

# Poor Interpersonal Communication: An Analysis of Sita's Quandary in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*

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## Abstract

The present study endeavors to scrutinize the impact of the communication gap between husband and wife in Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Sita finds herself as a weak, isolated, depressed, deserted, and unsettled woman due to the communication gap demonstrated in the novel. She finds her existence purposeless and insignificant as a result of social alienation and self-isolation that has been faced by her throughout her life. Anita Desai is known as one of the most distinguished Indian writers writing in English. Her novels depict a glimpse of Indian society through the portrayal of lonely and alienated women who feel miserable under their insusceptible and unresponsive husbands. She makes an attempt to explore the depth of a woman's psyche and depicts it to society through her characters. Anita Desai in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* portrays the pathetic predicament of Sita who suffers under imperceptible and self-centered husband. This research paper is a humble attempt to study Sita's prosaic routine of insignificant survival. Sita, an overly sensitive and sentimental lady, withdraws herself physically from the world. No healthy communication can be found between Sita and Raman, their married life is filled with dissonance and disharmony.

**Keywords:** Isolated Life, Indian Society, Nature, Sensitive, Identity, Predicament, Self-Centered Husband, Desire.

## Introduction

Interpersonal communication is a means of exchanging information, ideas, and feelings between two people, which can be done verbally or non-verbally. "Interpersonal communication is often defined as communication that takes place between people who are interdependent and have some knowledge of each other: for example, communication between a son and his father, an employer and an employee, two sisters, a teacher and a student, two lovers, two friends, and so on."<sup>1</sup>

Honest participation of husband and wife is needed in interpersonal communication as they share their feelings, emotions, thoughts, and beliefs with each other. In order to build a strong communication between two people, the following steps are needed:

Step 1: One should try to approach a conversation with one's life partner

Step 2: One should try to talk to one's life partner

Step 3: One should try to listen to one's life partner

Step 4: One should try to determine reality with one's life partner

In the beginning, communication gap between the couples starts from a small level, later on, it can increase up to an extent that can ruin even a secure connection. We should not impose our viewpoint and rules on our partner. We should not always show our disagreement on everything, otherwise, it might break the communication. A person might be introvert by nature still a partner is needed to share feelings and emotions. For all human beings, communication is a basic need. To be able to connect, communication is very much required.

## Aim of the Study

By the means of this research paper, I will like to exhibit the new aspect of Anita Desai's writing and also explore the main reason for Sita's Quandary, emotional exploration of her inner mind along with the impact of interpersonal communication gap on her relationship with her husband Raman. Most of the research that has been done on marital happiness suggests that homo-geneity, i.e. persons with related choices, concerns,

and ideas contribute towards a secure and permanent relationship. It shows that marriage combines two minds and souls together. Anita Desai has made the theme of man-woman relationship highlighted in most of her earlier novels. As marriage incorporates the minds of two different individuals, there are definitely some adjustments in life. In the views of Anita Desai, there is disharmony in most of the marriages as men tend to be more logical and rational in their views whereas women are more sentimental and emotional. Due to this difference in attitude, interest, and nature, their outlook towards the same thing becomes just the opposite. After marriage, woman has always been expected to adjust herself with her new surroundings and people. Her individual thoughts have been oppressed and she always has to choose the same path designed by her new home, due to which her psyche and behavior is entirely affected. She feels as if she has been caught in a net, she can't live her own dreams. For a woman, marriage finally results in abolishment of all her favourite things. In this regard, Uma Benerjee opines that, "Mrs. Desai believes that one Nora will not make much of a difference and women will continue to play the supreme price for mealtickets".<sup>2</sup>

Man-woman relationship is known as the preeminent human relationship. It is called a spark of social life. Anita Desai is known as one of the most distinguished Indian writers writing in English. Her novels portray a glimpse of Indian society through the great picturization of lonely and alienated women who feel miserable under their insusceptible and unresponsive husbands. She makes an attempt to explore the depth of a woman's psyche and depicts it to the society through her characters. "Like Edward Albee's dramatic personages, Desai protagonists face the problem of incommunication. They want to articulate their human problems. Against the forces of isolation, they strive to assert themselves."<sup>3</sup>

Sita-Raman's relationship forms the portrayal of the novel. In the views of M.K. Naik (1982): "Where Shall We Go This Summer? marks a return to the autonomous world of inner reality. Sita, the main character here, appears to be a less morbid Maya after four children."<sup>4</sup> In order to comment on Sita's life, one needs an in-depth analysis of all conditions she went through since her birth, because they play a great role in making Sita how she is. After making this research only, one can understand Sita's character and her relationship with Raman. Following this view, S.P. Swain and P.M. Naik (1994) prepare a review of Sita's predicament. Their views are given as follows:

"Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) dwells on the theme of incertitude, alienation and incommunication in married life. It is the alienation of a woman, a wife and a mother, the alienation conditioned by society and family."<sup>5</sup>

The surroundings of Sita's life have exactly been exposed by Swain and Naik. The next crucial responsibility that comes forth in mind is to identify the reasons that have made Sita's thoughts and attitude contrary to that of her husbands Raman. At the same

time, Raman's mindset also should be analyzed to examine the essence of their relationship. Their married life has greatly been affected by the family, in which they are born. Their outlooks, mentalities, intentions and behavioural tendencies have been influenced by their family surroundings and set up. Sita and Raman's marriage does not prove to be a union of mind and soul together. Marital dissonance has been studied by Dr. P.F. Patil in the novels of Anita Desai. His remarks are given as follows:

"Sita's marriage to Raman was not settled through proper understanding and love between them."<sup>6</sup>

Anita Desai in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* portrays the pathetic predicament of Sita who suffers under imperceptible and self-centered husband. Through this story, Sita's prosaic routine of insignificant survival has been shown. Her classy and luxury flat in Bombay does not give her any mental relief rather she feels strangle there and wants to run away from it all. The one and only option available for her now is to go to Manori island, her childhood home, in order to not to give birth to her fifth child.

Mostly, Sita thinks about her uncherished married life with her husband Raman. She doesn't want to continue her relation with husband further, hence, she says 'No' to her life with him. Her thoughts have been clearly depicted through the following lines:

To certain people there comes a day when they must say the great yes or the great No. He who has the yes ready with him reveals himself at once, and saying it crosses over to the path of honour and his own conviction. He who refuses does not repent. Should he be asked again, he would say No again. And Yet that No... the right No- crushes him for the rest of his life.<sup>7</sup>

Discordance of temperament and mood causes a break down of means of communication between Raman and Sita. Their relationship becomes unsatisfactory because of difference in their outlook and viewpoint.

Attitude, nature and culture of Raman and Sita are entirely the different, as Sita finds mental peace and satisfaction in the company of nature whereas her husband's thoughts are opposite in this regard. Her husband, Raman belongs to the city culture; he is a part of Industrial civilization. For Sita, feelings, emotions are more significant, she takes decisions from her heart while her husband Raman thinks from his mind, he believes in logic and reason. Her relationship with Raman is ignorant and unenthusiastic. She desires for the day to come when she and her husband will have an emotional understanding. Sita is an emotional and imaginative lady whereas Raman is a logical and rational man, the difference in their thoughts is well noticed, when they walk along the seashore:

Then they trailed down the dunes and began to walk slowly and unevenly along the edge of the sea, she close enough to it to let the

cream-frilled waves rush up and dash over her feet, then leave them washed and tingling on the glittering sand, and he a little more landwards where the tide could not assault his shod feet, his dry dignity...<sup>8</sup>

Sita looks at sea with an emotional point of view, the sea is symbolic of emotionality for her whereas Raman views objects from a different point of view as he is a cool-headed person, and he doesn't get touched by emotionality at all. "He walked on heavily, as if pushing against the heavy, sodden monsoon air, avoiding the heaps of rotting weed, the sharp rocks about the small pools and the occasional rusted tin can."<sup>9</sup> Towards their walk to seashore, Sita remains unnoticed by her husband Raman, but the moment he looks at his wife, he realizes that she is getting emotional and sentimental. "He sighed, stopped and for the first time, looked out to the sea that grew every moment more radiant as it reflected the brightening sky in which the clouds were parting to let through shafts of watery light. He said nothing, seemed unwilling to have the old, crazy arguments repeated all over again."<sup>10</sup> Raman wants to avoid any kind of argument now, still he comments, why she does not take life easily, why she is distressed and unhappy all the time. Sita becomes shocked over such reaction of her husband, as she does not expect this from her better half. Here communication gap can be noticed very well between both of them. Rather than blaming each other due to difference in point of view, they should try to discuss and share their feelings and emotions. Sita and Raman's relationship should be based on mutual love and understanding rather than compromise.

Sita feels troubled due to her loveless and emotionless married life with Raman. Being married to Sita, staying with her all day, Raman does not understand that she is not happy and satisfied in her life, in fact she feels bored. He always considers himself a dutiful man who produces income for the family. He does not understand the fundamental requirement of Sita. They both live under the same roof like strangers, they do not share any kind of intimacy which is one of the basic requirements to make any relation successful. Hollowness of her marriage provides her a shock. They both are living a life of adjustment that is based on morals, ethics and acceptance. Uma Bannerjee has correctly noticed: "This is not simply a case of an emancipated woman, revolting against the slavish bonds of marriage. It is much more than that. It is a question of the basic truth that is bitter and naked and can neither be hidden nor be halved to suit individuals."<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, Raman can be seen making comparison between himself and his wife Sita on personal level. He is an empowered modern man with parental family culture and environment, he feels pride in being an entrepreneur, and Sita has been observed as a woman living with Raman's patronizing dignity. Sita does not have a family support, she feels isolated in the world without parents, and hence, in

their relationship a sense of inferiority and superiority can be found.

Thorough study of the novel reveals that Sita's domestic life has been disregarded and neglected by her husband Raman. He gives more importance to his business life and his liability towards his children. He considers his business more meaningful rather than Sita's domestic work and life. Mentality of Raman is that of a traditional entrepreneur, according to him, material foundation in the family is of utmost importance, as far as the wife is concerned, she can be deserted psychologically and physically.

In the novels of Anita Desai male characters have been studied by Kamal Awasthi (1991). Sita's father has been referred by her as 'charlatan' and her husband as 'sedate'. Through Sita's idea of her husband Kamal Awasthi explores character of Raman: "This reality is objectified in Raman who according to her is not an introvert, nor an extrovert – a middling kind of man."<sup>12</sup> Sita's imprisoned self has been analyzed by S.P. Swain and P.M. Naik (1994), they conclude that two different attitudes and mentality, is the main reason of Sita's predicament. According to them: "Desai dramatizes the conflict between two irreconcilable temperaments and two diametrically opposed attitudes to life."<sup>13</sup>

Once seeing a young woman in the *burkha*, lying in the lap of an old man, Sita feels remarkably delighted. When she conveys this to her husband, he does not understand why her happiness is linked to strangers rather than her husband and children. Sita finds herself a free spirit because of her husband's perspective towards her, "From the way he turned, the way he disregarded her, did not see if she followed or not, she felt him release her then-give her up. He released her and at last she was free."<sup>14</sup>

She realizes that spark of love is missing in her relationship, once she sees a woman in the garden, who feels blessed under the gentle love and care of her husband. All of a sudden, Sita finds such love and gentle care is missing from her life as her husband does not express his tender love towards her. Sita has been changed fully due to the maladjustment of her married life. She has "lost her all feminine, all maternal belief in childbirth, all faith in it and again to fear it as yet one more act of violence and murder in a world that had more of them in it than she could take."<sup>15</sup>

Hence, she decides to go to the magical island where she has spent the golden days of her childhood with her father, she does not want to stay at her husband's home anymore. Even the island does not provide any relief to Sita as it looks dark and grey to her, and the young people have become old, fat and flabby who were once handsome during her childhood days. Now, she finds herself caught in the net after swimming from the sea.

Sita feels relief, and finds a cheerful surprise when Moses informs that Sahib is coming on the island. Getting this news, her children also become enthusiastic that make her realize that they do not want to live on the island due to its wild nature. Sita feels like a free bird, when her husband Raman starts

to go with his children leaving her behind, at this moment, she feels she can go and fly wherever she likes. But she could no longer dare to stay alone on the island; hence, following him and his footprints, she decides to go after him. Like the 'freed sea- bird' at evening, she wheels around and begins to circle about and then drops lower and lower towards her home.' The entire verse has finally been recollected by her now, which she fails to recollect until now:

The wild young heifer, glancing distraught, with a strange, new knocking of life at her side runs seeking a loneliness. The little grain draws down the earth, to hide. Nay even the slumberous egg as it labours under the shell patiently to divide and sub- divide. Asks to be hidden, and wished nothing to tell.<sup>16</sup>

Sita knows that after reaching to the city she has to face the extra load of family responsibilities. The only encouragement she has at this point is her courage to say 'No' like her mother, and at the same time the courage of 'being a coward' also which has not been found in her mother. As her fifth child is about to take birth, with heavy heart she thinks of all the arrangements she has to make.

In modern busy life, couples do not get enough time to have healthy communication with each other; their lives are full of tension and anxiety. An over sentimental person cannot adjust in contemporary life. "In Desai, the protagonist does not look at life from the surface. He is committed and involved. Communication gap between man and man and the disintegration of social values in a culture-ridden society bring about the alienation of her protagonists."<sup>17</sup> Sita, an overly sensitive and sentimental lady, gradually withdraws herself physically from the world. No healthy communication can be found between Sita and Raman, their married life is filled with dissonance and disharmony. Sita's existentialist sensibility and her explosive susceptible nature have been described by Mr. Madhusudan Prasad as follows:

Her is a case of incurable existentialist angst and agony, boredom and ennui that, ineluctably grip a modern sensitive person. The very interrogative title of this novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is a pointer to the very angst and ennui of her anguished soul. She like Maya of *Cry, the Peacock* is a highly introvert character and the very appeal of her character consists is her inwardness, introversion and the result any psychic odyssey.<sup>18</sup>

Sita does not get feeling of satisfaction with Raman. She tries to convey to her husband that he has never tried to understand her emotionally. When Sita takes decision of going to Manori, Raman comments, 'Don't be silly, Sita don't behave like a fool,' Think of your condition.' Sita gives her angry and violent reaction over it by saying: 'What do you know

about my condition? 'I've told you- I've tried to tell you but you haven't understood a thing.'

Sita tells her husband Raman that she does not want to give birth to her child, listening this, Raman comments, now it is very late for her to go for abortion. After getting her husband's this kind of reaction, Sita speaks loudly pointing at her wish to keep her child in her womb. Due to communication gap neither Sita is able to express herself to Raman, nor does he understand her emotions. By enhancing their communication with each other, Sita and Raman could be able to maintain loving and respectful relationship. One of the main aims of communication is to regulate what reality is. Participation and association of two people is required while communication then only their opinions, feelings, view points and thoughts can be well shared and examined along with definite and precise understanding.

It is very much clear with Sita's and Raman's hot exchange of words that they both are of bitter and contrary nature, and there is no proper understanding between them. The words like, 'ferocious glare', 'eyes burning', 'closing and unclosing fists', 'nostrils whitened', and 'laughing and mocking', express the inflexible, distinct and diverse demeanor of Raman and Sita. "They stared, incomprehendingly at each other, more divided than they had been on the balcony that day- she fighting, the other laughing. What did he mean? What did she mean? In that snarled moment of silence, time was a scummy sea, telling nothing."<sup>19</sup>

It is noticeable that Anita Desai does not ever show any mark of biased interpretation while displaying the mind of women and explaining the internal clash and rivalry in the context of husband-wife loneliness. She has depicted her female characters as hyper susceptible and they are not able to face the tough situations and realities of life. Anita Desai's use of imagery is marvelous when it comes to portray Sita's pain of exile and isolation:

She seemed to have adopted, for the occasion- the way an insect might adopt certain characteristics not of its own breed for the sake of camouflage and self defence- the anonymous look of a shy, not wholly conscious bride, quite unlike her appearance at any other time. It was a look, she had immediately discarded and lost. She was amused to turn from the album to the mirror and see the layers of experience and melancholy and boredom that had settled upon her face since then, like so much grey sand.<sup>20</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Beyond the shadow of doubt, it can be concluded that husband and wife alienation in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is due to hyper emotional nature of Sita and lack of inter-personal communication with her husband Raman. Sita feels isolated due to the pressure and strains of a family life but she resigns herself to accepting reality towards

the end of the novel. The disagreement, discord and communication gap between Sita and Raman has been repeated many times in the story. A complete estrangement can be seen between husband and wife because of their contrasting psychological attitudes.

#### **Suggestion**

Personal touch in husband-wife communication has been missing since the beginning of their relationship which proves to be the main reason of Sita's quandary. They should have been completely open to each other, nothing to be hidden and there should have been no fear of being judged. Sita should have realized that life cannot be lived subjectively, domestic hard work and discomfort is unavoidable.

#### **Endnotes**

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