts and discharging her duties in an upper-class Indian family. Sense of privacy and love for solitude is naturally available to Raka: "If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation her great-grand daughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct. She had not arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice-she was born to it simply". (FOM p. 48)

Anita Desai very well understands that softness of heart generosity compassion and love are cardinal feminine virtues. Although the examples of feminine cruelty are many in the modern world, yet women and softness of heart should be synonymous. The examples of cruelty must be exceptions and exceptions only prove the rule. Like other upper class Indian women in other novels of Anita Desai Nanda Kaul too has an easily movable heart. She child because in Raka she finds her own childhood reflected Raka is a free bird that finds herself caged at Carignano. She does not as if Nanda Kaul's offer for a walk stands still, and dismayed. Raka does not like dog's slavishness to company. She bites her lip with vexation as a reaction.

Pity for the sufferer is a natural feminine instinct; some times, it misses due to some social or moral restriction. Generosity can be noted in the minor acts of kindness and consideration. Desai's women are in general upper class women inclusive, generally sensitive by nature because their feelings are easily touched. However, Nanda Kaul likes Raka in spite of her display of dislike. Actually, Nanda Kaul finds that something in the child, which attracts her. Nevertheless, she does not accept this fact openly. She does not wish to impose her ways on Raka: "--- Nanda Kaul was perturbed. She could not tell why she wanted to bring Raka out into the open; it was not how she

herself chose to live. She did not really wish to impose herself, or her ways, on Raka, yet she could not leave her alone.”

(FOM. p. 63)

We may think that Raka is cold towards Nanda Kaul and does not want to develop intimacy with her because of her (Nanda Kaul’s) reserved nature. However, the textual evidence shows that Raka does not have intimacy even with her mother. She does not miss her here, at Carignano in the least. She does not feel home sick. She moves about in Carignano as if she lived there ever since her birth. Any normal child would want the company of an elder while visiting tourist spots or other places. But Raka never likes such company. She wants to do everything on her own. For example, while going to monkey point, Raka does not want Nanda Kaul to accompany her: “she had not wanted to come here with her great-grandmother, she had planned to come to monkey point alone, on a solitary afternoon expedition, without anyone’s knowing, secrecy was to have been the essence of it, she relished it so—Raka had all the jealous, guarded instinct of an explorer, a discoverer, she hated her great-grandmother intently watching her ascent, clenching her hands with tension when the goats nearly knocked her off her feet or when she slipped on the loose pebbles” (FOM. pp. 60-61)

This strange attachment on Raka’s part to the place may be interpreted as her way of forgetting all her sufferings associated with her home and parents. “Her traumatic childhood”, says Shanta Krishna Swamy, “has hardened her in to a hard little core of solitary self-sufficiency and now recovering from typhoid, her spirit is defiant to go chanting”<sup>5</sup>

**5. Shanta Krishna Swamy, “Anita Desai-The Sexist nature of Sanity”, The Women in Indian fiction in English N. Delhi: Asia Pub. House, 1982 p. 273**

Intimidated since birth, anything destructive, lawless, uncompromising and ruthless excites her. Krishna Swamy continues: “The conventional sweet smells and sounds of childhood are ignored, she feels drawn by scenes of devastation and failure. The forest fires tingle her and she busts from the shell or Carignano like a sharp keen-edged explosive to set fire to the Mountains.”<sup>6</sup>

Vanity is a very common feminine vice. Every woman usually overestimates her qualities and weighs her assets more than they can be valued impartially. Nanda Kaul is a good example of heart vanity; all the same, women more than men have a weakness for praise admiration and compliments. Some are carried away even by false praise while others are simply amused even by genuine compliments. Moreover, rivalry and jealousy are usually in the very nature of women. However, it does not mean that all women are thus constituted; on the contrary, certain women show exceptional broad mindedness and know nothing of the self-consuming fire of jealousy. However, such examples are rare. Nanda Kaul is among those women who show their jealousy for their rivals. Nanda Kaul being a strange and eccentric woman hates Raka. She is jealous of Raka's sense of solitude and does not find herself up to the mark. She thinks maliciously that if Raka has secrets from her, she intends to have secrets from her, too.

**6. Shanta Krishna Swamy, "Anita Desai-The Sexist nature of Sanity", The Women In Indian fiction in English N.Delhi: Asia Pub. House, 1982**

However, on Raka's part it is something else. As dogs grow fiercer by being tied, in the same manner, restrictions at home make Raka more eager to enjoy the pleasures that are denied to her.

This relationship of love and hate of Nanda Kaul is not understood by Raka. She resents the idea of going to boarding school and takes it as Nanda Kaul's trap to keep her there permanently. Raka also rejects her suggestion to go to the club outright which makes Nanda Kaul feel all the more that Raka is most like herself, a lover of solitude. She says: "Bending down so that her face was at a level with the hunched child's and her nose tapered softly forwards, she said, Raka, you really are a great-grand child of mine, aren't you? You are more like me than any of my children or grandchildren. You are exactly like me, Raka."

(FOM. p. 64)

But Raka is neither ready nor willing for these outspoken advances of Nanda Kaul. She suspects some trap and is unable to grasp why all of a sudden quiet Nanda has become so loud. Raka keeps silence and her displeasure is visible from her blanched face and pinched lips.

These examples show us that perhaps because of their proud and independent attitude, the two female characters hardly interact. It is Ramlal, the cook, who establishes a friendly relationship with the child and it is surprising that the first warning he gives her is not to roam at night near the ravine.

This relationship between Nanda Kaul and her great-grand daughter Raka proves the point that upper class people are not satisfied with their own problems of others and take a very keen interest in them, why is it so? Speaking psychologically, because a desire for grouping is natural and grouping means sharing the joys and sorrows of one another, when this tendency exceeds a limit it becomes an unnecessary prying; upper-class women are prone to this undesirable tendency perhaps, for want of any other useful engagement of their time. Another reason is that curiosity to know or to explore anything hidden or mysterious is human nature. For a clearer understanding of Raka's behavior, we should know the family background. As we already know that she belongs to an upper class Indian family and like many children of upper class families, she is a victim of an unwholesome, empty and hopeless childhood and develops her consciousness in a home which reeks of disease and moral decay. Her mother is sick forever and father is found drinking at all hours, they are just not worried about the emotional growth and adjustments of Raka. Such an unhappy home environment creating order, parents-child exchange of ideas is essential. Discussing the positive influence of a harmonious familial interaction upon the psyche of a growing child.

SudhirKakar comments; "An individual's identity and merits are both enhanced if he or she has the good fortune to belong to a large, harmonious and close knit family."

**7.SudhirKakar, The Inner World. A Psycho- Analytical Study of Childhood and Society in India. Delhi; OUP, 1981, p. 121.**

For Raka childhood means a nightmare, violence and terror, because she has seen them taking place in her house and they have left an indelible impression on her tender consciousness. It is

because of this, when Nanda Kaul tells about her childhood as being happy and her father being affectionate, Raka concludes that they are perfect lies.

The importance of subconscious world cannot be denied; it is even greater in the case of women. The present society teaches the girls to hide reality and to act up to an ideal; there are fewer outlets their feelings for women than for men. All their repressed and thwarted desires lay buried in this sub-stratum, which cannot be easily reached. It is with a great sympathy and understanding that her secret world can be unearthed. She is reserved by nature and keeps most of the apartments of her inner world concealed from any common observer, what wealth of feelings, jewels of thoughts and riches of motive might there be, no one can ever accurately guess! HadaKaul too does not give vent to her real feelings; her secrets come out only after the death of her childhood friend Ila Das. IlaDas's visit at Carignano is welcomed exactly as Raka was before her, as an inevitable intruder: "Here she came, IlaSas, still little Ila Das

...an egg-cosy, yellowed rather than whitened by age, and Nanda Kaul looked down from her height, having invited her to tea, having put her away out of sight and mind. Here she was, that last little broken bit of a crazy life, fluttering up over the gravel like a bit of crumpled paper" (FOM. p. 122)

Nanda Kaul had known Ila Das in the days when the glory of the British Empire was allowed to reflect on a few favoured natives. Their families lived in large bungalows on quiet roads. In their houses, sherry was served before lunch, port after. Nanda Kaul can easily remember her past. She and Ila Das had played together as children, Children's games like orange-and-lemons and cooking dolls.

But these past memories are unpalatable to the ears of Nanda kaul, because like many upper class people who prefer some peaceful place ot live Nanda Kaul has escaped from her past to the top of Kausoli Mountains. Furthermore, there is a vast difference between these two women belonging to the upper- class.

Ila Das has a hard life, though in a different way, made as it is of privations and poverty. Nevertheless, she still cares for the contrary, Nanda Kaul has never experienced such an ambience, she smouldersinher rage within herself and her retirement. Ila Das still fights against local

superstitious priests who deny the children the possibility to be treated in hospitals, and let them die. Moreover, Ila Das is conscious of the role of women in the process of modernization that our country is undergoing after independence.” It’s so much harder to teach a man anything, Nanda—the women are willing, poor dear, to try and change their dreadful lives by an effort, but do you think their men will let them? Nooo, not one bit.” (FOM. p. 129)

IlaDas’s final comment on the dry weather and on the risk of forest fires is just an echo of Nanda Kaul’s brooding over the lack of water in Kasauli if compared with the richness in lakes and rivers of Kashmir of her childhood. But that dryness has permeated Nanda Kaul, who is dumb to her friend’s social involvement in improving life of women. Nanda Kaul’s recollection of her childhood, both spent amidst lakes and rivers, and IlaDas’s umbrella in a day season and in the evening hours are emblems of a lost womanhood, of a maternal female word, which has been destroyed by males. Nanda Kaul’s husband is the cause of her present aridity and selfishness, while IlaDas’s good-for-nothing brothers are the cause of her negated womanhood or even motherhood, since she could never marry. As we know that women can divine the feelings of others, the intuition of woman is famous for its probe. They have a sixth sense in certain respects and can foresee things to which common eyes are blind. Such a sense seems comparatively to be a recommendation to her friend not to preach against the priest, and the grain-seller’s reproach against going out at night alone are first anticipations of what is going to happen. Ila Das falls victim to the ambush and rage of Preet Singh, who wants to marry his seven-year-old daughter to a widowed man and does not want IlaDas’s intervention in that matter.

The death of Ila Das is announced by a phone call, as was her arrival, from the police station. In this sudden and incredible revelation, Nanda Kaul becomes conscious of all the lies she has told herself and Raka of a happy life with her father:

“No, it can not be. It was lie—Ila was not raped, not dead. It was all a lie. She had lied to Raka, lied about everything. Her father had never been to Tibet—he had bought the little Budha from a traveling her husband loved and cherished her and kept her like a queen. He had only done enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a life-long affair with Miss David, the Mathematics mistress whom he could not marry because she was a Christian but whom he had loved, all his life

loved. Moreover, her children-the children were all alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them. She did not live here alone by choice-she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing. All those graces and glories with which she had tried to captivate Raka were only a fabrication: And they helped her to sleep at night, they were tranquillizers, pills. She had lied to Raka, and Ila had lied too. Ila, too had lied, had tried.”

(FOM. p. 145)

While we are doubtful about Nanda Kaul’s surviving the bad news’ Raka excitedly calls her: “Look, Nani, I have set the forest on fire. Look, Nani-look-the forest is on fire.” (FOM p.145)

It would not be here out of place to discuss the symbolic significance of fire. For fire is a symbol of purification, of death and rebirth from its own ashes. It is a sign of Raka’s rebellion against a violent world as well as Nanda Kaul’s hate of the spiritual world. This fire is perhaps, the objective correlative of those domestic and silent acts of violence that plague upper- class Indian families and social life. After all, literally, Nanda Kaul is a widow who dies in a fire (Though we are not sure if she had already died when she heard the news of IlaDas’s murder), and this is the reminiscence of the practice of sati (Sutee), that is of women who burn themselves on their husband’s pyre, outlawed in our country in 1928.

Thus, Anita Desai has very aptly described the tensions and sufferings of Nanda Kaul. The root-cause of her loneliness lies deep within her married life; her life is an example of thousands of upper-class Indian women subjected to drudgery of household activities. The novelist has embellished Nanda Kaul with all the natural psychological characteristics of women. Desai has mingled in Nanda Kaul the natural vices and virtues so common in the general feminine world, she proves the point that a life built on lie, on escape, is not a solution to one’s tragedy. Therefore, the glass house of safety, carefully erected around her, is bound to break with an intruder like Raka.

Sitaof Where Shall We Go This Summer? Can also be studied in detail to serve the purpose of our study of Upper-class Indian women.

Where Shall We Go This Summer (1975) is the story of a near neurotic heroine, Sita, who wishes to escape the mundane reality of her existence in a bid to discover peace in her childhood home, but finally compromises with life as it is. Sita through high-strung, introverts and highly complex nature tends to reconcile with life and its problems. This naturally saves her from psychic disaster faced by other characters. Sita rises out of her frustration, dejection and despair by reclaiming her power to “connect”, in the forsterian sense.

Where Shall We Go This Summer? Describes Sita’s predicament; she stands up to say “No” to the dull tedium of a meaningless existence and ends up by realizing that “Yes” is the sensible word to accept, face and live life. The novel, structurally divided in to three parts narrates the story of Sita, is middle-aged. She resents her fifth pregnancy. In order not to give birth to her child by revoking the magic, she goes to Manori her maiden home. Her stay on the island awakens her to life’s reality, and she chooses to accept the routine of her existence.

Sita’s mental, moral and emotional issues oscillate between the two polarities of “Yes” and “No” As a critics observes, the novel – “dramatizes two kinds of courage: a struggle between the positive No and a potent yes.”<sup>7</sup>

**8.Atma Ram, “A View of Where Shall We Go this summer?”Journal of Indian writing in English, PP-74-80.**

Sita, at a later stage, tells her husband, Raman, that she did not desert them:

“No, no-desertion, that’s cowardly. I was not doing anything cowardly ...I was saying No-but positively, positively saying No. There must be some who say No, Raman!”<sup>1</sup> (WSGS p.148-49)

Sita is afflicted by the fear brought on by the fifth pregnancy, she acts neurotically. Her wish to hold back the birth by magic – is an outcome of a sick mind. In this, she seems to be nearer may– and



Monisha. With her paranoiac rage enigmatic demands and querulous behavior she makes her family miserable. The insane obstinacy of her wish to hold back the child, and the over whelming despair put her in the category of other Desai character's, heading for a neurosis, psychosis or sudden end. But her final resolution to reconcile with life, saves her from a melodramatically drastic end. The "quiet note" with which the novel ends, speaks of the nature of perception achieved by both Sita and her creator. Anita Desai, in her interview observes that in order to survive in the world, one cannot survive without compromise-drawing the line means certain death, and in the end, Sita opts for life with compromise-consoling herself with Lawrence's verse, with the thought that she is compelled to make this tragic choice because she is a part of the earth, of life, and can no more reject it than the slumberous egg can or the heifer of the grain."<sup>8</sup>

1. Anita Desai Where Shall We Go This Summer? N. Delhi, Orient Paper backs, 1998. All subsequent references are from this edition hereafter WSGS

#### 9. Atma Ram, "Interview with Anita Desai", Op cit. p. 57 pp. 21-33

This compromise with life is gained after a prolonged period of intra-psychic conflicts. Sita shifts from compliance to rebellion and then to withdrawal, again coming back to compliance. Since she oscillates between her changing strategies, her behavior is inconsistent and leaves much scope for disparity between her thinking and actions.

In the First part of the novel, entitled "Monsoon 67", she rebels against her family and decide to go to Manori, "What I'm doing is trying to escape from the madness here, ..... Came to a place where it might be possible to be same again". (WSGS, p. 35)

In the vehemence and spite of her bellicosity, there appears no redemption for her from madness.

The II<sup>nd</sup> part "Winter 47", depicts Sita's life twenty years back, her life with her father. Here we can see her development as a compliant person. This part enables us to understand her later conflicts.

Alternately, her resigned and aggressive trends dominates the third section “Monsoon 67”. This is a continuation of part first. Raman visits the Island to fetch his children. Sita, too, decides to accompany him. Personally, she reconciles with her situation. Socially, Moses and his friends dub her “mad”. It is to be seen if Sita really achieves a workable solution to her problems or just return to the same end from where she started.

Consideration of unusual childhood is necessary to arrive at a proper evaluation of a character belonging to an upper class family like Sita. A motherless child, Sita experiences partiality, neglect and uncertainties right through her childhood. Her situation is just the reverse of Maya’s in *Cry, the Peacock*, and belonging to middle class. If Maya’s father is over-protective who creates a conflicting situation, Sita’s father neglects her completely. He has no time for his children. A public figure, admired and revered by the people, he is too far off and formidable a person for Sita to approach with filial affection. There is always an- “impossibility of talk between her and her father.” (WSGS, p.79)

Sita’s father is immersed in his self-glorification and he regards Jivan and Sita just as he considers his sycophant chelas and devotees. But, he certainly loves Rakha, his eldest daughter. The atmosphere in which Sita lives and grows in that of neglect, hypocrisy and partiality. Consciously as well as unconsciously, she is uneasy. She questions herself: ‘why and how is it that there is no resemblance between the two sisters?’ The disclosure that Rekha is to her real sister drops on her – “skin like acid and she felt them burn whenever she caught an exchange of that heavy-lidded look between father and daughter of his arm in its fine white sleeve lie fondly across her round shoulders.” (WSGS, p. 79)

Here is a clear hint of incest. The two cases of parental partiality – one in *Cry, the peacock* and the other in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* are quite dissimilar. In Maya’s case, a tender father’s harshness towards a rebel brother is an indication that any move towards independence or autonomy is punishable by withdrawal of love. Maya, therefore, clings to her father for fear of antagonizing him. Sita, on the other hand, feels discarded and un-wanted when she notices her father’s tenderness towards Rakha. This experience breeds feeling of worthlessness, and its consequent strategy is rebelliousness. Sita cannot corroborate her father’s dubious ways. It sweeps down her psyche as a

bad human experience. Her world is peopled with hypocrisy and hypocrites the islanders, the chelas, Deedar, Rehka, and her father. The only serene and innocent voice is that of Sita who has the courage to declare that the well water is not sweet. Her environment is injurious. It shatters her faith in life and in the goodness of the world. It is “a strange life, and 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 than is usual for most”. (WSGS, p. 63)

The disintegration of family, immediately after her father’s death, testifies the bitter truth that they had nothing substantial to bind them as a family. Rehka does not even stop to shed tears for him and leaves – “as though she had waited for and planned for this moment of release from the old man’s love”. (WSGS, p. 99)

Jivandis appears a couple of days before the demise as if he had a fore-knowledge of the calamity. Only Sita stays on, to marry Raman, the first man in her life. The family would not have broken so abruptly, had there been a sense of belonging.

Belongingness is a subjective feeling in which an individual experiences personal involvement. The most damaging situation for Sita is complete lack of parental matrix. Hypocrisy and partiality apart, her father cannot provide her a home. Her life starts “in the centre of a crowd”. “With calm eyes she had watched the surge and flow of such masses, listened to endless speeches on one subject, swaraj had her chin chucked, collected, discarded garlands and played with the tinsel till she fell asleep against a bolster and was carried away to some one’s house to sleep-always a different someone, it scarcely mattered which one. She belonged, if to anyone to this whole society that existed at that particular point in history-like a lab does to its flock-and saw no reason why she should belong to one family alone.” (WSGS, p.55)

As Sita does not have a home, she has no feeling of belonging; “Belongingness ... means a subjective feeling of one’s personal involvement the freedom to acquire unique individuality but lets her- “Withdraw into the protective chrysalis of childhood for longer than is usual for most”. (WSGS, p. 63)

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As Sita does not have a home, she has no feeling of belonging; “Belongingness... means a subjective feeling of one's personal involvement to the extent that one feels himself to be an integral and indispensable part of the system.”<sup>9</sup>

Involvement can be with another person, an idea or a group, John Gray maintains that by uniting himself with other person in the spirit of love and shared work, man can hope to end his alienation. A family is the most important internal group to condition a person's relationship to himself.<sup>10</sup>

Some critics consider family to be internalized in each one of us. It is like a flower, with mother as the center, the children as its petals around it. The most vital link—the mother—is missing in Sita's life. Unknown to her, a deep seed of insecurity is sown in her life.

This leads to an alienation from self. Her fear, an abiding sense of dissatisfaction, nausea and mortal dread of taking the responsibility of the newcomer—all point towards the sense of insecurity bred in childhood. A way out of this is the adoption of some psychological probe. She desperately needs someone to belong to. Deedar's son, Raman, is the first and, of course, the only person to take her out of the shocking after her father's death.

Raman gives her the desired security, social as well as psychological. Naturally, Sita leans on him, unconsciously looking up to him as her messiah. She leaves the Island with some relief

**9Anant S.S., Conflict Resolution through Belongingness,(Manas, 26, Nos. 1-2) 1979. Pp. 63-64**

**10.John Gray, Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus  
Harper Collins,1992.p17**

**New Delhi,**

“Worn out by the drama” of life. Raman appears to her as: “a tired manager drawing the curtains together, looking up the empty theatre... It was as though he had been expressly sent by providence to close the theatrical era of her life, her strange career and lead her out of the ruined theatre into the thin sunlight of the ordinary, the everyday, the empty and the meaningless.” (WSGS, p.100)

Sita has been playing not to guard herself from the crushing circumstances. The need for affection, suppressed so far, raises its head. She is a helpless, lonely young woman, in need of support, and Raman can fulfill the need.

With this unconscious desire in the background, Stia makes a “bargain with fate” – if she is helpless, good and humble, she will be lovable, Raman will love her. As a self – effacing person she poses to be good, without pride, and hopes that she will be treated well by fate and by others. We have the first instance of Sita's bargain when she submits to the marriage proposal of Raman, who marries her- “Out of pity, out of lust, out of a sudden will for adventure, and because it was inevitable.” (WSGS, p. 99) She admits that she bore four children – “with pride, with pleasure-sensual, emotional, Freudian, every kind of pleasure.... “(WSGS, p. 31)Sita builds up a relationship

in her mind with her husband, based on the “deal” – she will be an obliging wife: and Raman will honour her self-image for her lovable qualities. For her, love is an engulfing passion, like the vision of the Muslim couple she sees in the Hanging Gardens –

“they were like a work of art so apart from the rest of us. They were not like us – they were in human, 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, uncoloured. (WSGS, pp. 146-47)

Such a love transcends the limits of the self and human finitude. Suno, in Anita Desai’s short story “Studies in the Park,” sees the same vision of divine love. The Muslim couples are real human beings belonging to this world but the intensity of their tenderness is beyond human limitations. Sita tells Raman that it was the happiest moment of her life. This confession enrages him, though Sita means no offence. As we evaluate her defence- mechanism, we discover the working of her glorified self-image. She is like the helpless Muslim woman—needing all attention and tenderness. She expects Raman to be like the lover, making making her realize how valuable she is to him. Raman, however, does not honour the claims of her bargain, and the dream is never realised.

Raman has his own compulsions to deal with. He marries Sita out of pity, as we have already discussed earlier, when this initial stage of lust and pity wears off, Raman finds his mundane activities more fascinating. He is an expansive person who wants mastery over life. Individuals like him resent those who depend too much because conversely they are scared that such persons may exercise control over them. Raman shifts his energies towards his business to escape intra-psychic and interpersonal conflicts “He has set his standards and must strictly adhere to them. He is careful and assiduous in fulfilling his obligations –

“everything was so clear to him, and simple: life must be continued, and all its business Menaka’s admission to medical college gained, wife led to

hospital, new child safely brought forth, the  
children reared, the factory seen to a salary earned,  
a salary spent.” (WSGS, pp. 138-39)

Sita secretly admires him for his courage and endurance. Raman therefore, cannot tolerate lack of control shown by Sita. He is fair, just and dutiful, so Sita should also be fair to him. He cannot understand her rebelliousness. Their contradictory drives drag them apart, making it difficult for each to comprehend the notices of the other.

Raman’s failure to recognize Sita’s self-effacing drives and honour her capacity for surrenders and love, injures her self-image. Her hopes of getting love are frustrated. She tells him once: “I thought I could live with you and travel alone mentally, emotionally. But, after day, that wasn’t enough. I had to stay whole, I had to. (WSGS. p. 148)

The concept of saying “whole” requires a little elaboration. Sita, here, does not refer to the idea of individuation or self-realization. She does not bother about self-realization. All, she wants is to feel her glorified self. Raman’s inability to honour her claims of love impinges upon her pseudo-self. Her neurotic pride is hurt and she turns vindictive. She must restore her damaged self-esteem: so, she tries to attract attention by being plaintive, and complaining of her unhappiness; and, she openly rebels against all social and familial norms in order to feel triumphant.

The Upper-class Indian women fight for their rights. Sometimes they rebel this is proved by Sita’s case. She rebels against the “vegetable existence” lived by the women of Raman’s family. Initially, it is only a verbal attack, and then she takes recourse to a more flagrant disregard for their way of life by taking to stacking. Shocking them thus, Sita enjoys a sense of superiority.

Raman is startled when she describes his business associates as animals: “They are nothing – nothing but appetite and sex, only food, sex and money matters. Animals.” (WSGS, p. 47) This out-

burst vexes Raman who is: “not an introvert, nor an extrovert—a middling king of man... dedicated unconsciously to the middle way.” (WSGS, p. 47)

One immediately recalls Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*. Maya shows her disgust for the people and the entire atmosphere at the Lal’s party. Gautama is irritated and he exhorts her to learn to bear everyday mediocrity. Sita also baffles Raman by her behavior and enjoys having thus annoyed him. It gives her a sense of triumph.

Again, Sita enjoys her victory when she often broaches the subject of the hitch-hiker. “She not only thought again and again of that wanderer’s mirage-like appearance and disappearance but spoke too often and too much of him.”

(WSGS, p.52)

Raman is amused, astonished, and then annoyed. His perfectionist moral standards receive a jolt, his male-ego is hurt. Tension mounts because- “He regarded her admiration for, and interest in, the hitch-hiker practically as an act of infidelity.” (WSGS. p. 53)

In an upper- class, Indian family the bond of feelings seems to be vanished nowadays. Family members live together but they are poles apart. Sita has no physical attraction for the stranger, but mentally she feels a kinship with him. For some readers this episode contains Sita’s quest-urge personified in the wanderer. From psychoanalytical point of view, this shows her hostile-aggressive drive, not only for a vindictive triumph over Raman but also to restore her neurotic pride. This is an attempt at self-preservation.

Sita shows “psychic-fragmentation” which is described in psychiatric literature as disintegrating process. In it, a neurotic fails to see himself as a whole entity and experiences himself piecemeal, which saves him from conflicts and tension created by his inner contradictions.

Denying herself joy, enthusiasm, and fear – the whole range of sentiments that make us human – Sita loses the urge to assess and affirm herself. Devoid of these natural feelings, she becomes a melancholy, depressed woman, bored with life; nothing can instill zeal in her. She presents a gloomy picture to her children and a quizzical one to her husband sitting on the balcony,



smoking endlessly, staring blankly at the sea, as if she were waiting for something. Her entire life acquires the color of waiting: “It was not a pure color – It was tinged at times with tinged at times with anxiety, at others with resignation. Or with frenzy, patience, grimness, fear. But whatever its tint, its toe, it had seeped through her, flowed along every smallest capillary till she herself was turned to the color of waiting, was turned a living monument of waiting.” (WSGS, pp. 54-55)

On a deeper level, waiting pre-supposes, the beginning of a wish to reach beyond a shake off despair and transcend emptiness and apathy into constructive potentialities. In Sita’s case, the vacuum exercised by her neurotic control system, blocks the possibility for assertion and spontaneity. The control imposed upon impulses and feelings is let loose; fear disrupts her mental equilibrium. It may be pointed out, here, that automatic control system is a neurotic measure adopted to relieve the tension of self-alienation: whereas normal self-control imposed upon unwanted desires and wants is a healthy attribute. The failure of automatic control system produces “fright responses” Sita becomes panicky with her fifth pregnancy.

The terror of the ensuing childbirth that Sita harbours has several psychological causes. Her confinement will force her to forsake her strenuously guarded strategies of detachment. It will entail getting involved in life once again-physically as well as emotionally. A deeper psychic reason, however is the fear of her guilt-feeling caused by the awareness that she has not exercised self-control in sexual - desires. Self -reproach in the form of gnawing feeling. “I should have known” , makes her feel small. Her rage indicates an externalization of the inner turmoil. The novelist says: “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 her.” (WSGS, p. 33)

Sita thus gives vent to her fury in order to protect herself from the onslaught of herself-hate. At the same time, there are visible signs of “self-tormenting intents” working within her psyche. Her desire to keep the child inside her is a kind of procrastination. It means to continue her suffering. Since her primary drive is self-effacement, the urge to magnify her suffering is a part of her mental make-up.

Some psychologists call it a vindictive satisfaction at the self-inflicted pain very common in upper class people. This is confirmed by Anita Desai’s observation in an interview with

Jasbir Jain that “in Sita’s wish to perpetuate her pregnancy there is a king of rebellion exactly of the last moment”<sup>11</sup>.

She goes to Manori revolting against all norms and advice. She becomes militantly aggressive towards all, Raman, her children and later

**11. Jasbir Jain “Anita Desai Interviewed” Rajasthan University Studies in English.**  
**Vol.XII, 1979.p 63**

Towards Moses. This single motif—not to give birth—on, which the entire structure of the novel is based, shows the combination of her compounded solutions, withdrawal, expansion and self-effacement. By closing her eyes to the reality and resolutely following her fantasy, Sita manages to make herself immune from the assault of herself-loathing. She feels a kind of victory by rebelling against her bondage, and overcoming her weakness, in protecting her child from the callous world. Sita is, in fact, guarding her self-image.

Upper class people may look crazy but they are somewhat different. Sita too, appears crazy to the world. Her attitude, her outbursts of anger, her appearance all substantiate her whimsical approach. Is Sita “mad” as Moses and his friends describe her? Why is she always angry? The answer lies in the aggressiveness brewing within her as her self-effacing solution hails. She wants to master life somehow, and by her behavior she creates an atmosphere denuded of love. Menaka is grown-up enough to retaliate her mother’s strange moods by her defiance. The girl comprehends that she can rely more on her father than on her moody mother. Sita is never normal with her children: as such, they are attached to Raman. Whatever solution Sita adopts—self-effacing, aggressive or resigned- she is always heavily charged under her own pride system. She either bores them by her perpetual misery, or intimidates them by her arrogant-vindictive-drives or her detached unconcern keeps them at a distance. Her capacity to give spontaneous love is seriously impaired.

When Sita’s compliant and expansive remedies fail, she resorts to withdrawal. We see her mostly bored with and disinterested in life. She neglects her appearance, grows defiant and difficult to

approach. A mental and physical inertia pervades her spirit. Her own children mean only “anxiety, concern – pessimism. Not happiness.” (WSGS, p.147)

She grows into an on looker on life, keen only to guard her freedom. The very idea of leaving the Island and going back to mainland means compromising her freedom. In moments of tension, she tells her foetus, “I’ll keep you safe inside. We’ll go nowhere.” (WSGS, p.127)

Sita does not have a healthy mind’s concept of freedom. Spontaneity is the pre-condition of positive freedom. It overcomes loneliness and insecurity, and helps in affirmation of life. Sita, on the contrary, resorts to the “mechanisms of escape” as Erich Fromm terms it. She attains only freedom from conflicts. The pathological side of her escape is an effort at forgetting the real self because she is desperate to maintain the identity of her glorified self image. She succeeds in making her life merely a condition of exile, uprooting herself from her setting. Erich Fromm explains “it as the “other course” before a man which is not conducive to integrity and self-realization, rather it is an escape from an unbearable situation and is characterized by its compulsive character”<sup>12</sup>.

Sita’s perception clears only towards the end of the novel. In D.H. Lawrence’s verse, she finds an answer to her problem. So far she has considered giving birth an act of violence but now she realizes that a seed fallen from the tree of life in to the cosmic womb, must break open. There can be no life without growth in to a full organism. Bursting out of the enclosure of the womb is a violent activity, but in its impetuosity, it is creative. In this fantasia, Lawrence maintains that pure passionate destructive activity and pure passionate constructive activity are the same, religiously. Sita realizes 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. With this awareness, her self-questioning consciousness

### **12. See Erich, Formm, Escape from Freedom. P105**

Gets busy in the task of self-improvement. This is her moment of inspiration; in it, she establishes a contact worth her authentic self. Sita achieves integration of her personality by arriving at a fusion with the world, when the self flows out in a spirit of creativity and spontaneity, she grapples with her

real self. On the Island, in the midst of nature, she experiences oneness with her surroundings. She becomes conscious of “presences” – the presence of the island itself, of the sea around it, and of the palm trees, that spoke to each other and some times over her. She does not feel lonely. Even when the children are away, she feels they are with her. “Considering how much and how close together they were in that isolated house.” (WSGS, p. 126)

One more experience, small but relatively significant, enables Sita to recognize her sensibilities and prowess as the self is relation to the earth. It occurs when she plays with Karan with an “oblivious Joy”, all soaked in mud. She loses all self-consciousness and regains childhood innocence.

For some, this denotes freedom from inhibitions, and is one of the paths leading to real self. Sita’s move from fragmentation to a cosmic awareness enhances her chance of self-discovery.

Here we see a full fructification of E.M. Forster’s phrase “only connect” which remains buried in her consciousness for long. Forster employs it in three different connotations In “Howards End.” It implies the connecting of individuals within themselves to achieve “wholeness”. In A passage to India, it stands for establishing a connection between individual and individual, as well towards developing a harmony in personal relationships and establishing a contact with the earth. The cosmic and personal synthesis, even so gained, helps her in seeing beyond despair.

All along, Sita is severely depressed, but the redeeming quality of her situation lies in her not becoming will-less and wishes less. Despair and dejection, the humanistic psychologists tell us, act as warning signals, if we need them, we can check the disintegration of our personality.

Psychologists observe that human system has built-in indicators, like machines, emitting signals when fatigue, frustration or other damaging impulse exceeds tolerance. If one hears their cues, he can recover the self: “Doubtless, when a person is behaving in ways that do violence to the integrity of his system, warning signals are emitted. If only man could recognize them himself, and institute corrective action.... “Normal”, self-alienated man however, often ignores his tilt signals— anxiety, guilt, fatigue, boredom, pain or frustration and continues actions aimed at wealth, power or normality until the machine stops.”<sup>13</sup>

In Sita, there is a temporary blockage of consciousness, but she shows steady signs of dynamism for constructiveness. There is no breakdown of her power to wish and will. It helps her in self-direction. The latent urge in her is to be creative. She tells Menaka that if she had had the talent to paint or sing she would have nursed it to full growth. Creativity would have lent meaning to her life: “If only I could paint, sing, or play. Sita is well, really well, I should have grown in to a sensible woman .....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. 177)

Conflicts and awareness of conflicts is in itself a sure sign of relative health. Sita has the capacity to reach out for full human ness. We cannot say that

**13.S.M. Jounard, The Transparent Self: Self Disclosure and Well – Being New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand, 1964. P. 101.**

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 image Sita sees herself as the Jellyfish; in another, the fish and her foetus become one as the “opaque” brain of a gigantic sea-monster. The fish symbolizes the amoeba of life. In recognizing the central point of the brain of the sea monster, she becomes aware of herself.

According to Jung, the central point withing the psyche is the core of personality, the source of energy which manifests itself in man’s urge to become the “self”.

Sita’s compromise with life constitutes a sure step forward to recognize reality. She shows that life is not meant to be shunned but to be experienced. Participation in the act of living leads to the acceptance of a fuller responsibility. Symbolically, when Sita walks back home placing her feet in Rama’s foot-marks in the sand, she decides to contribute positively to their lives. Sita’s existential angst is displayed in her thoughts, “life had o periods, no stretches. It simply swirled around, muddling and confusing, leading nowhere.” (WSGS, p. 155)

Here, her personal problems transcend into existential ones and her neurotic despair and anguish give way to a more philosophic perception of the absurdity of human condition. If human existence is so impoverished, it is better to affirm life, here and now. According to May Sarton - "Private dilemmas are, if deeply examined, universal and so if expressed, have human value beyond the private"<sup>14</sup>

**14. May, Sarton Journal of a Solitude, New York: W.W. Norton, 1963 p.60**

At times one finds Sita's affirmation and reconciliation too unassertive, signifying a defeat of individuality. At the end of the novel, we cannot tell whether she manages to lead a healthy life after he returns to Bombay, or she simply the child, Anita Desai affirms in an interview that the child is strides back in to her former neurotic ranges and fears. When asked about born and Sita learns to compromise: "it is born. It lives. It adjusts. It compromises. It accepts dullness, mediocrity; either loses its eyes too or else condors destruction, ugliness, rottenness. In other word, it leads an ordinary life of the kind its mother tried so desperately to change only to find she could not." (WSGS P 145.)

The above words convey acceptance for many Sitas in Upper class Indian families. Life ceases to be an absurdity and becomes a general fact of the human experience. By implication, we infer that it is a tangible expression of an inner change in Sita. Acceptance shows growth, ripeness, it implies the process of actualization. She ability, to "connect" the fragments of life and achieve integration will perhaps enable her place and experience herself as a part of a larger whole.

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