

A Study of Gabriel Marcel's Views of Existentialism in Anita Desai's -*Where Shall We Go This Summer?*

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A twentieth century philosophy that emerged as an answer to so many questions of the modern world of anxiety, Existentialism is by itself a humanism which several existentialists emphasis on. The very concept of Existentialism is a vast area which in the current scenario paves way for so many unanswered queries based on psychology of human existence. Existentialism emphasizes on freedom and choice of living. Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) was a French philosopher, playwright, drama critic, and musician. He is associated with many of the well-known philosophers of his day. Marcel's philosophical inheritance includes lectures, journal entries and dramatic works in addition to more conventional philosophical expression in essays. Marcel's philosophical method was unique, although it bears some similarity to both existentialism and phenomenology broadly construed. He focused on the modern individual's struggle in a technologically dehumanizing the social order. This research is based on the traces of Marcel's ideas in Anita Desai's novel - *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*

The primary focus of existentialism is to prioritize the importance of human existence. It was a twentieth century philosophy that emerged after the world wars that proved as a savior for the several unanswered queries, to so many victims of the modern world. Existentialism can be discussed from the views of different Existentialists and focuses. Existentialism is by itself a humanism which several

A Study of Gabriel Marcel's Views of Existentialism in Anita Desai's –

Where Shall We Go This Summer? - January - March – 2013

existentialists emphasis on. French philosopher Gabriel Marcel's focus was different, that his ideals were later known as 'Christian existentialism'. Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973) was a philosopher, drama critic, playwright and musician. He well- associated himself with many of the well-known philosophers of his day. Marcel's philosophical inheritance includes lectures, journal entries and dramatic works in addition to more conventional philosophical expression in essays. Marcel's philosophical tactic was unique, although it bears some similarity to both existentialism and phenomenology broadly construed.

He focused on the modern individual's struggle in a technologically dehumanizing the social order. First he insisted that philosophy begins with concrete experience rather than abstractions. To this end he makes constant use of examples in order to ground the philosophical ideas he is investigating. Next one of his central observations about life and experience, from which he is able to derive many of the philosophical distinctions that follow is that we live in a “broken world.” A world in which “ontological *exigence*” plays a key role. The third focus to mention is the difference between problem and mystery is one that hinges much of Marcel's thought, on the notion of participation. His discussion of “creative fidelity” is an excellent place to find unification, or at least a conjunction, of the various themes and ideas in Marcel's non-systematic thought.

One of the eminent novelists of this century, Desai an Indian born novelist is considered the writer who introduced the psychological novel in the tradition of Virginia Woolf to India. Desai has taught for many years at Mount Holyoke and MIT, and spends most of the year outside India. She holds the position of Emeritus John E. Burchard Professor of Humanities at the [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#). As a writer she has been shortlisted for the [Booker Prize](#) three times; she received a [Sahitya Akademi Award](#) in 1978 for her novel *Fire on the Mountain*, from the [Sahitya Akademi](#), India's National Academy of Letters. Her novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer* is an excellent depiction of the female protagonist's turmoil and inner dilemma. This novel is one positive example for the representation of adjustment and harmony in nuptial existence.

A Study of Gabriel Marcel's Views of Existentialism in Anita Desai's – *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* - January - March – 2013

This is a passionate story of a sensitive young wife, who is torn between the desire to abandon the boredom and hypocrisy of her middle class and superficially comfortable existence. It looks like the realization of the bonds that bind her to it cannot be easily broken. Sita's life began in a magical island called 'Manori' where her father was the master of the island. He lived an ascetic sort of life and people came flocking to meet him daily. They believed that he had the power to cure ailments. He performed miracles and cured many diseases. Sita had an elder sister Rekha and younger brother Jivan, but her mother was said to have eloped to Benaras. Sita, a child who was deprived of motherly love and affection is the protagonist of the novel. She is married to a busy businessman Raman, who lives in Bombay. They are blessed with four children, all highly demanding. Sita is blessed with all that an upper middle class woman wishes for. She has servants for her beck and call and finance was not a problem so life had not much of a clear cut target. She had to take care of the kids and the household. This was what led her towards monotony and boredom. It so happens that Sita is now pregnant for the fifth time and this becomes her breaking point. In Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, one is able to see several lines that speak of the mirrored self of Sita, "I mean I want to keep it- I don't want it to be born" (32). are the words uttered by Sita in utter frustration. Sita does not wish to go on with the same life style again she wants to somehow get rid of the burden and she believes in miracles that was possible for her father, and happen just like those that happened in her island..

The title is symbolic to the queries that Sita has in her mind. As usual her husband decides plans for summer vacation and this summer it was Sita who fixed up the place and it was her father's magical island 'Manori'. Sita strongly believed the island would save her from her dilemma. Desai has very beautifully exploited the theme of existentialism by presenting the picture of a couple of temperamental incompatibility and disharmony. She is concerned with the emptiness and insecurity of man's social and familial life. Desai also later shows how it turns into a perfect harmony.

Man is a social animal, who needs love and care. He is in need of an identity inside, the urge for which drives him to any extent. He is in need of a family, a job and a future focus. But when he is unhoused, he loses the sense of belongingness and thus

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suffers from a sense of insecurity or identity crisis. In the current scenario one find women also are in need of their own identity. Sita feels that she has lost her identity. Her life revolves around trivial matters of daily life. One can see in Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer* "When I am on my death bed, hold one of Mariam's cigars under my nose. If I don't leap up to snatch up from you, you can coolly go ahead and burn me." (100). This shows that she wastes her time only in trivial, mundane activities like smoking when there is nothing to do. Constant difference in attitudes, individual complexes and fears add to the distancing between the husband and the wife resulting in conjugal disharmony. The mismatched pair of Raman and Sita are confronted with the same dilemma of husband-wife discord. Sita represents a globe of emotions and feminine sensibility while Raman is a man with an energetic view of life and the sense of the practicality.

Sita is a nervous, sensitive middle-aged woman with explosive and emotional reactions to many things that happen to her, she always wants to escape reality and does not want to grow up and face the responsibilities of adult life. On the contrary, Raman represents the prose of life. He represents sanity, rationality and an acceptance of the norms and values of society.

One can view the fact that Sita feels that she lacks identity. A mother of four children she is frustrated by the monotony of the mundane life in Bombay. One finds traces of existentialism in the character of Sita as several of Desai's novels are focused on. Sita believes several things only when she experiences things at the magical island Manori. At home in Bombay what began as a tedious work slowly progresses into infuriating monotony. She is a mother, a wife, a memsahib and a daughter-in-law. Her responsibilities keep on going into a necessity that is accepted with indifference, until even the sense of dissatisfaction with the pure functionalism of the task is lost. The unfortunate truth is that she may come to see herself, at first unconsciously, as merely an amalgamation of the functions she performs. She remains an ignored personality since childhood. She is the product of broken family. She yearns to have the attention and love of others but her father remains busy with his chelas and patients. Even after marriage, she remains lonely. Her husband also is busy. He fails to fulfill her expectation. As a result, there is marital discord, tension between husband and wife.

A Study of Gabriel Marcel's Views of Existentialism in Anita Desai's – *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* - January - March – 2013

Sita's ignorance as a spinster slowly fades away as she gains experience in life. She is very clear to the core of what life holds for her. Once she had a secure life in the island and was in the security of her father. Though she was deprived of a maternal care, the paternal care was always her support. She had a secure life in the island and was in the security of her father now she expects the same. Though she was deprived of a maternal care, the paternal care was always her support. While a married lady in Bombay, she had only faced the one facet of life whereas in the island life had taught her a great lesson of adjustment and harmony. We see Sita go with her husband back to her normal life leaving all trials back in the island after a great mental conflict.

The characterization of the world as broken place, shattered by its facets, does not necessarily entail that there was a time when the world was intact. It would be more correct to emphasize that the world we live in is essentially broken, broken in essence, in addition to having been further fractured by events in history. Sita's life also is in a travel of the broken world. Her father had always been busy with public affairs, her mother was one who had shun away family responsibilities and ran away to Benaras. Sita's sister Rekha was always the darling of the father and could also sing well and she was happy to be the darling of the AIR. Jivan had quit to become a successful Trades Union leader. Sita's children Menaka, Karan, who accompany her to Manori island never enjoy the trip. Ultimately Sita is surrounded by a broken world, she herself does not enjoy life in the island as she used to do. There was a lot of change in the island. She was in a dilemma to balance the past and the present worlds.

Transcendence does not mean merely "going beyond" without any further specification. It must retain the stress of the traditional distinction between the immanent and the transcendent, one that emphasizes a vertical rather than a horizontal going beyond, a transcendence toward a height, a trans-ascendence. Sita after her experience in the island we see acquires a great transcendence or change in the focus of life. She seemed to have gone to the state of lunacy once, when in Bombay. It is pity to see that driven by sheer stress Sita starts to do things haphazardly. She feels the island holds no more magical powers and can do no wonders anymore. She expects to keep her fifth child from being born and that was her major plan that drove her to Manori. Sita feels many things have undergone a drastic change, she slowly

A Study of Gabriel Marcel's Views of Existentialism in Anita Desai's – *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* - January - March – 2013 becomes ready to deliver her child. The concept of fidelity holds the “problem” posed by fidelity is that of constancy. It also means that the trust one has on oneself and the strength to gather, shunning away the follies of life. We see Sita sometimes misjudging others thinking too highly of them, people like her father and siblings and at other times misjudge by underestimating certain people like her husband and children. She feels they were all helpless, but understands they are her sole support. In fact when Raman and children come in search of her, Sita is marveled and regains hope.

Three decades after his death, Marcel's philosophy continues to generate a stable stream of creative scholarship. One feels that, if modest in volume, nevertheless attests to his continued significance for the contemporary philosophical landscape. Desai has very well portrayed the existential predicament portraying in par with the ideas of Marcel in her novel. There are other existentialists also of whose ideas are traced in Desai novels. The idea of Marcel's existentialism adds more dynamism to Anita Desai's novel.

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