Chapter: II

Comparative Study: Presentation of Themes in Anita Desai’s Early Fiction *Cry, the peacock* (1963), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Fire on The Mountain* (1977), and Zoya Pirzad’s *Things We Left Unsaid* (2012)
Comparative Study: Presentation of Themes in Anita Desai’s Early Fiction *Cry, the peacock* (1963), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Fire on The Mountain* (1977), and Zoya Pirzad’s *Things We Left Unsaid* (2012)

II. Introduction

II.1 *Cry, The Peacock*:

II.1.1: Incompatibility

The Themes of:  
II.1.2: Alienation
II.1.3: Betrayal
II.1.4: Maya’s Vulnerability and Reoccupation with Death

II.2 *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*

II.2.1: Themes of Illusion and Reality

The Themes of:  
II.2.2: Theme of Incompatibility
II.2.3: Theme of Regeneration
II.2.4: The theme of withdrawal

II.3 *Fire on the Mountain*:

II.3.1: Themes of Loneliness and Withdrawal

The themes of:  
II.3.2: Theme of Detachment
II.3.3: Theme of Marginalization

II.4 *Things we Left unsaid*: Themes in the Iranian Novelist: Zoya Pirzad’s Fiction:

II.4.1: Theme of Incompatibility

The themes of:  
II.4.2: Theme of Marginalization
II.4.3: Theme of Alienation
II.4.4: Rejection of Masculine Dominance

References
Chapter II: Comparative Study: Presentation of Themes in Anita Desai’s Early Fiction *Cry, the peacock* (1963), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Fire on The Mountain* (1977), and Zoya Pirzad’s *Things We Left Unsaid* (2012)

**Chapter II**

**Comparative Study: Presentation of Themes in Anita Desai’s Early Fiction**

*Cry, the peacock* (1963), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Fire on The Mountain* (1977), and Zoya Pirzad’s *Things We Left Unsaid* (2012)

**II. Introduction:**

Anita desai, who started her fictional career with her first published novel *Cry, The Peacock* (1963), was at that time a novelist with a difference. She was interested from the first in presenting the interior mindscape of the characters than writing fiction dealing with social or political themes. As she herself says, she was influenced by the leading western writers like Proust, Virginia Wolf, D. H. Lawrence and Henry James. She had an advantage of her unique cultural background, being the daughter of a German mother, and having the firsthand knowledge of the works of the western writers.

Anita Desai’s fiction explores the reality of the life of women, who are frustrated in their married life, who feel betrayed and trapped in a situation created by socio-cultural norms and expectations. Women, especially in the Indian social milieu, have either to conform to their social norms or rebel against them, even if the choices and the consequences may prove tragic for them. According to her own perception, her novels deal with what Ortega Y. Gasset called the terror of facing, single handed, the ferocious assault of existence. Anita Desai’s protagonists are mostly women, who are individualistic, and who
face loneliness. They are introverts, who sometimes experience emotional trauma leading to violent acts either to themselves or others. Anita Desai explores the psyche of the new woman of the post-modern world, who is educated and who is aware of her identity. This new woman tries to realize her expectations, but she is constrained by unjust social conventions of the patriarchal world and the burdens of her routine family life.

In this chapter, we are going to compare and contrast the themes reflected in the early fiction of Anita Desai and those in the fiction of the Iranian novelist Zoya Pirzad.

II.1. Cry, the Peacock: The Themes of Incompatibility, Alienation and Betrayal:

*Cry, the Peacock* (1963) has been described as a novel of sensibility as it is more a presentation of the disturbed psyche of the female protagonist, Maya, who is hypersensitive about her conjugal relationship. She is married to a man almost double of her age, who is an intellectual, and who is guided by reason and logic rather than by feeling. Maya, a young pampered girl, is on the other hand, extremely sensitive woman. Gautama, her husband cannot understand Maya’s emotional needs, the intensity of her feelings. He of course, cares for her, but is more like a guardian than a husband, a lover.

Maya’s first person narration reveals to us certain facts about her married life. She is very unhappy because her elderly husband, preoccupied with his
intellectual pursuits as well as his professional engagement as a lawyer, hardly has time to pay attention to her. Being elderly he cannot understand her romantic hankering after his love and attentions. When she speaks, it is for him ‘chattering like a monkey’\(^1\). She is unequal to him and beneath his notice except as a wife to be looked after, not a friend, not even a bed-companion. She says,

"Giving me an opal ring to wear on my finger, he did not notice the translucent skin beneath, the blue flashing veins that ran under and out of the bridge of gold…"\(^2\)

and did not give another thought, "to either the soft, willing body or the lonely wanton mind that waited near his bed" \(^3\). She is a sexually and spiritually starved young lady, who is helplessly caught in a marital bond with a professional lawyer, who believed much more in detachment than attachment. She craves for a child, but even after four years of marriage, she is a childless woman. Naturally, her maternal instinct finds fruition in her pets, and she develops fanatic attachment to her dog. Gautama, her husband, does not understand this. Before her marriage, Maya was totally dependent on her father, she being a motherless child; and now, after her marriage she tries to transfer her emotional attachment to her husband, Gautama, and idealizes him. She tries to win his esteem by curbing her passions and emotions, but she and Gautama are poles apart. What is really important in life? For Gautama it is detachment from the worldly things, but for

\(^1\) Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock*, P/20
\(^2\) Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock*, P/14
\(^3\) Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock*, P/14
Maya it is her sensual pleasure in living. Despite her effort to cling to his ideal, Maya cannot suppress her emotional, instinctive responses to the life around her, the nature and the people.

She genuinely tries to connect with people. She entreats her mother-in-law to stay with her at least for a few days, but her mother-in-law is preoccupied with her social work. Her sister-in-law, who is sympathetic to her, is also engulfed in her own marital problem, seeking divorce and looking after her children on her own.

Maya is a young woman with romantic temperament. On the other hand, Gautama is a prosaic intellectual, a down-to-earth lawyer, who is dedicated to his professional career and social concerns. It is interesting to note that the whole family of Gautama; his mother, sister and brother are all influenced by values of the male-dominated culture. They hardly speak about their love or attachment, their individual concerns.

"...they spoke of discussion in parliament, of cases of bribery and corruption revealed in government, of newspaper editor accused of libel, and the trials that followed, of trade pacts made with countries across the seas, of political treaties with those across the mountains, of distant revolutions, of rice scarcity and grain harvest..." 4

---

4 Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock*, P/43
And they need to lead austere life of meager meals and dull-colored clothes. The conflict between Maya’s idealized romantic hankering after love, her instinctive emotional nature and the prosaic, matter-of-fact and dry intellectual approval of Gautama and his household results into Maya’s neurosis, which is further exacerbated by her childhood prediction of death, either of her own or of her husband, after four years of married life. The story culminates into Maya finally pushing Gautama from the roof-top to his death. There are several themes interwoven into the tragic story of Maya’s married life, which is the result of incompatible relationship between Maya and Gautama.

II.1.1. The Theme of Incompatibility:

Maya’s marriage with Gautama is supposed to be her own choice. This is what we know from what Gautama himself says:

“...you have a very obvious father-obsession-which is also the reason why you married me, a man so much older than yourself. It is a complex that, unless you mature rapidly, you will not be able to deal with, to destroy.”

Maya and Gautama are different from each other not only in their age and maturing; they have radically different sensibilities. Maya would like a candle-light dinner, but Gautama, who was ‘no romantic’ would grumble about a fly falling into his dinner. Maya felt longing for close relationship with him, but she always felt

---

5 Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock*, P/122
frustrated in her effort. When she felt longing for him, to be close with him and hastily undressed to join him in bed; she

“….saw that he had closed his eyes not with mere tiredness, but in profound, invulnerable sleep, and was, very far from any world of mine, however enticing.”

Maya and Gautama appear to have two very different attitudes to life. Gautama, as an elderly intellectual, preaches the doctrine of detachment drawing his thoughts from Bhagavad Gita. Maya, on the other hand, is very much involved in the physical world, emotions of love, simple joys of life.

Their marital incompatibility springs not only from the difference in their ages, but also from his cold treatment of her during the four years of their married life. Gautama’s intellectualism always puts her off. Gautama’s responses to her always sounded to her dry and styptic. She was also aware of their two distinct personalities. She looked at herself in the mirror,

“the round, childish face, pretty, plump and pampered, its smooth, silken skin with one, small velvet mole, the small shell-like ears curling around petty ignorance, the soft, overfull lips, arched with vulnerable sweetness, the long curled lashes…”

---

6 Anita Desai, *Cry, the peacock*, P/81
7 Anita Desai, *Cry, the peacock*, P/90
which, she felt, that man like Gautama could not love; because it is not suitable to his rational, intellectual personality. She thinks he might be charmed by

“…a finer one, the elongated, etiolated, one of an intellectual, refined by thought and reflection, bereft of the weakness of impulses, aloof from coarseness and freshness.”  

Maya realizes how incompatible they are physically, temperamentally and also in their attitude to the world around. She feels intense longing to belong to the world around, she has a deep sense of attachment. But Gautama, on the other hand, tries to preach her how the sins arise from attachment:

“Thinking of sense objects, man becomes attached thereto. From attachment arises longing and from longing anger is born from anger arises delusion, from delusion, loss of memory is caused from loss of memory the discriminative faculty is ruined and from the ruin of discrimination, he perishes.”  

But, for Maya this dry philosophy sounds inhuman. She accuses him that he does not love her. She says: “Love has no importance for you. It is merely attachment.”  

To which Gautama reacts in a very characteristic manner. “Whoever spoke of love?” he says. Maya and Gautama have different point of view of life. She is particularly exasperated with Gautama’s attitude because she

---

8 Anita Desai, *Cry, the peacock*, P/90
9 Anita Desai, *Cry, the peacock*, P/95
10 Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock*, P/96
is not able to connect with him at any level. They both are in an incompatible relationship.

Gautama and Maya are incompatible characters in the sense that Maya is all emotional, romantic and physical, while Gautama is a dry intellectual, prosaic and unemotional. He often ignores Maya’s emotional needs.

One reason for Maya’s incompatibility in her married life is related to her growing up. She led a protected life in her father’s house; and was brought up on fairy tales and fantasies. After her marriage she confronts reality, which she cannot understand. The dog, Toto, was only a kind of relief for her from the incompatibility she experiences in the dry, intellectual atmosphere in her in-laws’ household and also the cold reasoning of her husband, who is double her age. She cannot be at ease with her husband’s family, as she feels left out in their social and political discussions. They also ignore her because

"...they knew I would not understand a matter so involved and I knew it myself. They spoke to me...only when it had to do with babies, meals, shopping, marriage , for I was their toy, their indulgence, not to be taken seriously, and the world I come from was less than that...it was a luxury they considered it a crime to suffer, and so columned it with dismissal. " 11

11 Anita Desai, Cry, the Peacock, P/45
Maya can hardly get mental satisfaction in her husband’s family. Her father advises her to learn to accept. He is a fatalist, who would like her to find adjustment, as one cannot change the circumstances one finds himself or herself in. Gautama, her husband, attends to the dead dog’s burial. But he has to attend to his own job as a lawyer. He cannot be with her all the time. Maya cannot understand that Gautama has his own preoccupations. She feels lonely and hurt, and blames Gautama for it. Gautama, in fact, cares for her in his own way. Gautama realizes her sorrow, wipes her tears, and tries to make her relaxed. Maya herself confesses:

"I relaxed then, like a foolish baby I sat down upon a pillow and saw, opposite me, a round-faced child in a white petticoat gazing bleakly ort of the silvered Mirror"\textsuperscript{12}.

Maya, when she rationally thinks, she knows that Gautama is friendly to her and cares for her in his own way. She suffers because she is in love with him and experiences pain when she feels neglected. She acknowledges that it is not Toto’s death but something else that makes her grieve and this something is absence of Gautama she feels there is another unremembered sorrow, which filled her with despair. She loves Gautama intensely and expects him to do so. But he is impatient with her, which strengthens her sense of isolation. While Gautama is detached and has self-control, Maya is fast losing it. She moves towards insanity.

\textsuperscript{12} Anita Desai, Cry, the Peacock, P/59
Maya’s incompatibility in her married life is also the result of her memories of protected childhood, pleasant and happy as she used to wander about in the garden, her breakfast sessions and her reading of fairy tales, the takes from the Indian mythology, and Arabian Nights. She lived like a toy princess. She could not outgrow this life. Her round baby-like face described by the writer makes out her to be a child. She feels comfortable in the memory of her childhood. When she looks upon the dead body of her dog, Toto, She screams and rushes to the garden tap to wash the vision of death. She says, ‘I had soon turned to remembrance of lullaby that was crooned to me as a child.’ The source of her incompatibility also appears to be her childhood which she has not outgrown.

II.1.2. The Theme of Alienation

Maya is a daughter of Rai Sahib, the aristocrat, who has brought up Maya meeting her whims and fancies. Maya has a loveable face, and she must have developed liking for Gautama, who often visited her father, who considered Gautama as his protégé. They both are spiritually enlightened, but Maya’s Father has not been able to pass on his philosophy of life to his young daughter. Gautama finds Maya only as a girl who has not yet grown out of her childishness. For him she is ignorant and at times silly. He is not romantic and emotional, and fails to understand Maya’s needs. During their four years of marriage, Maya feels increasingly alienated not only from Gautama but even from his entire household. She feels utterly lonely because her desire for companionship, for love and understanding, is often frustrated. Gautama’s family is different from her own
family. In Gautama’s family his brother, sister, mother all talk about politics, parliamentary affairs, the current news and so on. They hardly talk about each other’s personal life, problems, and simple family matters. In this atmosphere Maya feels emotionally insecure and lonely. She craves for the company of Gautama to escape the torture of her loneliness. Gautama once took her to a party.

At the party Maya desperately wanted to be with him. She went to him in the midst of the circle of the gentlemen who greeted her well-manneredly. But Gautama turned his back on her; he stood talking to a friend, a glass in hand, and was saying:

"Blissful, yes, because it is unrelated of our day, unclouded by the vulgarity of ill-educated men, or of overbearing women…”  

Maya listened to it and turned away. She felt that in his world she had no place. She was in his eyes, “A light-headed woman, a childish one”  She felt that she could not be accepted in his world. She, however, tries to belong to the world of Gautama, to be the ideal wife to him, sharing his ideas and thoughts. But, Gautama’s prosaic and practical responses to her efforts drive her back to her sensuous identification with the life around her. Maya increasingly feels alienated from Gautama to the point where he does not matter to her any more.

---

13 Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock*, P/89
14 Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock*, P/89
Another reason for the alienation of Maya is the intellectualism of Gautama and his callous indifference to her feelings. He preaches her detachment, but she would very much like to belong to the world around her. She says, “I don’t care to detach myself into any other world than this. It isn’t boring for me.”\(^{15}\) This temperamental opposition between them makes her feel alienated not only from him but from his entire family. When Gautama is expostulating on detachment, Maya suddenly asked him, “And love?”\(^{16}\) But for Gautama, love is an abstraction, something without ambition without any desire. Love for him is not attachment. Maya’s passion for a flower that is going to be dead by night is a folly in his opinion. He does not realize how Maya is starved of love. Maya tells him plainly how she loves him, how she wants to be with him, to touch him. She accuses him of being afraid that he cannot meet it, that he feels out of his element. Gautama does not realize how Maya hankers after his love, his physical and mental involvement in her. And with frustration she increasingly feels alienated from him.

Maya’s increasing sense of alienation makes her lose her sanity. She starts hallucinating about things. She realizes this when she says,
“Yes, I am going insane. I am moving further and further from all wisdom; all calm, and I shall soon be mad, if I am not that already. Perhaps it is my madness that leads me to imagine that horoscope that encounter with the albino, his predictions, and my fate? Perhaps it is only a phenomenon of insanity?” 17

Maya is, thus, already insecure mentally, and feels alienated from Gautama. Albino astrologer’s prophecy is an added element to her schizophrenic fear.

II.1.3. The theme of Betrayal

Maya’s marriage with Gautama was according to her own choice, as Gautama claims. Her father also thought Gautama to be the right choice for her. He is almost twice her age. Maya gradually realizes the difference between herself and Gautama, he is a dry intellectual who looks upon everything from detached point of view, always analytical and rational, Maya on the other hand, is all feeling. She realizes that there is a barrier between them holding them separate. Her expectation of Gautama, her hankering after his companionship, is defeated by his rationalist, philosophical and detached outlook on life. She feels betrayed. According to Gautama what people must achieve is “peace, or

---

17 Anita Desai, Cry, the Peacock, P/92
serenity, better words than happiness." 18 His family achieves this peace of serenity in their work or vocations.

When Maya says, she is different from him and his family, he advises her to create the world of her own, and detach herself from this world if it grows boring. For Maya, this philosophy of detachment, of casting away the present world and creating another within herself is not acceptable at all. She has no need of another world. She does not need this detachment because she is neither bored with this world nor will be. She loves to touch and feel the world around her. For her the world is full of things she can connect with. But Gautama preached her of the incarnation of one life acting upon the other, “action performed in one incarnation bearing fruit in the next.” 19

Maya is horrified at the idea of waiting for another incarnation to bear the fruit of this one. There is no reassurance of happiness in this. She feels he was betraying her with this philosophy of waiting for the fruit in the life to come. She loves the present, the life to be lived now. She craves for the child of her own. He and his logic of incarnations,

“…to pay, in this life, for what we may have done in a past one, to think that we have to pay horribly, for something horrible, something terrible, that we might have done it is terrible!” 20

---

18 Anita Desai, Cry, the Peacock, P/99
19 Anita Desai, Cry, the Peacock, P/104
20 Anita Desai, Cry, the Peacock, P/105
Maya, who is rooted in the present, feels betrayed by this agreement of waiting for the fulfillment of her desires in the next incarnation. She feels betrayed by Gautama’s dry, disinterested approach to life, which would not fulfill her desire to live life fully with a child of her own, with people around and beautiful nature. She hankers after the cry of the peacock, whose thirst and agony she shares as they hunt for their mates.

Maya feels betrayed because she, as a woman who harbors her adolescent desires, feels frustrated in her effort to build a bond of love with her husband. She is disillusioned with him, and finally comes to the point of rejection of him. Maya feels betrayed not only by Gautama but also by her very loving father, who keeps saying “it is best to accept, Maya. What good does it do to cry?” 21

Her father, too, was like Gautama, the rationalist.

“If he saw disaster, he saw it as being inevitable, and if he saw rebellion, he saw it as being hopeless.” 22

Maya knew that her father would not be of any help in her dark fears and in her relationship with her husband. Her father was a fatalist, who would advise her to learn to accept things as they are.

---

21 Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock*, P/48
22 Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock*, P/49
Finally, Maya is shown to have grown neurotic by the end of her four years of married life. One reason for her neurosis may be the prediction of death either of herself or of her husband. But, even if it is not expressed in so many words, it is suggested that her childlessness, her hankering after normal married life like other women, her loneliness finally drive her into this psychic condition. Gautama is totally oblivious to her mental and physical needs. Gautama’s death at her hands, though apparently accidental, drives her mad, and she too commits suicide.

II.1.4. Maya’s Vulnerability and Reoccupation with Death

Maya, as portrayed by the author, is very touchy and a vulnerable character. She can easily get excited. Her father used to preach a doctrine of acceptance, but Maya does not seem to have faith in it. As she is not an intellectual like her father and husband, and has excitable temperament, she has a habit of reacting to things in a very subjective way. The incident of the death of her dog, Toto, is an example of it. Maya’s husband, Gautama, does not realize how Maya is emotionally high strung. Her husband’s ignorance of her emotional and physical needs drives her to her psychic disintegration. She gradually begins to show the symptoms of schizophrenia. To add to this, her visit to the Albino astrologer unsettles her mind. She becomes neurotic and begins to think of the forecast of her husband’s death. She gets frightened of Kathakali dancers, who are really human beings, but still she reacts to their masks. The death of her dog, Toto, adds to the disintegration of her mind. She screams, but does not realize
that she is screaming, until Gautama tells her to stop screaming. A schizophrenic person feels his or her own action to be someone else’s action. In this state of mind Maya takes Albino’s prediction to be true. Maya sometimes comes out of this state of mind and starts thinking like a normal person but these moments do not last.

Gautama is also responsible for this mental state of Maya. He does not understand Maya’s need for physical relation with him, and he does not understand the importance of sex in life. He perhaps abhors physical love as coarse and vulgar. But, for Maya, it was essential. He looks upon ‘copulation’ with horror, and detests her physical demands.

Maya’s another obsession was with death. In fact death is the theme in Cry, the Peacock, She likes Gautama’s talk about death and the life after it. Peacock’s cry or scream is associated with death. When her sleep is disturbed by a peacock’s cry, she feels the agony of death.

Maya’s marital life grows oppressive for her on account of Gautama’s dryness and his intellectuality. She finally realizes that Gautama could not give her what she wanted, and she is no more troubled over his return. She takes for granted his intellectual preoccupation, and his distance from her. Maya cannot accept or practice his philosophy of detachment. She is tortured by the sense of neglect and feels very lonely. She loses her self-control, as she is more and more preoccupied with the idea of death. She is unable to extricate her thoughts
from the prophecy of the astrologer. She herself is not prepared for death, but she thinks Gautama has reached the stage of detachment which he preaches and life or death does not make any difference for him. In her subconscious mind she begins to have thoughts of death. She suggests to Gautama that they should go for a stroll on the roof. And all this time she is preoccupied with death. She herself is not prepared for it, as she has sensuous love for life, which drives her to transfer the burden of the prophecy of death to Gautama. She, perhaps, accidentally pushed Gautama because he came between her and the fool moon. She describes Gautama's shadow as an ugly, crooked shadow that transgressed its (the moon’s) sorrowing chastity. There is an association of the full moon with madness, in the sense that mad people get unbalanced or excited at the sight of it. Maya’s preoccupation with death, and the full moon combined to affect her neurotic state of mind, and screaming she pushed Gautama down.

II.2. Where Shall We Go This Summer?: The Themes of Illusion and Reality, Incompatibility and Regeneration

Sita, in Anita Desai's novel, Where Shall We Go this Summer?, rebels against her drab and callous urban life after giving birth to four children, and the fifth in her womb waiting to be born. Like Maya in Cry, The Peacock, she too finds herself trapped and decides to run away to the Manori Island, where her
legendary father used to live. Talking to Jasbir Jain *Stairs to the Attic* \(^{23}\), she relates Sita’s predicament to her unusual childhood,

“...she is led to expect life to continue to be extremely unusual, full of large, meaningful happenings, whereas life comes to her as very trivial, full of disappointment...” \(^{24}\)

Sita’s father was a freedom fighter and a social worker. Sita as a motherless child was full of strange experiences. Her father was believed to be a magic man by rustic people around the island. Until he lived, the life of the island for Sita was enchanting. After his death, she was taken to Bombay by her father’s friend. She eventually married his son, Raman, a factory owner. Sita who is a very sensitive woman, felt bored and disillusioned even after a great spell of her married life.

Sita’s memory of her life on the island house of Manori was influenced by the larger-than-life portrait of her father. In her heart of heart she felt that going back to that island house; she would be able to capture once again that magic, which would enable her to escape the drab, monotonous, though comfortable existence in the city. Her momentous decision to go back to the island house with her two children is really an effort to find escape from this monotonous life and capture the magic she had once experienced on the island house when her father was alive. But, the story of Sita is her journey from the Illusion of the

\(^{23}\) 1987. (P.11)

\(^{24}\) Jasbir Jain, Stair to the Attic, 1987, P/11
romantic life at the island house of Manori and back to the reality of her life in Bombay.

**II.2.1. The Theme of Illusion and Reality**

We can see that there are two tendencies warring in Sita’s mind, she is a sensitive woman, who is utterly dissatisfied with the squabbles and noise and the trivialities of the Bombay suburban life around her and in her family. She has four children and the fifth is on the way she is disenchanted with this stereotype life of pregnancy and birth, and daily chores of life. Her life with her father on the island appears to her now like a dream, and she would like to escape to it as she is going through fifth pregnancy. She believes that there is magic at that island house, where she can keep her baby unborn within her. This irrational desire stems from her dissatisfaction with her present life, and her hankering after the miracle she is waiting for to happen in her life at the Island.

As pointed out above, she expects something unusual to happen in her life, as she had experienced her father’s extremely unusual life full of a variety of meaningful happenings. Sita, in fact, is not sure what she really wants. Her dissatisfaction stems from her drab middle-class life, which she mentally contrasts with the life on the Island. She has romantic notions about it, which makes her increasingly hanker after the past. Her decision to leave for Manori Island is an impulsive reaction against her routine and drab married life of child-bearing and housekeeping.
Sita has intense emotional reactions to things happening around her. The incident of a wounded young one of an eagle being attacked by the crows shows how her nerves can be easily distraught. Her reactions to the normal fights among the children were also intense and frenzied. She could not stand their shouting and bawling and kicking. She is disturbed by the mock-fighting of her sons, imitating a fight in a movie, her children, their simple, mindless actions frightened her. Which is her indirect reaction to the noisy, in human city life. She is impatient with her husband’s guests, who were noisy and talked of nothing but food and sex. Sita could not come to terms with the city life of Bombay, the noise, the squabbling, the quarrels and fights disturbed her.

When Menaka tears up her water-colour painting, Sita tearfully protests. She is utterly disappointed with her life in which she finds people around her caring for nothing else “but appetite and sex, only food, sex and money matter. Animals…”25 Sita, who is bored and dissatisfied with her life, decides to withdraw to the island house of her father, because of her memory of it as a glamorous place of magic and enchantment. She expects a miracle to happen there. Her childhood memory of it promises it to be full of vitality. She unconsciously believes that her children would like to have the experience of this island life, and would understand her own hankering after it.

But Sita’s romantic expectations of the island life are sorely defeated. The magic notion she has of the island home of her childhood proves to be an

---

25 Anita Desai, *Where Shall we Go this Summer?*, P/43
illusion. Sita, though a grown up woman now, is still under the influence of her adolescent life with her father. She thinks that her stay on the magical island would impart same meaning to her own life. She had seen how her father successfully met the needs of people with his social and spiritual experiments. Sita expects to find meaning of her own life coming back to the island home of her childhood. But in reality, her father's charismatic personality had only restricted appeal, enough to satisfy the spiritual and mundane needs of the villagers. On coming back to her island life, Sita fails to relive the magic life of the past. It had vanished with her father's death.

II.2.2. The Theme of Incompatibility

Maya in Cry, the Peacock was brought up by her father in a protective and insulated life at home. Similarly, Sita in this novel remained in her adolescent state of mind as she was not exposed to the realities of life. Sita’s reactions to the social life around her in Bombay were eccentric because her abnormal childhood had not prepared her to accept the everyday happenings in the life in a large metropolitan city. Her husband, Raman, is surprised at her intense reaction to the everyday incidents. The isolated life that she led on the island had not provided Sita to face the events and happenings in her life in the city. Sita herself was quite aware of her inadequacies, her lack of confidence. Her life on the island failed to give her experience to lead a city life. Her husband, Raman, is surprised to see her extreme reactions to the everyday events. When Sita decided to leave for Manori Island, he said to her,
Chapter II: Comparative Study: Presentation of Themes in Anita Desai’s Early Fiction Cry, the peacock (1963), Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975), Fire on The Mountain (1977), and Zoya Pirzad’s Things We Left Unsaid (2012)

“…but you are not leaving for such small incidents, Sita? They occur in everyone’s life all the time. If you are an adult, you know how to cope with them—they are only small incidents.”

Sita’s problem here is her incompatibility to come to terms with her life in the city, where a variety of incidents occur and she is disturbed by them. She tells Raman:

“it’s all madness – the boy acting out that scene from the film they saw, fighting each other on the floor, Menaka and her magazine and the way she’s torn all torn all these drawings of her’s I’d kept so carefully; the ayah taking Karan to that – that roadside dump where all the ayahs sit and gossip and fight; the way you laughed because I tried to keep the bird alive;…”

Sita and her husband, Raman are poles apart in this. He is city bred from childhood and has learnt to understand happenings around him as part of everyday life. But, for Sita, these incidents are quite unsettling. She is herself aware sometimes of her own inadequacies, her lack of confidence and her unfruitful life on the island.

Sita appears to reject the life in the city and wants to go back to the island home of her father because her abnormal childhood there has rendered her life in the city incompatible. Her life with her father has inculcated in her some

---

26 Anita Desai, Where Shall we Go this Summer?, P/32
27 Anita Desai, Where Shall we Go this Summer?, P/34
strange belief in miracles. She would like to keep her child unborn, not abort it. Raman, who is a practical man, cannot argue against this. “…you want to work a miracle, Immaculate Conception in reverse” \(^{28}\) he comments.

Sita’s reactions to everything are extreme. Raman’s business associates are invited for a party. Raman is very practical about it, because he has to talk to them about business matters. He is neither too involved nor too detached while dealing with them. But, he cannot understand Sita when she vehemently criticizes them as animals. Sita could not get on with Raman’s family also. In the first year of their married life, Sita had almost revolted because she found her in-laws placid, calm and sluggish.

Sita’s incompatibility also stems from her lack of confidence. She did not have schooling like a normal child. She feels her inadequacy when she looks at the accomplishment of her daughter, Menaka. She says to her:

“I wish I had your talent. I used to think. After I left this island and had to think what I would do next – that if only I could paint, or sing or play the guitar well, really well. I should have grown into a sensible woman. Instead of being what I am… I should have known how to channel my thoughts and feelings, how to put them to use.” \(^{29}\)

\(^{28}\) Anita Desai, *Where Shall we Go this Summer?*, P/33
\(^{29}\) Anita Desai, *Where Shall we Go this Summer?*, P/108
The feeling of her inadequacy was also one of the reasons contributing to her incompatibility. This is to some extent the reason for her hankering after her childhood days, the magical world of Manori. But she is disillusioned when she actually goes and stays there with her children. This disillusionment leads to her regeneration, her waking up to the reality.

Like Maya, Sita is also lured by the fantasy to the island life of her childhood. She too refuses to face reality of life. She ignores the children’s reluctance to go to Manori as they are accustomed to the city life. Raman, her husband also needs her, but she is obsessed by the idea of keeping her child unborn. This is her madness. She thinks at the island there would be miracle, and she would be able to keep her child unborn, as she does not want it to be born in the corrupt world around her. She looks upon the island of Manori as ‘magic mirror - it was so bright, so brilliant to her eyes.’ Here she could remain sane; she feels. When her father was alive, she recalls, how he used to cure people by miracle. Her father had become a legendary figure at the island.

If Maya is incapable of coming face to face with reality and listen to the advice of her father ‘to accept’, Sita, too, was the victim of the rejection of city life and hankering after the dream world of her father’s island life at Manori. Sita’s idea of keeping her child unborn is her reaction to the intolerably violent city life of Bombay. Anita Desai, in her interview with Jasbir Jain says:
"In many ways her experience of life had been bleak and drab grey in many ways, harrowing and depressing and she could not bear the thought of bringing the child into a world as dreadful as this".

II.2.3. The Theme of Regeneration:

Sita, on her own, decides to go back to Bombay with her husband when he comes to the island of Manori to take away the children. In a way, she appears to have surrendered to the demands of her family or her social life. K. N. Awasthi (1993) comments that her “rebellion is immature and largely ineffective.” But, this is not so. The story of Sita here is that of Regeneration. She has graduated from her adolescent hankering after the world of her father. She is disillusioned of her romantic longing for her life as a child on the island. In fact, her rebellion was not really rebellion in the sense of abandonment of her family altogether. She believed in the magic of the island, where she would be able to keep her child unborn within herself. She had not left her husband’s house never to return. The very fact that she took her two children with her, shows that she had not cut off her relation with the family. Sita’s experience of visiting the island of Manori was essential for exorcising her father’s latent influence on her adolescent life. Sita’s going back with her husband should be interpreted as her regeneration, her freedom from her father’s influence. Her return to her family in Bombay is the result of her transcending the illusory magic

---

Chapter II: Comparative Study: Presentation of Themes in Anita Desai’s Early Fiction *Cry, the peacock* (1963), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Fire on The Mountain* (1977), and Zoya Pirzad’s *Things We Left Unsaid* (2012)

of the island as well as the magic of her father’s personality. Her journey to the island house enables her to reinterpret her life and experiences on the island and see the inconsistencies of her life during her adolescence. It is; therefore, wrong to interpret her going back with her husband as her defeat or immature rebellion. Unlike Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, she retains her sanity and embraces life rather than rejecting it. She had not, in fact, forsaken her family. She had tried to find meaning in her father’s magic world that she had experienced in her childhood; and when she realizes that there is no such alternative for her as well as for her children, she decides to retrace her steps. Seeking and testing alternatives in life cannot be interpreted as defeat.

II.2.4. The theme of withdrawal:

Sita cannot get accustomed to the violence and destruction around her in the metropolitan city. There is atmosphere of gossip and quarrelling among servants, the fighting between the children and among the women. She is not able to adjust with the routine life which is marked by the absence of feeling. She expects from her children and others around her a sensitive approach in life. But she finds nothing but callousness; complacency and violence.

"They all hammered at her with cruel fists The fallen blocks, the torn watercolors, the headlines about the war in Vietnam, the photographs of women weeping over a small grave, another of a crowd outside a Rhodesian jail; articles about the perfidy of
Pakistan...they were hand-grenades all, Hurled at her frail gold fish-bowl belly and Instinctively she laid her hands over it”. 31

Sita is overwhelmed with the violence around her. She hankers after the calm and quiet life, at Manori Island. She feels life is at constant danger here in this city life and feels a desire to find meaning for her existence. She could not accept that life could continue like this in a small, enclosed area. It is for her 'a grey, dull-lit, empty shell.' Sita grows rebellious at this kind of life. For her, the trip to Manori Island is a trip back to her childhood, which was a perfect life for her. The island has become for her a refuge, an escape from the boredom she feels in the metropolitan life. The ordinary mundane life grows insufferable for her. She, therefore, longs for the magic island life which might bring her release. The reality of the city life has repelled her and she tries to go back to the island life of her childhood though it was an illusion.

Her withdrawal to the island brings her face to face with reality. Her withdrawal is not merely running away from the city. It was in fact her search for love, 'for free and unquestioning love'. She remembers how at the island, a woman dying of T.B. was being nursed by a person with devotion and love. It is self-less love in the face of death. She expects this kind of love from Raman; but she is unable to get it. There is conflict in her between the need to withdraw to keep her individuality and also the need to be involved. She is torn between her desire to withdraw from the callous city life and at the same time she feels

31 Anita Desai, Where Shall we Go this Summer?, P/49
attachment to her family. When Raman comes to the island, she says, he has come because Menaka had called him. Sita feels betrayed and she is disappointed. Her children also have betrayed her. Sita feels that she is loved neither by her husband nor by her children. There is conflict in Sita between her desire to withdraw so that she can keep her individuality intact, and the need to be involved with her family, her husband and the children.

II.3. Fire on the Mountain

II.3.1. The themes of Loneliness and Withdrawal

Fire on the Mountain is Anita Desai’s award winning novel, which won the Sahitya Academy and also Royal Society Award. The novel is mainly concerned with Nanda Kaul, who lives alone in Kausali, at the hill-top house, Carignano. Nanda Kaul is the wife of the late vice-chancellor, who now lives a secluded life in Kausali. But her seclusion is disturbed by the arrival of her great granddaughter, Raka, Just an eight year old, introvert and sensitive child. She, like her great grandmother, loves to be left alone. She wanders up and down the hills and ravines, and strangely, she is attracted towards the nature's desolation and the fire that occasionally breaks out on the hills. She likes to wander about

“…the ravaged, destroyed and barren spaces in Kanauji that drew her: the ravine where yellow snakes slept under grey rocks and agave growing out of the dust and rubble, the skeletal pines that
rattled in the wind, the wind-leveled hill-tops and the seared remains of the safe, easy, civilized world…” 32

Raka is an unusual child. She likes to wander all alone and does not like her great grandmother to encroach upon her privacy. Nanda Kaul makes up fantastic stories for her about her own childhood, about the wild animals her father kept in the house, the bear, the leopards, etc. Raka feels occasionally interested, but she is always looking for an opportunity to vanish into the hills. Like her great grandmother, Raka is also a recluse. Both love seclusion. Nanda Kaul’s seclusion, her almost total withdrawal from her relations, is the result of her

“…long life of duty and obligation, her great grandmother was a recluse by nature, by instinct. She had not arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice – she (Raka) was born to it, simply.” 33

Raka’s arrival at Carignano serves the purpose of unfolding the past of Nanda Kaul’s life. Though she made up romantic stories of her past for the sake of her great-granddaughter, she finally breaks down when the reality of it hits back at her with the arrival of her childhood friend, Ila Das, and her brutal murder in the end. Her vice-chancellor husband was secretly in love with a Christian woman, Ms. David. She felt betrayed by her husband and even by her children –

32 Anita Desai, Fire on the Mountain, P/99-100
33 Anita Desai, Fire on the Mountain, P/52-53
Chapter II: Comparative Study: Presentation of Themes in Anita Desai’s Early Fiction Cry, the peacock (1963), Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975), Fire on The Mountain (1977), and Zoya Pirzad’s Things We Left Unsaid (2012)

her daughters, who remember her only to saddle her with some responsibility. She is alienated from them and tries to keep her distance from them. The novel presents three women, actually a girl and two grown-up women, who have been rendered lonely and tragic by their circumstances in a male-dominated world.

II.3.2. The Theme of Detachment:

Nanda Kaul, the grandmother, has deliberately cultivated her mood of detachment, after having served her family, as a dutiful wife, and mother, etc. she was conscious of her husband’s clandestine affair with Ms. David. She was also aware of how her own children, her daughter, remembered her only when they thought of the use of her. Nanda Kaul, at Kasauli, has decided to live her secluded life as a result of the sacrifice she had to make and the rejection she had to suffer, from her husband and children. She feels detached now and would like to live an independent life at Kasauli.

When she gets a letter from Asha, her daughter that her (Asha’s) grandchild, Raka, is being sent to her to recuperate Nanda’s privacy is threatened. She is reluctant to accept any such responsibility. In fact, she does not feel involvement with her children’s problems at all. Nanda Kaul’s detachment was the result of her disillusionment with her husband and her children. Her life was like bare rocks of Kasauli, where, in the crevices, there were serpents hidden from the eyes.
Her husband, the vice-chancellor of a university, carries on an affair with Miss David, the teacher of Mathematics, who, he could not marry because she was a Christian. She knew her husband did not love her. Even her children behaved like aliens with her, preoccupied with their own life and problems. Nanda did not understand them, and did not feel her motherly attachment to them, but she carried on her duty as a wife, as an efficient hostess and as a mother. When Raka comes to live with her, she tells her stories about her married life full of glories, but it was all false only to captivate Raka, and these made-up stories proved like tranquilizers for her to have sound sleep. Nanda has unpleasant memories of her married life, of betrayal and shame, and she comes to live at Kasauli with this wounded psyche. She was respected and envied by other women, and they used to say,

"Isn't she splendid? Isn't she like a queen? Really the vice-chancellor is lucky to have a wife who can run everything as she does."34

Nanda Kaul performed the roles of the mother and also perfect hostess, but while doing this she had sacrificed her individual self. With her unfaithful husband and uncaring children. She is emotionally a wounded woman. There is an image of charred tree-stump which occurs in the novel, which symbolizes her feelings about her experience of married life. The desolate nature at Kasauli represents her own life of desolate nature at Kasauli represents her own life of desolation.

34 Anita Desai, Fire On the Mountain, P/18
Like herself, her grand-child Raka, has also been a victim of the desolate childhood. Like her great-grandmother, Raka is also a recluse, on account of the rejection she felt and the abject degradation that she witnessed of her mother. She had seen her father coming home,

"...stumbling and crashing through the curtains of night, his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse –harsh, filthy abuse that made Raka cower hinder her bed-clothes and wet the mattresses in fright." 35

Nanda Kaul also suffered on account of the betrayal of her husband, so much so that she became emotionally detached, and finally preferred the wilderness of Kasauli to her children’s and grand-children’s company.

II.3.3. The Theme of Marginalization:

   The women in Fire on the Mountain appear to live a marginalized life. Nanda Kaul, for example, has decided to accept the marginalized life, away from her children and grandchildren. This marginalization is the result of self-seeking behavior of her husband, who is no more, and her daughters, who remember her only when they have a problem. Nanda Kaul was disillusioned with her husband, when she discovered his clandestine affair with Ms. David. She knew that her role in the family, as a wife, was to maintain appearances, which she did.

35 Anita Desai, Fire On the Mountain, P/71-72
Another marginalized person is Ila Das; her childhood was spent in affluence. It was a protected life, and despite her strange voice, an abnormality, she found a vocation in her life, that of a teacher, through Nanda’s husband’s influence. Ila is a very sincere and self-respecting woman, but not traditionally educated, with a degree to her credit. As a result of haughty temperament, she lost her job. Ila Das has found a vocation for herself as a social worker, which she thinks, would help her to battle her loneliness. But, she, now and then, realizes how difficult it is to live on her own, a marginalized life, having no relations except an old friend like Nanda Kaul.

Raka, the eight year old child, is also a marginalized character in this novel. There is no love lost between herself and her mother and she has come to Carignano to live with her great-grandmother to recuperate her health. She is essentially, a lonely child and tries her best to be alone. Raka’s love of loneliness could be from the way she tries to avoid her great grandmother, and how she goes against her instruction without speaking to her. Raka’s loneliness is shown by the writer in her wandering alone and not meeting anyone. She is uncommunicative giving very little response to her great-grandmother’s efforts to socialize her.

Raka does not like to be watched or questioned. “She hated her great-grandmother intently watching her ascent” Krishnaswamy Shantha comments:
Chapter II: Comparative Study: Presentation of Themes in Anita Desai’s Early Fiction Cry, the Peacock (1963), Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975), Fire on The Mountain (1977), and Zoya Pirzad’s Things We Left Unsaid (2012)

“...traumatic childhood has hardened her into a hard little core of solitary self-sufficiency and now recovery from a bout of typhoid, her spirit is defiant enough.” 36

Raka’s secretiveness, her love for wilderness of Kasauli could be the result of violence and viciousness she experienced in the family, her drunken father beating his wife.

All these three novels portray women who were either ill-fitted or ill-treated in their family life. In Cry, the Peacock Maya’s upbringing had somehow rendered her unfit as a spouse of an adult, intellectual husband, who could not understand her romantic hankering after nature. In Where Shall We Go This Summer?, Sita experiences existential problem of living with her husband and even children, who do not understand her emotional attachment to her father’s world of the island of Manori. She feels disillusioned with life as her bringing-up had not prepared her for it. Sita resents that people care merely for food, sex and money. She is tired of stereotypical life of cooking and giving birth to children. And in Fire on the Mountain, Nanda Kaul, Ila Das and even the child Raka, who feel rejected and essentially lonely in their life face the problem of marginalization. They try best to lead their life independently, but they too feel the after-effects of the cruelty and violence of the male-dominated family life.

36 Krishnaswamy Shantha, 1982, P/262
II.4. Themes in Zoya Pirzad’s Fiction: *Things We Left Unsaid*

Zoya Pirzad is a modern Iranian writer of repute, her novel *Things We Left Unsaid* (2009) has won international acclaim. It presents the life and experiences of the female protagonist, Clarice, a housewife in a Christian family. She is portrayed as a sensitive woman, a dutiful wife, a loving mother and a very hospitable housewife. She is also the lover of literature, widely read, often consulted by the principal of the school showing her the translations made by him. She hardly says no to the demands of others. She often realizes what she should have said or reacted to but fails to do so. Her relatives naturally take advantage of her.

Clarice believes that a woman is more than just a home maker like her mother; she shouldn’t dress up just to please others as her sister Alice does. She herself is always neat and tidily dressed but never showy. Her sister Alice asks her, “Where has it gotten you?”[^37]. She does not answer her, but it makes her introspect. There are incidents in her life which make her think about her life; her likes and dislikes, her relationship with her husband and also her children. But this calm and quiet routine life of Clarice is disturbed when a new, aristocratic Armenian family comes to stay across in the same street. There is a widower young man, who lives with his old mother and a school-going daughter. Emile, The young man, is a contrast to Clarice’s, husband Artoush. Clarice finds in Emile someone with whom she can share her feelings. When Nina, her friend,

[^37]: Zoya Pirzad, *Things We Left Unsaid*, P/18
thinks of Emile as a possible bridegroom for her Violette, Clarice feels empty. She can hardly say anything. The title of the novel ‘Things We Left Unsaid’ is really about Clarice, whose life is what it is because she has left many things unsaid. Clarice is at the center of the novel, going through her mundane life without a complaint, but in heart of heart she nurses grievance of not having said things she wanted to say.

II.4.1. The Theme of Incompatibility

Clarice, the efficient and dutiful housewife as well as a loving mother, is all the time preoccupied with the daily chores of life, hardly paying attention to herself or what she wants. Her husband Artoush is preoccupied with his work, playing chess when at home and there is in the novel hardly any scene where Artoush has a word of love for Clarice or any occasion of animated talk between them. It, of course, does not mean that Artoush is an overbearing husband. But, it is also true that Clarice cannot share with him her love of literature, her likes and dislikes. Their incompatibility stems from their different individuality. Artoush as an officer in the oil-refinery, is preoccupied with his job, and he is also secretly associated with opposition politics. Their relationship is incompatible in the sense that Clarice can hardly share her feelings, with him. She is just a housewife, not a companion. In a sense, she feels like Nanda Kaul in Anita Desai’s novel ‘Fire on the Mountain.’ Like Nanda Kaul, she too feels alienated from her children, especially her son Armen.
Clarice is a voracious reader. She has keen sense of language and literature, but Artoush says, “poems and stories do not pay the rent” 38 Clarice, however, is respected by the school principal, who seeks her opinion on books he translates, from English into Persian. There are incidents which make Clarice think over her relationship with her husband and her children. She and Artoush had bought two suitcases at the Kuwaiti Bazaar. She carried the suitcases one in each hand while Artoush walked empty-handed. Shahendah, the storekeeper, jocularly said, “Doc, you’ve got yourself a pretty porter!” 39 Clarice does not say anything, but she does realize how her husband takes her for granted. She is reminded of this incident when Emile, who comes to change the soil in the flower pots. He tells her not to do anything, and he proceeds to change the soil and tend the plants. He uses ‘informal you’ to address her.

Clarice opens up with Emile about her reading, and talks and talks without feeling any inhibition. She does not hear even the school bus arriving. Emile keeps watching her as she talks. Later, Clarice feels embarrassed about it. She blames herself for showing off. Her other mind, “the generous streak in her”40 defends her saying, “She wasn’t showing off. She was suit talking about the things she likes.” 41 And the critical mind questions her, “Since when do we ever talk about the things we like?”42 which suggests that many things are “unsaid” by

38 Zoya Pirzad, Things We Left Unsaid, P/90
39 Zoya Pirzad, Things We Left Unsaid, P/162
40 Zoya Pirzad, Things We Left Unsaid, P/169
41 Zoya Pirzad, Things We Left Unsaid, P/169
42 Zoya Pirzad, Things We Left Unsaid, P/169
Clarice in her life. Clarice realizes the incompatibility in her married life with Artoush. He often treats her like a valet or even valet’s servant\textsuperscript{43}. Clarice is not interested in Artoush’s politics. After their engagement, he used to take her to a meeting of Iran Soviet society and she was always bored. Artoush does not notice if Clarice has put on a new dress or put flowers on the table. Clarice loves to read books. She is a voracious reader. This is a common point between her and Emile. But her husband does not share her love of literature.

\textbf{II.4.2. The Theme of Marginalization}

Clarice, in her heart of heart, feels that she is being used or imposed upon by her relations. Her sister, Alice thinks only of her husband and herself. Alice gets a job in the oil company hospital in Abadan, so Mother comes to stay with her along with Alice. Clarice doubts if mother would have come only for her. Nina her friend always saddles her with a dinner party or a lunch, inviting people to her house. Nina has to find suitable partner for Violette, and thinks of Emile as a possible match. She tries to saddle Clarice with a job to talk to Mrs. Simonian Emile’s mother about it. Like Mrs. Simonian, Clarice has always chosen to put up with things, for the sake of her mother, sister, friends and her husband as well as her children. She comes across her son Armen’s letter, addressed to Emily the daughter of Emile; in which he accuses, mother, father everyone

\textsuperscript{43} Zoya Pirzad, \textit{Things We Left Unsaid}, P/15
Chapter II: Comparative Study: Presentation of Themes in Anita Desai’s Early Fiction Cry, the peacock (1963), Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975), Fire on The Mountain (1977), and Zoya Pirzad’s Things We Left Unsaid (2012)

“…mother who only knows how to criticize and cook and plant flowers and complain, down with fathers, mothers and grandmothers” 44

Clarice is in tears as she reads this. She feels very unhappy. No one appears to understand her. Her son criticizes her calling her a nag. The husband does not exchange a single word. Mother and sister ridicule her, Nina, the friend, is solely concerned with fixing a match of Violette with Emile. Her husband thinks only of getting a partner for playing chess, and Emile is his choice. Clarice feels like Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain, who also experiences this marginalization by her husband and her children. Clarice would like to talk about the things she likes, but what she thinks or feels is always left unsaid. No one appears to understand her or care for her feelings.

Clarice is always in the kitchen because there are relatives, and one or the other program. Her sister Alice invites people to dinner without asking Clarice, who wonders what right Alice has to do so. But she cannot say a word. When Artoush asks her “What’s for dinner?” She flares up and says, “Nothing. Go, get something from Annex”45 Apart from this Clarice hardly protests against the work imposed on her. Clarice feels marginalized not only by her mother and sister, but also by her husband and children.

---

44 Zoya Pirzad, Things We Left Unsaid, P/210
45 Zoya Pirzad, Things We Left Unsaid, P/178
II.4.3. The Theme of Alienation

Like Sita in Anita Desai’s novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Clarice experiences alienation especially when she reads her son Armen’s letter addressed to Emily. Except for her work in the kitchen, she hardly exists for her husband and children. Mrs. Simonian is the only one who understands her predicament. Clarice can hardly open up her mind to anyone. Her exchanges with her husband are about routine matters of home. Her children talk to her only about their needs, their complaints and quarrels. She does not appear to exist beyond being a wife, a mother or someone who uncomplainingly by cooks for relations. No one appears to think of her. Her feeling of alienation is assuaged a little by Emile’s entry in her life. She can talk to him about what she likes. They share many things. Clarice and Emile find themselves exclaiming *‘me too’* as the talk about what they like. But this companionship is threatened by Nina’s intention of getting her daughter, Violate, marry Emile. Clarice, who had the only chance to open up and come Out of her boredom is threatened by Nina’s proposal. Even Emile, who tells Clarice that he would like to marry Violette, does not realize what a blow it is for Clarice. She uncomplainingly goes through this charade, Only Mrs. Simonian realizes that Violate is not a good match for her son. She does not openly say anything, but she has in mind someone like Clarice, or is it Clarice only? This is a moot question. Neither Clarice nor Mrs. Simonian say anything. Things are thus unsaid, leaving Clarice to her alienation, mechanically carrying on her daily routine. Clarice’s feeling of alienation draws
Chapter II: Comparative Study: Presentation of Themes in Anita Desai’s Early Fiction *Cry, the peacock* (1963), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Fire on The Mountain* (1977), and Zoya Pirzad’s *Things We Left Unsaid* (2012)

her to Emile, who shows concern for her. As she clears the dinner table, he says, “Clarice, can I lend a hand? ”\(^46\) Clarice wonders whether he really wants to help her or he calls her by name to please her. He once says to her

> “Everyone enjoys talking with you. Talking with you is comfortable.
> 
> …A person feels like he’s known you for years” \(^47\)

Emile’s attentions glaringly underline Artoush’s way of taking Clarice for granted. When Clarice burns her fingers lifting the hot frying pan. Emile’s reaction is to make her sit at the dining table, and make her drink a glass of water. He brings a jar of medicine to apply it to her burnt fingers. But Artoush scolds her for her “irrational fanciness from your mother” \(^48\) such incidents glaringly make her feel alienated from her husband. She feels her mother is more concerned for her sister rather than for her. She feels alienated even from her growing up son, Armen.

**II.4.4. Rejection of Masculine Dominance:**

The Iranian Revolution in the late 20\(^{th}\) century was a unique opportunity for women to participate in Iran’s social as well as political development. The women, who were most active in this phase, were of course from the middle and the lower classes of the Iranian society. The war imposed on Iran resulted into women’s active participation in the socio-political field. Women did not remain

---

\(^46\) Zoya Pirzad, *Things We Left Unsaid*, P/91
\(^47\) Zoya Pirzad, *Things We Left Unsaid*, P/101
\(^48\) Zoya Pirzad, *Things We Left Unsaid*, P/106
passive spectators of what was happening in the country. The women writers boldly expressed the feelings and passions of women. Mushtaq E. (1999) says woman,

“…takes away all the masks and weapons she took in centuries to hide herself from her in herself, and bares out her tender and sensitive soul.”

In the character of Clarice in Zoya Pirzad’s novel, we realize how Clarice reacts against her husband’s way of taking her for granted. She feels attracted towards Emile, the new neighbor, and does not feel guilty about it. She is, of course, a dutiful loving mother and she is all the time conscious of her responsibility toward her family and other relations. In Clarice’s character the writer shows how the educated middle-class women like Clarice formed their own identity and are ready to challenge masculine dominance. Clarice shows how women are ready to challenge patriarchal tradition. This is revealed more glaringly in Zoya Pirzad’s, We Get Used to It (2003), in which two women, Shirin and Arezoo, achieve independent identities and deal with their social surrounding quite confidently. Clarice, though mostly portrayed as a dutiful housewife, has achieved independent identity through her literary studies. The principal of the school consults her on his work of translation of the Iranian fiction.
Chapter II: Comparative Study: Presentation of Themes in Anita Desai’s Early Fiction *Cry, the peacock* (1963), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Fire on The Mountain* (1977), and Zoya Pirzad’s *Things We Left Unsaid* (2012)

The awakening among women is the result of modernity, the consequent individualism among women. This, however, did not develop in all the classes. This was the development during the beginning of the 21st century. We can see this awakening in some of the portraits of women in Shaharnush Parsipur’s stories in *Women Without Men* [1989, Translation 2011]
Chapter II: Comparative Study: Presentation of Themes in Anita Desai’s Early Fiction Cry, the peacock (1963), Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975), Fire on The Mountain (1977), and Zoya Pirzad’s Things We Left Unsaid (2012)

References

Primary sources of Anita Desai

- *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), Orient Paperbacks: New Delhi.
- *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), New Delhi: Orient Paperback.

Primary sources of Zoya Pirzad


Secondary Sources

- Hosseini Mahrokhsadat, *Iranian Women’s Poetry from the Post-evolutionary Islamic Literature to Feminism Consciousness and Expression*, The Asian Conference on Asian Studies 2012, University of Winchester, United Kingdom
Chapter II: Comparative Study: Presentation of Themes in Anita Desai’s Early Fiction Cry, the peacock (1963), Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975), Fire on The Mountain (1977), and Zoya Pirzad’s Things We Left Unsaid (2012)


- Rahimieh Nasrin, Irvine "Women and Domesticity in Modern Persian Literature" University of California


*   *   *   *