CHAPTER I
FEMALE ALIENATION: AN INTRODUCTION

Alienation as a universal existential predicament has been a central and inevitable fact of all human existence. Far from being acknowledged as a human condition applicable to all individuals, alienation has frequently been attributed as an experience related to the males, the patriarchs of the society, while as the ‘second sex’ and the ‘second class citizens’, the women have often been considered the ‘pariah’ and kept perpetually in a marginalized state. A concept such as the ‘female alienation’ has hardly attracted the attention of any intellectual debate or discussion. This thesis seeks to analyze the much neglected aspects of female alienation with particular reference to two canonized women writers of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. One is the most creative Indian woman writer, mapping precisely the psychological dilemma of the present generation Anita Desai and the other is the prominent Black writer Toni Morrison, dealing with the human predicament of the ‘Black pariahs’ in a white community.

Alienation can be viewed as a theory, a concept, a philosophy, a pragmatic reality or may simply be dismissed as a fictional state of mind. Alienation as a literary device has been inscribed in literature from the beginning of any kind of creative writing, only that the theme has been addressed differently by different writers from a different perceptive and points of view. An attempt is made in this study to explore the multiple dimensions of alienation and the alienating factors, particularly the female alienation. Woman as a class, as a separate entity, as a category, has been for centuries not recognized as a person in her own rights. Excluded from vital experiences as Simone de Beauvoir rightly points out “what peculiarly signalizes the situation
of woman is that she—a free and autonomous being like all human creatures nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other” (29). She aptly raises pertinent questions such as: “How can a human being in woman's situation attain fulfillment? How can independence be recovered in a state of dependency? What circumstances limit women’s liberty and how can they be overcome?” (29).

The focus of this study is to context these questions in the writing of writers belonging to two continents. As a diasporic Indian writer, having lived in two or more countries, Anita Desai had confessed that, “she feels about India as an Indian, she thinks as an outsider” (Narzary 15). As individuals and writers uprooted from their native grounds, either by chance or choice, these women writers, who infuse their characters with notions of powerlessness, helplessness and as victims of estrangement, isolation and alienation, may have probably frequently experienced these emotions themselves.

Residing in an alien country, living amidst unacquainted culture, staring into unknown faces, the sense of not belonging follows the sense of being, rudderless and anchorless, totally reflective of the psychological predicament of the writers and their perceived characters, who become receptacles for their emotional saga of separation and aloneness. According to the Oxford dictionary, alienation is “the action of estranging, or state of estrangement in feeling or affection”. The word “estrangement” is fastened to the concept of alienation and mostly carries a negative meaning. “The condition of alienation itself”, Rosenstock and Kutner describes, “is a negative form of involvement in a social system: an individual is present within, cognizant of, or somehow implicated by the system, although he perceives that it cannot fulfill his goals or provides the outcomes he values” (13).
In general terms, alienation describes “a situation in which someone separates from something” (Fischer 38). This ‘something’ is a point where the specific perspective, towards the main concept, diverge. Peter L. Berger opines that “the essence of all alienation is the imposition of a fictitious inexorability upon the humanity constructed world”, by which “choices become destiny”. Besides the general conception of alienation, it is closely allied with humanistic sciences such as philosophy, psychology and sociology.

Alienation is endemic to human existence. It is a state wherein a person fails to maintain a sense of identity, leading to a disintegration of his psycho-physical system. A state of alienation exists when a person is unable to identity himself either with his self or with the society. When a person lacks an identity, it is said that he is alienated. But a sense of non-alienation exists in proportion to the existence of sense of identity. No person is entirely lacking in any of the aforesaid conditions. Hence, all individuals are neither totally alienated nor entirely non-alienated. Man is a machine. To have an identity, he must make a persistent endeavor to keep the machine going satisfactorily. When he is unable to function satisfactorily, it is said that he is alienated. But alienation is more profound and disturbing in women than in men.

The Oxford Dictionary of Psychology defines alienation as “Turning away; inducing someone to become indifferent or hostile or causing their affections to be diverted; the state of being an outsider or feeling detached from society, a state in which one’s emotions are experienced as foreign so that the self and the outside world appear unreal” (23). The English concept ‘alienation’ can be traced back to the Latin concepts, alienation (alienare) and ‘alalienatio (alalienare). These concepts were employed by Seneca and especially Cicero primarily indicating the sale of a commodity, the cessation,
transfer or sale of rights and property. The term has a medical, psychiatric connotation, which has intense relevance to the ‘modern humans’ who are afflicted by this condition.

Derived from Latin ‘Alienare’ from the word ‘Alius’ the source of the word in western civilization is tied up with humanity’s erstwhile concern over separation of self from others, a distinctness of individual consciousness from the whole. Such distinctness entails human concern over loss of affection, truth, one’s mind or one’s self. Other concepts that are related to this central concept of alienation are powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, cultural estrangement, social isolation and self-estrangement. In a woman these aspects intensify as she is subjected to multi-factors of alienation that threaten to destroy her essential womanhood.

Alienation is not simply having tension, doubt, apprehension, anguish and ennui but in being unable to function systematically and satisfactorily as a result of having these elements. It is not a pre-conceived state or condition of the self but it is the aftermath and the consequence of a state of being. No man is free from alienation. Alienation in some form or the other is bound to persist in each and every individual. An abnormal person shies away from alienation but a normal person encounters it and learns the method of coping with it. He is the person who can sustain an identity with the minimum feel of alienation. One must be able to maintain a balance and achieve integration between his two levels of identity-individual, and societal. Conflict between these two levels of identity breeds tension in man who loses his unity of being. In other words, he is alienated. Man cannot be totally free from identity crisis since no man’s identity is stable and static. It is continuously at war with the self and the society and it is perpetually struggling for expression and affirmation. Hence
there is in the life of each and every individualism some degree of identity crisis leading to estrangement. Therefore alienation is found to be universal. Alienation has its positive manifestation in the growth of individual personality.

In a most general sense, alienation is experienced by all, only differently. This century of estrangement generally called the age of alienation, “is surely an age of lost values lost men and lost Gods” (Moony and Stanley3). Humans suffer from external calamities like war, persecution, famine, poverty, and depleting natural resources but the inner soul-corroding factors affect them more intensely and disastrously. Filled with a surge of inner hopes, ideals and ambitious expectations they however encounter an external world that continuously frustrates, disintegrates and alienates the soul. ‘Alienation’ is closely associated with the existential problems of man. It is pretty difficult to define ‘alienation’ or existentialism’, it is quite evident that one is the off shoot of another in the modern anxious and care-ridden world. If ‘existentialism’ lays emphasis on ‘the individual consciousness’, alienation underlines the futility of human search and the modern predicament of anxiety, frustration and loneliness. The latter is often equated with powerlessness, meaninglessness, formlessness, cultural estrangement, social isolation and self-estrangement in an individual’s life, which cumulatively tend to reinforce the idea of purposelessness and insignificance of human existence on earth.

As accurately pointed out, “The 20th century is called the age of alienation and man suffers from an acute sense of rootlessness which manifests itself as, the alienation from oneself, from one’s fellow men and from nature; the awareness that life runs out of one's hand like sand, and that one will die without having lived, that one lives in the midst of plenty and joyless” (Fromm
Generally alienation is steeped and viewed in negative traits. Alienation is held to be a psychological or sociological or any other kind of problem, and almost all, alienation studies try to explore the causes and analyze the quality and nature of alienation. Alienation is looked upon as being equal to loneliness which is naturally a disturbing state for an individual. A few believe that alienation is capable of being both negative and positive depending on the individual’s response. When alienation is not assumed as a negative trait, it is associated with being a thoughtful and intellectual decision.

For self defined people with a strong sense of self confidence and a secure well being, alienation is an embracing and dear emotion. As psychologically empowered individuals, the alienation they adapt for themselves is a conscious positive decision. (Horowitz 27)

Hegel is known as the first one, who used and developed a philosophical expansion of the term ‘Alienation’. Alienation and estrangement are key categories in Hegel’s idealistic philosophy. Tracing the course of alienation in human history, Hegel applied the notion of the alienation of humanity from itself to the transitional period between the fall of the great-city-states and the coming of Christianity and above all to the bourgeois society around him, where he expressed his opinion that the concept of alienation reflected extremely significant aspects of social life.

However a few believe that “Rousseau used the concept of separation of man from nature, before Hegel” (Fromm 123). Hegel believes that the history of human alienation is as long as human history. Hegel opines, “What the mind really strives for is the realization of its own notion; but in doing so it hides that goal from its own vision and is proud and well satisfied in this alienation from
its own essence” (Fromm 47). For Hegel, in his idealistic philosophy, alienation is an experience of the mind, or in overend words, “a separation of the mind from its essence into an alienated spirit” (307). For Erich Kahler, “the history of man could very well be written as a history of the alienation of man” (43).

Alienation is an important concept in psychology. “It may be known as a “syndrome”, a disease like schizophrenia, or considered as a symptom of an intense sickness; yet, distinguishing alienation from insolence, pride and apathy is very difficult due to various indications” (Bronfenbrenner 73). The classic definition of psychological alienation is offered by Erich Fromm: “By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself” (120). Significantly, the psychological discipline of alienation contributes to this concept in three ways: 1) expressing the universality of the concept of alienation, 2) proving that alienation is related to the personality as well as the social system and 3) declaring the presence of alienation in socialist societies as well as capitalist ones.

The most defined and accepted concept of alienation is Melvin Seeman’s social-psychological definition presented in his research paper On the meaning of Alienation (1959). Pointing out ‘alienation’ as the major factor leading to detachment or ‘estrangement’, he offers five major modes of alienation such as:

1. Powerlessness: the individual's feeling of helplessness and losing control over one’s life, and that his efforts do not positively influence the outgrowths.
2. Meaninglessness: the uncertainty of the individual on his beliefs, decisions and actions; a state of hopelessness about future events.
3. Normlessness: an individual's feelings that socially unaccepted behaviours are the means of reaching likely goals.
4. Social-Isolation: assuming less value for socially and normally praised aims or beliefs which leads one to be separated from a group or the society.
5. Self-Estrangement: a disconnection between the actualized self and the ideal, or ought to be self; a state of losing natal meaning of self. Seeman also referred to the concept of cultural estrangement, which can be related to social-isolation as society is the place where the culture is practiced.

Alienation may roughly be classified as: alienation from others, alienation from work, a feeling of powerlessness and alienation from culture. According to psychology, a six level hierarchy of motives determine human behavior:-1) physiological needs 2) security and safety needs 3) need for love affection and feelings of belonging, 4) competence prestige and esteem 5) self-fulfillment 6) curiosity and need to understand. If these needs remain unsatisfied, the individual is prone to pangs of loneliness, rootlessness, ostracism and likely to be maladjusted and a victim of psychological disorders.

Alienation also paves the way for the roots of powerlessness and meaninglessness, when the relationship between the social systems and the individuals ultimately breaks down. When one makes a self analysis and discovers when alienation occurs, it always generates an intense sense of powerlessness and meaninglessness. Any relationship is based on how the individual webs with the social system, how the social system allows
individuals to pursue goals of their own choice and to what extent it permits expression of individual identity.

Alienation is not an exclusive feature of the modern post-industrial and postwar period. It is to be found in all ages but in different forms. Alienation in our age is an inevitable aftermath of mass education, which fails to reach the inner being of the modern man. Alienation is said to be dehumanization. Barbarization, moronization and impoverishment of the self. All these traits emphasize alienation as a negative concept. But alienation may also lead to positive and constructive growth. Plato’s The Republic, a major work on socio-political philosophy is the creation of man estranged from Athenian society to form the politics and morals of his time. Alienation in conjugal life renders the sexual experience of the couple one-dimensional, since there is no communication, no reciprocation. Love, for them, has little or no significance. It is simply physical. They lead spiritually barren lives. They exist in the body, not in the spirit. There is spiritual alienation of the soul. Alienation of the self comes from dehumanization of personality. Self-alienation is the alienation of a conformist from his self. It is different from social alienation which has its roots in the rigid caste-system and social excommunication. Self-alienation is severe estrangement leading to schizoid states of being.

Psychological and psychiatric study of men have come to the solution that the chief problem of people in the middle decade of 60s of the 20th century is emptiness. A human being can never function normally with a condition of emptiness for a long time. A man’s feeling of emptiness or vacuity shoots up from his feeling that he is powerless. The vacuouness within him is a long term thought that he cannot act as an entity in directing his own life and this deep sense of despair makes a man alien. He remains uninvolved, detached and
unrelated. He considers the world to be inanimate. Remaining aloof from other persons and the emotional distance from the world weakens a man’s character. Thoughts about the society never comes to his mind. He prefers to be in solitude and rarely associates or converses with others. Many who feel alienated are mute or barely communicative. They do not talk and have nothing to say to the outside world. Alienated people when they are alone never feel supported or affirmed. In case of some alienated men they immerse in deep thoughts about themselves. “The scars of yesterday may still be throbbing in their memories” (Prince 57).

In case of alienated women, their sensitivity increases. They start internalising the stress and the problems and hurts that get under their skin. They begin to feel helpless about things they cannot really change. Overtime, that sense of helplessness turns into anger, and since there is no place for the anger to melt, it surfaces on depression. This darkness of depression grips the inner spaces of an individual which is devastating. Alienation sometimes is an illness that respects neither good nor bad people either believers or non-believers. It is an equal opportunity affliction; Saint or sinner an alienated person becomes more depressed to the point of preferring death to another day of darkness. Elijah was a great prophet and could be considered as one of the foremost God fearing men of The Old Testament. We are given a powerful description of his state in the Book of kings in The Holy Bible – He feels depressed, fatigued, disturbed sleep, poor appetite patterns, and a desire for death, as said in The Kings:

But he (Elijah) himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is
enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers. (392)

Desolation, darkness of soul, turmoil, inclination to what is low and earthly, restlessness rising from many disturbances and temptations which lead to want of faith, want to hope, want of love, surrounds an alienated man. The soul becomes slothful, tepid and sad and separated, as it were, from its Creator. His faith, becomes assaulted and battered when serious illness strikes, he would stagger through life in a state of emotional disequilibrium, uncertain of himself, feeling powerless and hopeless, struggling desperately to find enough meaning to validate his existence. It is difficult to focus on God – or anything. His energy gets sapped and immobilizes every act. Loss, grief and loneliness are all interconnected and make the pain even more unbearable at times. It churns the corners of the heart and mind burrowing deeper and deeper. The entire inner life of an alienated man is plunged into darkness as though a fuse inside him had blown. His emotional hurricane gathers in his mind and spirit, as storm clouds. The feelings of disconnection, isolation and loneliness, common to depression, are intensified According to Geyer and Schweitzer:

Alienation unfortunately tends to feed on itself, it breeds discouragement, which in turn exacerbates the depression, Man continues to suffer, even deteriorates. Alienation can be experienced at different levels by all individuals or groups and it can be categorized into aspects, affecting, class, colour, race, gender and sex etc. It may be experienced as a physiological, psychological, spiritual, social or economic condition. Though there are strategies to counter or coup with this malaise, there is also a certain feeling among the
experts that alienation can only be reduced and not be totally alleviated and that “alienation is continually maintained and recreated by the entire system…only a radical transformation of the system will yield a fully satisfactory solution. (278)

Alienation can register an acute inability to relate to outride one’s self that is other humans, in the form of withdrawal and indifference, with a constant effort to isolate oneself from others. Alienation may result as an emotive factor, which is failing to relate to the self, “the failure to experience oneself which may come from an excess of conformity or a lack of individuality and spontaneity” (Ruby Chatterji163). The individual’s inability to accommodate and adjust himself to the social milieu and to integrate himself with the social fabric generates feelings of enslavement, oppression and rebellion. Social alienation is primarily a detachment of the body, the physical existence, whereas self-alienation is a detachment of the spirit, the mind, the psychic and spiritual existence of the individual. While self-alienation is the loss of contact with any inclinations or desires that are not in concordance with prevailing patterns. Social alienation does not imply self-alienation. Discord and disagreement are the elementary cases of self-alienation. Above all, alienation from oneself is the rudimentary form of rootlessness.

In his seminal work Being and Time (1927), Heidegger equates alienation with being cut off from one’s potential “authentic” existence (a being toward-death) by over-involvement in the present or a superficial understanding of oneself (qtd, in Existentialism in American literature, 163). Sartre, in Being and Nothingness (1943), states that “alienation is the individual’s experience of himself as an object, which is not a disparity-to be overcome, but a fact to be acknowledged” (163). Alienation can be viewed as
both a sociological and an existential category, the former is “a historical phenomenon susceptible to change”, but the latter is that it is “axiomatic becoming almost the quintessence of human nature” (163).

In sociological terms, alienation is a feeling of separation from people closely related and becoming isolated. Alienation is something basic to all human beings. At some stage or the other, everyone experiences this sense of being alienated as living in a highly complex social order entails and where this kind of isolation and loneliness forms an integral part of life. In Christian theology alienation refers to the relationship between God, the Father and the worshippers. Here alienation is due to human beings isolating themselves from a loving Father through committing sins and being indifferent. In *Existentialism in American Literature*, alienation means:

Loneliness, the absence of relationships, the feeling of dissociation from others or the explicit rejection of social values and norms, the sense of both powerlessness in the face of existing social structures as well as the sense of their meaninglessness. (162-63)

In sociological terms alienation means loneliness, the absence of relationships, the feeling of disassociation from others or the explicit rejection of social values and norms, the sense of both powerlessness in the face of existing social structures as well as the sense of their meaninglessness. On the other hand there is alienation 'from the self' the failure to experience oneself may come from an excess of conformity or a lack of individuality and spontaneity. Alienation as an attitude, behavioral pattern, a state of mind, a concept, philosophy, experience, epistemology, thought and perception or a
theory has been much in existence in a number of classical texts written by the
male writers. The notion of alienation may be traced to German philosophy.
However it was Karl Marx who used it as a powerful diagnostic tool for
sociological enquiry. Marx took the concept of alienation from Hegel. He
recognized that alienation reflected extremely significant aspects of social life.
He also became aware that Hegel’s idealism obscured the real historical
conditions and social contradictions that had generated the forms of alienation.

According to Karl Marx, alienation takes place when the labourers or
workers are kept away from the fruits of their production. Condemning
capitalism which has perpetuated this type of alienation, he defines four types
of alienated labour as the alienation of the product from the producer, the
alienation of the art of production, the alienation of nature from man and finally
of man from his species being. The use of the term by sociologists in
connection with the relation of the individual to others can be traced to the
influence of Marx or simply to the ordinary use of the term. The ordinary use
of the term is clear in some writers who, for example, conceive loneliness as a
type of alienation. The term is understood to refer to “the feeling of loneliness
and yearning for supportive primary relationship” (35). To be alienated is to
feel a lack of meaningful relationships with other people, and to feel unhappy
about this lack. Some writers characterize this type of alienation from others in
terms of “social isolation” which is construed in the sense of dissociation from
the norms, values and culture of one’s society.

In medical term ‘alienation’ is referred to as splitting apart of faculties
of the mind. There are three types of alienation classified, namely,
psychological alienation, ecological alienation and sociological alienation. The
first refers to alienation of oneself from the deepest self, the second refers to
alienation of technological civilization from its non-human environment. The last refers to alienation of groups of people and individuals from one another, from a community and social institutions. A number of contemporary social scientists who have attempted to generalize about the way the term ‘alienation’ functions, point out that however different the contexts in which it is employed may be, its various uses still share a number of common features.

Erich Fromm, a distinguished scholar and psychologist has presented a more detailed and deeper analysis of the concept of alienation in his text *The Sane Society*.

By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the centre of his world, as the creator of his own acts, but his acts and their consequences have become his masters whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship. The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, is experienced as things are experienced with the senses and with common sense but at the same time without being related to oneself and to the world outside productively. (120)

He further refers to the reality that:

Alienation is by no means a modern phenomenon... suffice it to say that it seems alienation differs from culture to culture, both in the specific spheres which are alienated and in the thoroughness and completeness of the process. (124)
One can say along with Erich Fromm that alienation as a deeply ingrained emotion has always existed and no one can exactly give a date or time to it. Human beings have always been subject to this feeling of non-conformity, of not belonging, of not sharing certain features or traits with others, of being the only ‘other’ in a company of people who pursue set norms, mores and values in the society.

Traviss speaks of two kinds of alienation ‘social alienation’ and ‘self-alienation’. By 'social alienation' she refers to the sense of estrangement brought by the sudden discovery that the social system is either oppressive or incomplete with the individual’s desires and ideals she says;

Self alienation however means the loss of contact of the individual selves with any inclination or desires that are not in agreement with the prevailing social patterns, as a result of which the individuals are forced to manipulate in accordance with the social demands or feel incapable of controlling their actions. (46-47)

It is also pointed out that alienation from oneself is the more basic form of rootlessness which forms the subject of many psychological, sociological and philosophical studies. Alienated cases discussed under clinical conditions have shown malignant self-absorption conspicuously. Psychological alienation is a tendency to experience exorbitant anxiety in relatively ordinary interactions with other people. It is a tendency towards absorption with ideas and fantasy, an uncertainty in thinking and acting, a gnawing consciousness of a lack of “fit” with other individuals or groups, a tendency to withdraw from others and an alternating vacillation towards and away from social context. In all these
instances, withdrawal is not used selectively as a response to specific threatening conditions but rather is an answer to any situation found out to be even vaguely dangerous or precarious. The purpose of an alienated person’s retreat is to avoid contact with people, thereby reducing conflict and escape from anxiety. Trying to escape from such situations of conflict and anxiety, the alienated individual often rediscovers, the same experience of conflict and anxiety within himself. A sense of disharmony always knocks his mind. These tendencies in self – alienated persons does not imply anything about the qualitative nature of the ideation. The problem in an alienated being is that of the mental life. Depending upon his aptitude and past experience he may delve deep into either significant or trivial ideas. It is quite distinctive to note that alienated characters who withdraw never stay unobtrusive by themselves. They engage in vacillating moves, towards and away from their people. They are schizoid individuals who are never comfortable but are beset with approach avoidance conflict around affiliation with others.

An alienated persons who thinks himself as a socially unacceptable being, shows schizoid symptoms of conflict, which arises from self-reflection. At times alienated persons feel that their internal system has disorganized their whole being. They are caught in a whirlpool of threatening, dangerous thoughts. Sometimes they are forced to believe that any catastrophic event in their life is due to their own sense of peculiarity.

An alienated individual strives for freedom. He restricts his inner and outer demands, and wants neither love nor mastery over life. He lives in an ivory tower, above others and feels delectable of his detachment. He abhors any intrusion on his cocooned, cloistered life and feels consciously superior to others in his self-sufficiency, stoicism and freedom. With self-realization, the
germs of self-alienation perish. Self-hatred and inner conflicts cause fissure in one’s personality, and an inner turmoil sets in. It severs all ties with reality. Identity deteriorates. In such a state, a person becomes a disembodied spirit engaged in a desperate. And futile battle against the world. Thus, in his alienated struggle against the milieu, he becomes a tragic protagonist. Alienation, a trait of contemporary life of variety and complexity, is caused by a sense of deep-rooted frustration and failure, irredeemable sense of loss and loneliness. One of the cardinal characteristics of ‘alienation’ is anxiety. It confronts the individual with his responsibility and the call to grasp his authentic being. The feeling of alienation has become very prominent in recent times due to the growing awareness of man of the ‘otherness’s of himself and his surroundings.

Alienation, as a theme and a concept has provided a base to innumerable 20th century American and European fiction and it impacted the Indian English Literature as well, may be due to historical and socio-cultural reasons. Meenakshi Mukerjee rightly affirms that “alienation or rootlessness is a very common theme” (83), whereas Pritish Nandy simply dismisses it as a “rootless literature totally alienated from the people, unconcerned with Indian realities” (qtd in Kohli 86).

The individuals feel their world crumbling and collapsing about them, as they are filled with the angst of uncertainty, perplexity and insecurity. Initially it was the western writers who were the first to depict this predicament of the human species. Camus, Malamud, Becket and Pinter are a few of the writers, who infused the experience of alienation in their fictional characters. When this concept crossed and reached the Indian shores the younger generations of native writers in English, employed the novel as a powerful medium and a
platform to explore this emerging concept of alienation. In the post independent era, writers in India were gradually weaning away from their overt obsession of socio-political issues, and the theme of alienation, emerged as a novel subject lending itself to innumerable possibilities.

The theme of existentialism and its consonant, ‘alienation’ becomes a novel tool for experimenting with new techniques of plurality, multiplicity and heterogeneity related to the psychic world of humans. The Western writers were the first to present this complex dilemma of human predicament by exploring the corrosive impact of alienation. Camus’s protagonist is essentially an outsider. Bernard Malamud’s heroes search for a new life, Beckett’s and Pinter’s heroes are absurd – all explore the experience of alienation in one way or another.

Alienation suffered by women, is a much neglected area with the women being marginalized and oppressed in all public spheres. Alienation is an attribute and a tendency not usually associated with a woman. Alienation is, as it is depicted in literature either as personality trait or a trope appears to be man centered and male specific while women were never ever considered to be within the realm of being affected by the same affliction and a tendency not associated with the women. Considered almost as sub-human, she is “a womb, an ovary; she is a female” (Beauvoir 35), and “this enslavement of the female to the species” (69), has reduced her to an anomie and a depersonalized entity, who has no ‘self’ or identity of her own.

Relegated to the private sphere of the kitchen and rooted in her biological essentialism, a woman as an object, had no social standing or a cultural status. If the patriarchs of the society suffered, the world suffered for
them but if a woman suffered it was hers alone, she was no one’s concern or worth any botheration. Trapped in an essentially dominant sexist and gendered structuring of a social and cultural ordering, the woman is a deprived person and is forced to fend for herself.

Female alienation is a theme that has been portrayed and discussed threadbare by many writers. Alienation that of women may be defined as a dislocation, a separation from their family both mentally and physically. It is an estrangement from the existing values and society. A sort of neurotic phobia over takes them. As a result, their mental health gets destabilized. Such high state of distress in women is instantiative. They search for the deep causes of alienation and the magnitude of loneliness increases disastrously. A woman’s situation is precarious as time sweeps, whereby abandoned by her family which teases and taints her and the society which taunts her she becomes frozen. Such condition often results in expressing greater symptoms involving anxiety and withdrawal known as internalizing disorders. More such internalizing disorders are depression, fear, obsessions, psychosomatic complaints and schizoid features. All these internalizing syndromes are associated with the traditional categories of neurotic and physiological disorders.

Women in alienation are not always dumb or quiet. They astonish with fire and fluency of their argument. Women were condemned in the Old Testament as temptresses. No rigid or standard action was taken against such enforcement. A woman is a frail constitution. Sometimes her nature expresses the disability to cope with her husband or family. Being unable to work hard at home and satisfy her husband, who seems to be displeased with her delicacy, thereby getting diminished in her interest, the relationship between them breaks. Such behavior in a woman sows the seeds of suspicion in the family. A
violent conflict grows, resulting in flaring temper, use of filthy language and repeated ugly fight. In a woman, sometimes tides are at their ebbs, surrounded by agonies of life, when an unfaithful husband deserts a wife who trusted and loved him dearly. Her beauty of thought and broad-mindedness about her husband are doomed. She is depressed from every corner of her life. Mutual disputes become very common.

Divorced women are generally faced with gossip in all its split forms in a society. Such depressed and broken persons need something emotional, through attachment, love, compassion, advice and consent etc. Sometimes divorcees become victim of emotional discrepancy. They become friendless or are forced to rebuild their own alienated world, unable to face severe problems. In a woman when both the sexual and physiological aspects, forcibly interrupt, she faces a crises. She is pushed into a variety of insulting shafts because of her ambiguous status. However virtuous might be a woman but the divorcee in her is considered a fair game by the community. Wounded pride is an almost inevitable consequence of divorce and divorce impairs the self-feeling in several ways.

1. The failure to make a success of marriage regardless of the fault of the spouse is a serious reflection upon the self.

2. Friends may take sides and blame one mate for the failure of the marriage thus contributing to the injured ego-feeling of the guilty one.

3. The residual social attitude towards divorce, with its implication of failure and even deliberate moral turpitude, still further undermines the ego of the divorced person.
The lacerated feelings of a separated woman sweep her unto an atmosphere of extreme alienation leading to deep weeping and wailing, she grows restless. Her deep love for her home and humankind questions, instigates murderous tendencies in her. Negative feelings keep squirming within her head. At such a moment an explosive psychological sneaking occurs. When a woman suppresses large parts of self into the shadows of the psyche, she feels discarded, devalued. She acts disinterested and is calm on the surface, but whenever there is a slit of light she backcharges, bricks back, exhausts herself and tries to creep into the black cell of alienation.

Women with poor marriages do this, women made to feel inferior do this, women filled with shame, fearing punishment ridicule or humiliation do this. Strict, injured women do this. Women in a rigid community do this – the ignominy of being shunned. It must be remembered that an oppressed woman not so much refuses to fit as she cannot fit without also dying. Her spiritual integrity is at stake. Acute and accurate portrayal of irritability overtakes a woman.

As Camus opines “A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusion and of light, man feels a stranger” (18). Here too, alienation in a number of critical sources, the very terms and concepts which define alienation, appear to be man centered and male obsessed while women are not ever considered to be within the realm of being affected by the same emotion. To cite a few examples of this patriarchal discrimination, “Alienation is one of the greatest problems confronting modern man” (Pathak 24). Further he says “Man suffers from not only war, persecution, famine and ruin but from inner problem... a
conviction of isolation, randomness and meaninglessness in his way of
existence” (24).

It is however not only surprising but shocking to read through scores of
critical evaluations of this theme and then discover the concept of alienation.
Like the various other concepts, it is a gendered one, closely privileging the
male sex as being the worst hit sufferers of this malaise and that the women as
humans who also get affected by this emotion have been much disregarded.
All theorists of alienation often ascribe this symptom of alienation to the ‘HE’
or the ‘MAN’ as an individual who is greatly afflicted by this mental state of
mind.

The main causes of alienation for human beings are economic,
technological, sociological, philosophic, existential and psychological. The
supposed consequences are so extensive as to include psychosis, suicide,
psychosomatic disorder, ethnic prejudice, civil riots and political agitations or
protestations. The problem of alienation is intimately related to the loss and
quest of one’s identity. Donald even rightly suggests that it is the loss of
identity that results in alienation. To realize adequately the magnitude of the
problems of loss of identity, it is necessary to bear in mind that it is in the
centre of all problems including alienation. A sense of identity is a perennial
sustaining creative force in a writer. The loss of the sense of identity may lead
to rootlessness or alienation.

Religious literature bears witness to a man’s alienation. The book of Job
in the Old Testament paints a sad picture of the wretched Job seated on a heap
of ashes, with a heavy heart. Calamities one after the other stream in Job’s life.
His live properties of cattle, sheep and camels get destroyed, his children all
dead, afflicts Job to the core. His loss weaves a curse around him. All that is solid melts away, all that is holy seems to be blurring and Job is at last compelled to face every-thing with sober senses. No rich man had ever endured suffering like Job—he did remain faithful to God. Yet the fleshy spirit in him under torrential grief, questions God for his deep suffering. In his alienated atmosphere Job could never understand why he should suffer, he feels bitter. When Job hears that a violent storm from the desert had blown down the house of his eldest son, where his other children were celebrating a feast, crushing them to death, he tears his clothes, shaves his head, kneels to the ground and utters with agony, “We bring nothing at birth; We take nothing with us at death” (Job Chapter-1-21). Job’s sufferings never end. His whole body is covered with painful sores from head to toe and he is found scraping his sores with a broken piece of pottery. With such a pathetic sight we find Job cursing the day of his birth:

Blot out the day of my birth and the night when my parents created a son. Forget about that day cover it with darkness and sent thick, gloomy shadows to fill it with dread. Erase that night from the calendar and conceal it with darkness. Let those with magic powers place a curse on that day. Darken its morning stars and remove all hope of light. Because it let me be born into a world of trouble. (74)

An alien man is a caravan lost in the desert, searching for water. Alienation swiftly traps a man. He is not as strong as a stone or bronze but one who has reached the end of his rope in depression. Sometimes alienation is an escape to purchase freedom of one’s own will, freedom from brutal enemies. He in his desperate moment rejects light. Darkness is his only companion. The
cuts and bruises burn brightly within an ‘alien’. He always lives with a fear of hurtful words, shrinks at the threat of being destroyed. Treacherous thoughts grip him, torture of terrible dreams choke him to death. Above all an “ailing alien” refuses to forgive and always feels to be a victim of misery and a heavy burden that seems to expand and traumatizes him.

It is claimed that “absurd is that which is devoid of purpose…cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd and useless” (Ionesco. qtd. in Pathak 24). The advent of the alienated man and all the themes which lie behind his advent now affect the whole of our serious intellectual life and cause our immediate intellectual malaise. “It is a major theme of the human condition in the contemporary epoch and of all studies worthy of the name” (Mills 171). Pathak says that Camus’s Meursault and Kafka’s ‘K’ are serious attempts which paint the confusion, frustration, disintegration and estrangement of modern man.

Alienation is the final result of all human complaints. Alienation sometimes far from being a rare and curious phenomenon is the central and inevitable fact of human existence. Grief, ecstasy, huge unhappiness of a living being, hurt by abuse, hatred, mistrust, contempt and scorn all intense, lands a man in alienation – which is intense and sharp enough to dissect his heart. An alienated person’s mind is always impregnated with self-doubt. Shameful feelings of inferiority starts rising and engulfs a man. A sense of disbelief, horror, desolation, sickness, crawling stealthily corrupts his health thereby shrivelling the very growth of strong exultant joy.
To a youth alienation is vague – a kind of dull weather disturbs the soul’s experiences. His youthful hopes, all are pitiful delusions, his aspirations waning, stands reflected on the pallid face. The disdainful words of contemptuous people delve deep into his heart. The flame of hope pops and he feels that his own senses have betrayed him. He is said to transmit his own emotions to whatever he comes into contact with. Everything appears to be creatures of death-in-life which he himself experiences. This hideous doubt despair and dark confusion is the outcome of his negative thoughts. He feels that he is spiritually, mentally and physically sterile. Nobody is to cheer or revive the submerged gay spirit which he once possessed. He loses faith in his own self. Thus being deserted, an alienated person is disturbed, worried to the core, devoid of all feelings, an impotent never in his life to be reconciled with his broken past. The wall of alienation tightens around him. Little by little suffocation creeps in. His malignant tumour of memory corrodes him gradually. His life seems to be meaningless, strange and insubstantial. Envious thoughts about the throbbing beings around, aggravate his doubtful situation. He compares himself to the humanity around and feels withered, drugged and fettered.

From times immemorial ‘Man’ has been viewed as a generic term that subsumes the woman. The male was inclusive of the female. The latter was hence considered as a separate category, with special needs and demands but was integrated into the male identity imploring that she does not have a different identity but was the shadow of the subaltern called ‘man’.

Alienation has always been an isolated and a universal phenomenon that has touched and afflicted the life of many, particularly women. Contemporary social scientists have referred to alienation “as a human or social condition with
negative value implications” (Geyer and Schweitzer 21). Despite many controversies and contradictions that exist regarding the term, ‘alienation’ is today, very much, a material and spiritual condition that is severely affecting the physic of individuals and people at large. Generally defined, the term ‘alienation’ points to “deficiencies or losses in the lives of individuals, groups or societies, it designates a negative state of affairs” (21).

Unlike male alienation, female alienation requires a specific definition and understanding. Alienation as a concept, theory, philosophy, experience, epistemology, thought and perception is nothing new to women in general. Women have always been viewed as alienated figures, embedded in “otherness”. Simone De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* is a seminal text of the 20th century which projects that woman is defined and established as the ‘other’ simply because she is not a male De Beauvoir says:

The ‘Other’ is particularly defined according to the particular manner in which the one chooses to set himself up. Every man asserts his freedom and transcendence—but they do not all give these words the same sense. For Man on the other hand, transcendence is a situation: he is the transcendent, he soars in the sky of heroes; woman crouches on earth, beneath his feet; it amuses him to measure the distance that separates him from her; from time to time he raises her up to him, takes her, and then throws her back; never does he lower himself down to her realm of slimy shadows. (279)

Simone De Beauvoir expresses the notion that in a patriarchal culture, the male or masculine is the positive norm, the subject and the female or the
feminine is the negative, the unessential, the abnormal or ‘the other’. “She is the incidental the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the absolute” (16).

For De Beauvoir, the woman’s identity as the ‘other’ and her fundamental alienation derive, in part from her body-particularly her reproductive capacity and also from the primitive order of division of labour chiefly due to the childbearing and rearing function. She sees the female body as inherently alienating because it demands so much of women’s energy, disallowing them to engage in any other creative activity.

Among the many vocations and careers debarred to women by a patriarchal society, writing happens to be a profession denied to them. Women’s arrival to literature was frequently seen as a threat to male hegemony. In an essay of 1753, Samuel Johnson wrote that the pen like the sword was considered as ‘consigned by nature to the hands of men’. In times, where the profession of writing was discouraged, women straining against great odds and constraints strove to create a ‘literature of their own’, even when it came to hiding their writing under blotting papers in drawing rooms or adopting pseudo names to hide their female sex. Gradually women fought against these alienated practices, but as a commercial business for women, writing gained propriety only slowly. Women writers were still looked upon as suspects and the personal lives of certain women writers like Aphra Behn, Susanna Centlivre, Eliza Haywood and Delarivier Manley were made targets for both mudslinging and accusations of licentiousness. However, by the end of the 18th century, women were identified with their works, and their writings gained greater professionalism and respect along with dignity. Still the trend of isolating women writers has continued into the twenty first century.
Generally what women wrote was considered as ‘narrow’ or specialized in contrast to what men wrote, which was viewed as ‘general’ and meant for the common good of both men and women. This decidedly opens the way in which “our culture has evaluated the relative importance of the experience of men and the experience of women” (Sherry 2). She further points out:

As this evaluation changes, we notice that women writers frequently have given us a more detailed depiction of women’s lives, ideas, emotions and preoccupations than men have. Perhaps, in works by women, there are relatively few male characters or they occupy a less central place than the women characters do.(2)

The above statements reveal how women writers were not only an alienated sex, considered as always the ‘other’, the second sex and the second citizen but also their experiences, concerns, interests and issues related to their lives were neglected and relegated to a secondary position or at times even totally ignored and forgotten. Women in general, were a muted race, rendered invisible in history, a silent spectator and witness to the dynamic activities of the male sex. They have to remain as inarticulate voices, that did not resist or challenge. Confined to the private sphere of the home, husband and children, domesticity sapped women off their creative energies and some of the most brilliant women trapped between the surging creativity in writing and the perpetual demands of domesticity and feminine roles and unable to yoke the two extremes have been forced to annihilate themselves. Writers like Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Virginia Woolf, to mention a few, were unable to compromise to a life of high intellectual creativity and low drab domesticity.
Domesticity and housework happen to be an area which continues to be the major occupational role of women today. Increased employment and career opportunities have not lessened or altered the status of being a housewife. With the virtual disappearance of the ‘underclass’ of private domestic servants, the roles of the housewife and the house worker have merged. Technology has not entirely contributed to minimizing the burden of the household, moreover the social trivialization of housework, is in part responsible for the tendency to underestimate or ignore the amount of the quantity of time women spend on it.

Housework differs from most other work in three significant ways: it is private, it is self-defined and its outlines are blurred by its integration in a whole complex of domestic family based roles, which define the situation of the women. Both in traditional and modern societies, homes are private places and the physical isolation of house work ensures that the work is totally self-defined. If a housewife chooses to seek a gainful work, it is to be employed in another housework, doing a similar work of drudgery and drab.

The other social image of a woman includes the roles of wife and mother which are not very distinct from that of the housewife. The ‘ideal’ self is always stressed upon: which is to be a good wife, a good mother and an efficient home-maker. The biological task of reproduction, pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation are other conditions that greatly preoccupy and consume women's time. Women’s experiences are exclusive to them, like menarche (menstruation), marriage, motherhood and menopause which are other ‘private’ happenings that need to be shrouded in secrecy and confidence. Essentially viewed as the ‘other’, women are always seen in relation to men as Sherry points out only in terms of "romantic and sexual relations” (13) and almost never as a person in her own right. Further the appropriation of muscle
capacity, tools and machinery by man is an important source of women’s subordination, powerlessness and lack of a sense of identity.

If one reviewed women’s writing, it could be noted that among all genres, women excelled in fiction writing. It is perhaps a woman’s life that paved the way for women producing novels that were commercially successful and personally satisfying. It is further observed that since women’s experience centered as the domestic and private spheres, it was most apt that women in increasing numbers turned towards writing novels. Nicola Beauman has rightly observed that it is “a novel which in some way or another illuminates female’s attitudes to experience, throws light on the texture of women’s lines” (5). For the first time the novel broke from the patriarchal constraints it had endured and in the women’s hands it was moulded into a dynamic and pulsating receptacle into which women could freely pour forth their long pent up oppressions and dormant instincts.

Women writers were always an ‘alienated’ lot. Women in general were relegated to a private sphere, that of the house, ‘the angel in the house’, attending dutifully to domestic chores, quietly rearing children and other related works. They were explicitly discouraged from writing and in the Victorian times particularly, there was pressure on the women to prioritize their domestic responsibilities. If writing was opted as a professional career, women were advocated not to employ certain subjects in their writings. As Sherry rightly points out:

The judgment that works about men are ‘general’ while works about women are ‘narrow’ or ‘specialized’, tells us something about the way in which our culture has evaluated
the relative importance of the experience of men and the experience of women. As this evaluation changes, we notice that women writers frequently have given us a more detailed depiction of women’s lives, ideas, emotions and preoccupations than men have.

Unlike their Western counterpart, the Indian women writers occupied a major space of the contemporary Indian Writing in English. It was in the post-independent era, that their writings gained prominence, the liberty to express their ideas freely. Women were naturally good narrators, storytelling was something that came spontaneously to them. Hence it is not surprising that their contribution to the growth and development to Indian English fiction was immense. Initially from 1875 Indian women writers did not score much on producing works of high quality. Mishra says that it was only after the second world war that Indian Writing In English, became a rich mine in producing works of high merit.

Though the Indian women novelists did not face acute cultural obstacles and socio-economic barriers, they were however grappling with a foreign language–English - the legacy, a left behind the colonial rule, and learning its intricacies in order to employ it to express all matters that was ‘native’. In keeping with the literary potential of their western sister novelists, Indian women novelists did persist in using the novel as a vehicle for exhibiting the ‘deepest’ human experiences and feelings. Keenly aware of the problems and hardships of women living in a traditional society. They strove to pack their novels with elements of realism and authenticity. They dealt with various socio-political economic and cultural issues. Other themes included issues of caste, class, sex, gender, race, identity crisis and other contemporary societal
themes, besides the east west encounter, cross cultural problems, immigration and expatriate issues were dealt within the novels.

Most of the writers who chose to migrate and domiciled themselves in other countries, become eventually people who were misfits in both the cultures trapped between two worlds, two cultures. They were the most ‘alienated’ lot, having two homes, but no real home, belonging to two cultures, but unable to belong to either, they resented the country they had left behind, but hated the country they had arrived at. The alien culture, customs and lifestyle rendering them homeless and baffling, their senses with one foot in the native culture and another in an alien soil, most writers were looking in a hindsight, over the shoulders at times with longing nostalgia at the homeland they have left behind, yet there was no home to return to again.

The women writers were determined to create a ‘literature of their own’, “a canon of works”, one that was not an equal or alternative to male canon of masterpieces, but one that would air their voices, their experiences, point of view, values, originality, diversity and creativity. The theme of alienation became one of the powerful devices in women’s hands, to exclusively focus on women’s problems and dilemmas in coping up with this modernist malaise.

Scores of women writers have adopted this theme of alienation which has become an umbrella term encompassing a multitude of perspectives that reflects the women’s ‘real’ and authentic presence. As Bharati A. Parikh affirms, “the theme which cuts across the novel of Anita Desai and Toni Morrison is that of alienation” (18). As the concept of alienation was inclusive of different levels of experience and emotions, such as loneliness, dejection, anomie, angst, stress, rejection, rootlessness, powerlessness, meaninglessness,
disillusionment, frustration, disintegration, confusion, nothingness, helplessness and a sense of not belonging, women’s self-experience were self-reflective of these conditions. Women writers using a diversity of voices, styles and forms, delineated aspects of above experiments specific to their lives as writers.

As Walter Kaufmann remarks, “whether we choose to speak of alienation or not, the experiences widely associated with that term are often held to be distinctive characteristics of our time” (qtd. in Pathak 26). There are numerous alienated characters in male texts who drift in and out in modern literature. The artist as an alien, figures in James Joyce’s *Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Man*, the Negro or Jew as an outsider in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and Saul Bellow’s *Herzog*, the outsider as a sensitive adolescent in Salinger’s *Catch The Rye*, Camus’s Meursault and Kafka’s ‘K’ are serious exercises in depicting the modern conditions which defy man’s confusion, frustration, disintegration and estrangement. Alienation has also frequently been a recurrent theme in existentialist literature and absurd drama.

On par with the male writers women writers, have dealt with alienation as a feminist issue and theme. Writers like Doris Lessing, the Noble Laureate for literature 2007, Nadine Gordimer, the Noble Prize winner in 1991, Toni Morrison the Noble Prize winner in 1993, Margaret Atwood, the Booker Prize winner for the year 2003, Margaret Lawrence, Alice Munro from Canada, Inez Baranay from Australia, Kiran Desai, Booker Prize winner in 2006, Manju Kapur, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Nair from India, Taslima Nasrin and Monica Ali from Bangladesh, Bapsi Sidhwa and Tehmina Durrani from Pakistan, are a few women writers to name who have in
their fictions dealt with some aspects of alienation through women centered novels.

Among these brilliant galaxy of writers, who have explored the theme of female alienation are two writers, Anita Desai an Indian, who has now migrated abroad, and is still actively writing and the other writer selected is the Afro-American Toni Morrison, a black writer, writing on issues that cut across all human structured barriers. What yokes these two writers across culture, is their stark but realistic and authentic portrayal of women alienated due to various reasons: alienated from the self, family, community, society, environment, circumstances etc.

The larger dimensions of fractional factors like gender, class, race sex, colour and need are to be examined in relation to how alienation impacts these from the physiological, psychological, social, economic, religious spiritual or simply environmental point of view. In recent years a great volume of literatures are centred around depicting this deadening crisis of alienation. In a society, rift with political upheavals, social setbacks and cultural crisis, there cannot be a more definable term to indicate the despair and malaise of the contemporary society than the term ‘alienation’. The worst affected are women, migrants, children and the aged.

The theme of alienation found its roots in Indian Writing In English during the 1960s. Maladjustment and inflexibility forced many individuals into isolation, only, that the impact of alienation on the individuals varied according to the intensity of the prevailing situation. Many writers turned to this theme as this was also the main drift, the society was plunging into. According to Melvin Seeman, the different manifestations of alienation, in French and
English fiction are “powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self-estrangement” (qtd. in the Quest – 2006: 20).

Initially Indian Writing In English was critiqued for its lack of quality and quantity but the emergence of the three literary giants: Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan gave a powerful impetuous to the writing of fiction. Gradually scores of women writers began to enter the vast patriarchal dominated literary area and started making a “room” for themselves. Writers like Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya and others carried the Indian Fiction in English to a height that it deserved, just as these writers were craving for a literary identity. Among the prominent themes that attracted the Indian women writers were the theme of alienation and quest for self-identity. In many instance both the writers and their fictional characters faced the same space of thinking this sense of anomic, of having no roots. Inevitably this sense of loss of identity as Okin opines leading to “the loss of identity, often results in alienation” (84).

The concern of alienation can be seen as a universal and timeless human tendency, surfacing prominently in periods of insecurity and crises. Human beings have continuously been subject to this condition of experiencing alienation, which stems from problems of selfhood, identity, isolation, loneliness and frustration. A majority of male writers explicating this concept in their texts have largely viewed it as a problem, closely related to the male, a patriarchal inscription of a social affiliation that is however known to affect both the sexes. As sexes essentially different and unlike each other, the nature and degree of experiencing alienation is never similar. The males, who occupy the ‘public sphere’ of the social rung, are subject to a category of alienation that is varied from that experienced by the female sex.
Many women struggle to control these actions due to harassment. They feel these feelings and emotions. The problem of women being persecuted with a biting blast of criticism is not new. An attempt is being made in this paper to trace the position of women all over the world and understand the reasons for the great social, legal and emotional upheavals in the lives of women – to expose the murkiness and immorality in the society, so that a blow may be stuck in favour of woman’s freedom and her right to equality.

The literature on world history abounds with contradictory and conflicting views on the status of women. For a woman to try to shape her own life is to court disaster. She is hampered by both emotional and physical disadvantages of her womanhood, by inadequate education and most likely, by lack of experience. Women do not necessarily inflict violence directly but very often become willing agencies of violence by submitting to male oppression and ignoring their own feminine needs. Women perform their task in the midst contradictions and persecutions. Pierced by the sword of anguish anxiety and desolation, women have endured suppression.

Tradition customs and theories ought to undergo a change along with the passage of time. Deprived of economic freedom due to her ever being a ward, a woman is subjected to social exploitation. Nothing was done to improve her situation in the past. Many women writers, to serve the womankind by attacking the vicious social customs and burning the abominable atrocities against women with the fire of their literary twigs (as was inspired) have contributed a lot. Their anguish is to throw open the defects in the social system, the obnoxious customs and practices meant for oppressing women and to point out the utter confusion that prevails in the world of women. Each problem in a women’s life is now a subject matter of an article or
a story or a novel. Our intense desire should be of one to study the deplorable condition of women in all fields of life social, economic, political, cultural and moral, to the public gaze, to examine it with an integral view and to suggest a solution for never ending problem.

Violence against women takes many forms-physical violence, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, intimidation and economic deprivation. It cuts across all cultures stretching worldwide, ingrained in its very history. Women of all races caste and social classes bear its brunt. Years of historical fact speak of women assaults, attacks, rapes, violation, psychological abuses, maimings and killing of women in their own homes by men. They stagger through life in a state of emotional disequilibrium uncertain of themselves, feeling powerless and hopeless struggling desperately to find enough meaning to validate their existence. When clinically viewed, they experienced devastating, postpartum depression with psychotic features including delusion and hallucination.

“Wedding is destiny, and hanging likewise” Heywood wrote over 400 years ago. It is seen that after marriage persecution and harassment take place in various ways. In India the cause for a woman’s persecution varies. She can be tortured for dowry, barreness or simply for not being modern as her husband would want her to be. Women are weak and submissive and tortured with hardly any chance of finding happiness for their own self at home. In this world most marriages take place more or less in business – like manner. Most of the women look upon their married life as an everlasting private hell. It is shocking to a woman that all her tender ideas about marriage in literature are not derived from marriage at all, but from courtship.
Female novelists have made a significant choice to portray the organizing condition from the oppressive tradition. Teslima Nasreen, the controversial novelist from Bangladesh, remembers that her life had never been an easy one. Her father, a doctor with progressive views, had sent her to school, unlike many other girls in the locality. But she remembers growing up in a house surrounded by huge boundary walls. She was not allowed to go anywhere but to school. She was scolded several times for her interest in games like cricket and football played by boys and was encouraged to play with dolls, which she hated. From her childhood, she developed a strong sense of social injustice around her. Her personal experiences have determined her feminist ideas. In an interview she recalls that she was only nine, when she felt the discrimination against women for the first time. She lived only to play in the fields. Thus women find themselves within the four walls of dark and dreary homes with their minds desolate and depressing with almost all the fundamental birth rights totally cut off leading to alienation. Anita Desai’s fictions explore a remotely inaccessible part of the female psyche, the reality of women’s situation that is not romanticized or glorified. According to Iyenger Anita Desai writings are:

exploration of sensibility the particular kind of modern Indian sensibility that is ill at ease - the inner climate, the climate of sensibility that colours or clears or rumbles like thunder or suddenly blazes forth like lightening, is more compelling than the outer weather, the physical geography or the visible action. (464)

Anita Desai’s preoccupation as a novelist has centered around the exiled social casts and characters, who have withdrawn into their self. Each of her novels presents one or two memorable women characters; she is primarily
interested in the projection of female protagonists living in separate, closed, sequestered worlds of existential problems and passions, love and hatred. Unlike most of Indo-English novelists, Anita Desai does something unique by portraying each of her individuals as an unsolved mystery. Her concern for the character alienation enables her to offer an unexpected glimpse into the deeper and unconscious psyche state of her protagonists. She says in an interview with Yashodhara Dalmia:

I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated, or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against or made a stand against, the general current. It is easy to flow with the current, it makes no demands, and it costs no effort. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out “the great No”, who fight the current and struggle against it, they know what the demands are and what it costs to meet them.(33)

Love is always a secure anchor that helps to support and sustain human relationships. When the feelings of sharing and the bonds of togetherness is strong, a relationship survives any amount of stress or strain that threatens to sever it. Lovelessness in relations leads to lawlessness of existence, when one is pushed to an extreme extent of either killing another, as Maya kills her husband Gauthama in Cry, The Peacock or kills oneself like Monisha in Voices In The City, who simply torches herself to death. Leaving these two extremes is the character of Sita, who aims to evoke a miracle in a world of discord and conflict in Where Shall We Go This Summer? Most of Desai’s characters belong to the class of the elite they don’t suffer from want, but are comfortable in the bracket of the elite and are women of leisure and class. Maya, Sita and
Monisha do not wallow on the brink of poverty. Neither are they wanting in any material comforts. They are shown as women who have no individual intellectual aspirations, no separate ideology or creativity; they simply fail to connect with reality and are chiefly self-absorbed women, lost in a world of private dreams and fantasies. Totally dependent on their husbands, they see themselves as reflections in the mirror of their counterparts.

Women in Anita Desai’s fiction are mostly depicted as emotionally prone individuals, who are sensual, sensitive and introverts and who nurture a self-internalized injury as if the world has hurt them. They counter relationship with more of a heart and less of a head. Surprisingly Anita Desai’s women are not even interested in the ‘feminine’ aspects of life, Maya for example is shown as a woman not interested in cooking or even eating, relishing good clothes or in any aesthetics like painting, drawing knitting or sewing and does not read. The only other life she is attached to is Toto, her dog, who alone makes her come alive besides her father and memories of her brother Arjun, who has run away from home. Given the ultimate leisure and comfort of life, Maya develops no creative ability and is lost in a mental inscape of delusions and odd cravings. She can only crave for that is not, her hatred of her husband who does not bend to her inclination, whims and fancies, fill her mind to the extension of any other interest in life. The little interest she had in gardening also vanishes in the face of her self-created delusions of pain and suffering. The albino’s prophesy, becomes just a blind reason for her to hit back and despite all the techniques of languages, symbols and metaphors that Desai pours on the elimination of Gautama from her life, the plain truth is that Maya kills him, not able to withstand an existence, which her husband excludes her from.
As one of America’s best and most prolific post-war writers, Toni Morrison is the second American woman writer to receive the Nobel prize for Literature in 1993. She continues to crusade for the welfare of the blacks, who have been victims of racial discrimination and slavery and whose journey from slavery to freedom has been akin to a crucifixion, exploited, abused, tormented and destroyed. Toni Morrison appropriately takes up the cause of the Blacks, becoming an articulate voice, espousing through novel after novel the humanness of the Blacks and the need for restoring their human dignity and respect, which has been eroded through centuries of violence against them. The novel *Beloved* became a statement against the continued ruthless abuse of an individual, where the mother Sethe, kills her daughter Beloved, rather than have her grow up as a slave. Death is preferred to living in the fight against injustice and racial discrimination heaped on them.

Female alienation is an existential experience and condition that has frequently been encountered in women's literature but it happens to be an area that has either been ignored or neglected as much as women, as a race have remained subordinated, marginalized and suppressed as a voice. Female alienation which is essentially very different from the one experienced by the patriarchy has been an area less researched and not fully explored either holistically or comprehensively. ‘Female Alienation’ requires a specifically different definition and understanding. Always viewed and treated as Beauvoir's ‘the Other’, it is because of the woman’s identity as 'The Other' and her fundamental alienation derived in part from her body-her reproductive capacity- and primitive order of division of labour due to childbearing and rearing function that results in women alienation from any other creative activity. What renders the situation tragically pathetic is that most women are not aware of their state of immanence that their alienation stems from their sex.
As a woman she is systematically denied any kind of status, identity, individuality, rights or values, she is mostly viewed as a shadow and she is never a person in her own right but is essentially ‘The Other’ who is dependent on some male member all through her life.

In earlier decades, alienation was a new concept for an academic approach. Scholars were trying to define, describe and clarify the concept and; therefore, in every single disciplinary, especially sociology and philosophy, many intellectuals contributed to the debate. Those discussions shaped the basic general academic approach toward alienation which is now useful as the subject investigated. Today's researches, however, are more case studies of alienation in different areas-including education, political science, sociology, and so on -which are based on early developments of the concept. Recent papers apply the theoretical studies of alienation on proper cases which is the purpose here.

Alienation, as a theme, has been replete and pervasive in literatures of the world. Writers have frequently worked and reworked this theme into the fabric of their fiction. Viewing it as a dominant theme, critics and reviewers have not been far off in ascribing and critiquing this theme leading to a plethora of research articles and sources that continues into the present. This study as it explores the theme of alienation found inscribed in the novels of Anita Desai and Toni Morrison, outlines the critical output in this specific theme of alienation.

"Alienation of women characters in Anita Desai's novels" by Dr. C.V George, traces alienation as a thematic motif in Desai's fiction. The article on "Heroines of Toni Morrison and Anita Desai: A Cross-cultural perspective" by
Bharathi. A. Parikh is an article which has direct relevance to this topic of research. "The theme of suffering in the select fictions of Anita Desai" by A. Namasivayam, "Cry The Peacock, A study in the theme of Alienation" by B.D. Pandey, "Woman's striving for a meaningful life in Anita Desai's Cry, The Peacock", by Vinod Kumar Maheshwari, "The psychic Trauma in Anita Desai's Cry, The Peacock" by V. Sunitha, "The Theme of martial discord in Anita Desai's Cry, The Peacock", by S.P. Swain "Treatment of Neurosis in Cry, The Peacock" by Q.F. Inamdar, "The poetics of feminism in Anita Desai's Cry The Peacock" by N. D. Chandra, "The Alienated self of Maya: A Study of Anita Desai's Cry, The Peacock" by S.P Swain, "Claustrophobia in Anita Desai's Cry The Peacock: From Defeat to Disaster," by Deepthi Chauchan, are a few articles which focus exclusively on the themes of alienation, neurosis, pain, suffering, psychic trauma in Anita Desai's Cry The Peacock. Other sources such as "The lonely voyage: Feminine psyche in Anita Desai's Cry The Peacock” by Prabhat Kumar Pandeya, "Feminism and Anita Desai's Cry The Peacock and Where shall We Go This Summer by M. Mani Meiter, "Women Lost: Cry The Peacock, Chapter II - The predicament of Women protagonist in Anita Desai's Novels" by N. Sethuraman, “Separation and psyche in Anita Desai's Cry, The Peacock”, by Dr. M. Rajeswar, “Anita Desai's Cry The Peacock: A Vindication of the Feminine” by Som. P. Sharma and Kamal N. Awasthi, "The illusions of Maya: Feminine consciousness in Anita Desai's Cry The Peacock by Ani Lowary Weir, “Anita Desai - Cry, The Peacock chapter 24 studies in Indo-Anglican literature”, ed by Dr Krishna Nanda Joshi and Dr. B. Shyamala Rao, again focuses on feminism, female psyche, feminine consciousness, etc. Some of the general studies on Anita Desai focus on aspects such as "Sense and Sensitivity of women characters in the Novels of Anita Desai" by Rita Roy, “Memorable characters in Indian writing in English” by P.K. Kumaresan, “Anita Desai” by R.S Sharma, "Alienation to Existentialism."
A Study of Anita Desai's novels" by Shashipal are some which focus on generic themes. Martial discord is discussed in "Dialectics of marital polarization in Anita Desai's Cry The Peacock", by S.P. Swain.

Anita Desai's Voices In The City is analyzed by Madhavi Latha Agarwal in “Anita Desai in Voices In The City”, “Images of alienation-A study of Anita Desai's novels” by Dr. S. P Swain. “The Alienated self in the novels of Anita Desai” by R.S Pathak, “Anita Desai and the wounded self”, by V.V.N Rengachari Prasad, "Fate and Fatalism in Anita Desai's Cry The Peacock" by Dr. S.S Rengachari, “Anita Desai : The Novelist” by Madhusudan Prasad, “The Ailing Aliens” by Kalpana Wadrekar, "From Self-Alienation to self-identification: A study of Anita Desai’s novels” by S.P. Swain and P. M. Nayak, "Alienation in Indian Novel in English" by L. Manjula Davidson are a few articles which focus on themes of alienation from differing perceptions. The comparative aspects is dealt with by S. Indira in "Exploration of inner space: Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee".

“Existential Dilemma in Anita Desai's Voices In The City”, by Dr.Poonam Rani Gupta, "Anita Desai- Alienation in "Voices In The City" by Madhavi Lata Agrawal, "Relationship Dilemma in Anita Desai's novels" by Behnaz Alipour Kaskari, explores the Existential conflict and the relationship dilemma. “Anita Desai's Where Shall We Go This Summer?: A Psychoanalytical study" by Dr. Mr. Mani Meiter, “Where Shall We Go This Summer? - Sita's incarcerated self”, by S.P Swain and P.M. Nayak’s, "The woman who sailed Back: Where Shall We Go This Summer”. "The reverse patterns of journey in Anita Desai's Cry the Peacock and Where Shall We Go This Summer?" by Dr.Sanjay Kumar and "Light and Darkness - The Futile Quest for a Harmonious Blend in Anita Desai's Where Shall We Go This
"Summer?" by T. Mathukal analyses the theme of alienation. Other critics like Arvind M. Nawak, B. Chitra, Amit Saha, S. Sujatha, Basavaraj Naikar, M. Sivaram Krishna, Ruth K. Rasen Wasser, Usha Bande, D. K. Pably, are a few who have written elaborately on various aspects of alienation in Anita Desai's novels.

Like Anita Desai, in Toni Morrison too, the theme of alienation is a predominant theme. Numerous research articles have appeared in books and in journals that highlight this aspect in Toni Morrison's fiction. Most popular among them include Barbara Christian’s book on Black Women Novelists with its chapter as "The contemporary fables of Toni Morrison", “The Indian Journal of American Studies (Summer 1993)” has published a special issue on Toni Morrison and the different aspects in her novels. “The Existential Studies Of Beloved by Zhong Yu-ning and Wang Bai-tao (Aug 2007)”, makes a study of the novel Beloved in the context of the theme of alienation. John N. Duvall's “The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Post Modern Blackness”, has an exclusive chapter on the selected novels The Bluest Eye and Sula, focusing on the themes of invisible Name and Complex authority, and "Engendering Sexual/Textual Identity," The books analyse the concept of alienation to a limited extent, but the characters are analysed as isolated people, lost and drifting in their subconscious mind as a 'nobody'. “Critical Essays On Toni Morrison” by Nellie Y. Mckay contains excellent information as it gives reviews essays and interviews and analyses Morrison's novels The Bluest Eye and Sula also have a chapter on the Black family search for identity by Ruby Dee. “Racial Alienation And Intelligence” by Arthur R Jensen published in The Washington Pat, 1969, is another article which provides information on alienation arises due to the twin factors of race and Intelligence. Manjula Davidson in “The Untramelled Spirit”. Toni
Morrison's *Sula*, studies the aspects of identity studied at three levels - race, culture and gender. Toni Morrison's novels have often been compared with other writers, a research article by Madhu Malati Adhikari on "The Female Protagonist in Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home And The World* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved"*, another by Ruth Grant entitled. "Alienation and Estrangement of Women in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Virgina Woolf's *The Voyage Out*", more exact to the topic taken up for analysis in this thesis is an article by Bharati A Parikah's *Heroines of Toni Morrison and Anita Desai: A Cross Cultural Perspective* published in the Indian Journal of American Studies (Summer 1993) from which the title of this thesis itself emerges and forms the core of reference for this work. Other books of interest in Toni Morrison are “*Black Women Novelists: The development of tradition, 1892-1976*”, published in 1980, “*Toni Morrison*” by Wilfred D. Samuel and Clenora Hudson-Weems, “*Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* by Trudier Harris”, (1991) also makes significant contribution to the aspects of alienation in the selects novel of Toni Morrison. Other Studies which relate to this concept are "*Fictive Strategies and Cinematic Representatives in Toni Morrison's Beloved: Postcolonial Theory / Postcolonial Text*", by Lynda Koolish, "She was Laughing at their God": Discovering the Goddess within *Sula*" by Michele Pessani, “*Racial Legacies in Toni Morrison : Playing in the Dark Whiteness and the literary imagination*”(1992),"The Ghost of Slavery: Historical Recovery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" by Linda Krumhotz (1992), “*The Haunting of 124*”, by Carol E. Schmudde (1992) and "Beloved; A Womanist Neo-Slave Narrative; or Multi vocal Remembrances of Things Past", by Bernard W. Bell and his book on “*The Afro American Novel and its Tradition*” (1987), are some of the article used as points of references in thesis. The book on “*Critical Companion To Toni Morrison: A Literary Reference To Her Life And Work*” by Carmen Gillespie provides general information on the
writer and her novels. The other books referred to, for this study include “*Toni Morrison’s Beloved*”, in Year Book 1988, 1933, “*Contemporary Literary Criticism*”, edited by Christopher Giroux also provides general information.

A serious attempt has to be made to study the female alienation, disintegration and estrangement of women in Anita Desai's and Toni Morrison's select novels. A comparative study is often an effective tool and provides the methodology for comparing two female minds writing across the continents from different cultures and social background. While female alienation is a universal condition also unconditionally faced by women across the globe, there are emerging patterns which differentiate one from the other. As a leading woman writer of her era Toni Morrison (Feb 18 1931-) deals extensively with the existential dilemma which a Black woman suffers due to her marginalization and secondary position. Anita Desai, (June 24, 1937) a diasporic writer portrays the Indian Women’s psyche as she is severed from her moorings as a person and undergoes a trauma of severe identity crisis which results in an alienation from the self and others.

The thesis attempts to critically analyze the two writers; the Afro American Black writer, Toni Morrison and the immigrant Indian novelist Anita Desai and how they deal with alienation as an essentialist condition which women wallow in and how they transcend the given state at some point in their lives. Female alienation is a theme that runs concurrently in most of the modern feminist fictions and alienation of a woman may be defined as a dislocation, an estrangement from the existing values and society. Women alienated express symptoms involving anxiety, withdrawal and other internalizing disorders as depression, fear, obsessions psychosomatic complaints and schizoid fear. Most
of their internalizing syndromes are associated with the traditional categories of neurotic and psycho-psychological psychosomatic disorders.

The study is based on philosophical findings of writers like Erich Fromm, Herbert Maruse, Sigmund Freud, B. Murchland, Camus, Jaspers, Fuller, Ionesco, Spengler and others who have richly contributed to the theories of alienation. It also has its base on the analytical view points of feminists, philosophers and psychoanalyst critics and writers on the female alienation theory. An attempt is made to deconstruct the select novels of Toni Morrison and Anita Desai from the standpoints of some of the feminist theoretical assumptions on the concept of female alienation. Alienation theories of the European, the Anglo-American, French and other feminists are points of reference for this study.

The methodology used is to analyze these novels contentwise and contextually and to study the extent of alienation of these women characters created by these writers. Writing across cultures for Toni Morrison the issues focus more on race, color, class sex, and gender. For Anita Desai it is on sex and gender. However as diverse as both the writers are, there are points of convergence and uniformity in their writings and creativity as well as divergent points on which they strongly disagree and artfully different in their portrayal of women characters. Their commonalities and differences would be critically compared and their contrastive features would be outlined in the final chapter.

The study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter gives conceptual definition of alienation-Female Alienation in particular and the parameters and features which essentially differentiates female alienation from the patriarchal one. It outlines the theories on female alienation and attempts to
apply the same to the women characters in the select novels of Toni Morrison and Anita Desai. It studies the socio-cultural circumstances in which the two novelists lived and wrote. Both are the products of their respective cultures and their experiences of the culture they belong to by ancestry and the one they arrive at by choice or design makes them belong to two cultures- the past and the present simultaneously and hence their writings are interfused with cultural complexity and social diversity which is the very composite of some of the women they structure in their novels.

Chapter II, strives to explore the concept of alienation in select novels of Anita Desai. The analysis deals with the study of three novels *Cry The Peacock* (1963), *Voices In The City* (1965) and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975). Alienation serves as a basic theme and acts as a recurrent motif believing the different corners of the novels into a singular unit. It is undoubtedly the most dominant trait of several characters delineated in them. An Indian novelist who has inscribed the theme of alienation in her novels in a systematic way is Anita Desai. We find in her characters self-examination- an exploration of the alienated human psyche. The chapter elaborately analysis the characters of Maya, Monisha, and Sita as they struggle through their inner trauma and dilemmas to survive the ordeals surrounding their lives.

Chapter III deals with the Black woman writer Toni Morrison and the alienation, that her women characters were subject to race, colour, class, gender and sex. The women characters from select novels such as the *The Bluest Eye*(1970), *Sula* (1973), and *Beloved* (1987), are steeped in an alienated state generated by some social, political or cultural factor. Morrison’s novels depict a range of characters who are essentially strong in themselves but who are ostracized from social moorings. More than simply creating them as stereo
types, Morrison individualizes them giving personal traits and characteristics that vitally distinguishes them, one from the other. This chapter aims to analyze the alienation aspect that stems from certain facts such as race, colour, class, gender and sex.

Chapter IV exposes the Study of select Aspects of Female Alienation in Anita Desai and Toni Morrison. The problem of alienation is intimately related to the loss of and quest for one’s identity. The dispossessed personality's search identity is a common place theme in modern fiction. Most alienation is a result of the historical and cultural dislocation of individuals. The sense of rootlessness and deprivation makes most creative artists depressive and they are also victims of the angst and alienation that they experience in their lives. As a remedy to get rid of their deceased mental state, writing itself becomes a therapeutic outlet which helps them to retain a sense of sanity in a rapidly alienating environment—the emerging women characters are studied as 'role models' who provide for the making of a strong consciousness in women, who easily succumb to the external grind of onerous existence of daily life.

The chapter V deals with a comparative cross cultural analysis of the two writers, writing across the two cultures and the dual cultures that they have themselves experienced—the one they have left behind and the other culture which they have to accommodate. It outlines the findings of the study, implications for further research and also attempts strategies and methods to resolve find solution to the existential alienated dilemma faced by women in general, women characters in particular. A list of works referred to is provided at the end.