CHAPTER V
FEMALE ALIENATION IN ANITA DESAI AND TONI MORRISON’S SELECT NOVELS – A CROSS CULTURAL STUDY AND SUMMATION

It is undoubtedly an affirmed fact that the women as the ‘other’ and a species biologically different from the male are unlike each other in their nature and function. The new generation of French feminist theorists has turned away entirely from Beauvoir’s existentialist feminism. Moving away from Beauvoir’s liberal desire for equality with men, these feminists as the argument goes have emphasized difference, “Extolling women’s right to cherish their specifically female values, they reject ‘equality’ as a covert attempt to force women to become like men” (Moi, 98). Likewise cultural feminism is a theory which holds that there are fundamental personality differences between men and women and that women’s differences are special and should be, and this theory wants to overcome sexism by “celebrating women’s special qualities, women’s way and women’s experiences” (Tanden, 52). The cultural feminist theory emphasizes a matriarchal vision-the idea of a society of strong women guided by essentially female concerns and values.

One of the French feminist Helene Cixous analyses what Toril Moi calls the “patriarchal binary thought”, as such to the question what is ‘she’?

Activity / Passivity, Sun / Moon, Culture / Nature, Day / Night, Father / Mother, Head/Heart, Intelligible / Sensitive, Logos / Pathos

Cixous’s whole theoretical project can be summed up as an effect to undo the logocentric ideology to proclaim woman’s source of life, power and energy..... to subvert these patriarchal binary schemes where logocentrism collides with
phallocentrism in an effort to oppress and silence women.
(Moi, 105)

Writers, according to Elaine Showalter, possess this element of differences, for the notion of a ‘female’ imagination confirms the belief in a “deep, basic and inevitable difference between male and female ways of perceiving the world” (Eagleton, 2). She points out very aptly:

Such ‘essentialist’ on ‘biologistic’ beliefs imply that there is something intrinsic in the experiences of being male and thus render gender biological, rather than cultural, they tend to privilege gender at the expense of class or race and they can too early become historical and political presuming an unproblematic unity among women across culture, class and history. (2)

Women had to fight against odd constraints that threatened to annihilate their potential for writing. The catalogue of material difficulties that they faced were innumerable: inequalities in the educational system, lack of privacy, economic and financial dependence, the demands of marriage, the burden of child bearing and rearing domestic obligations, the familial restrictions and social expectations were some of the barricades women had to overcome as Virginia Woolf admits in “Professions for Women” that she has “many ghosts to fight many prejudices to overcome”. Most women writers were nocturnal, working by day and writing by night after the children were put to sleep. Single mothers had to combat with a different set of problems. Above all this, the women writers were suspicious about their chosen role and what Gilbert and Gubar calls “the anxiety of authorship” was a worrying tension. It was alright for women writers to go in quest of their mothers garden, to find the long
buried traditions of the ancestral mother but they had also to face the formidable patriarchal father staring stonily down at them.

Writing for Third World Women, the black women writers were riddled with political, social and cultural blockades that threatened to throttle their creative abilities. For the Indian woman, it took the political independence movement which propelled her out of her sheltered, protected existence and with receiving education; she was free to pursue a line of profession she deserved. The Indian woman was seen emerging from centuries of male domination and male – ordained social and cultural norms. As Indira Nityanandam says:

Though the Indian woman did not have to struggle like her American counterpart for universal suffrage, she had to strive to attain recognition of her individuality and acceptance by society of an existence even beyond her gender-based roles. Patriarchy had compelled the Indian woman to be totally subservient to the male in both the social and economic spheres. (11)

These political and social changes brought in a new lease of life, completely transforming the lives of women, strangely much like their counterparts all over the world. For the Indian women too, more than in any other genre of literature, it is in fiction that they found their mainstay which helped them to attempt a realistic portrayal of women. In earlier fictions of the male novelists, women were represented more as symbols and there was no authority of authenticating experiences. The women were generally cast into a few limited roles, they were portrayed as virgin heroine or temptress, a dutiful daughter or all sacrificing mother, the pativrata or the redundant widow. A
prevailing gendered notion about woman was that “woman is innately weak, emotional, enjoys dependence is limited in capacities for work” (Horney 231). “The passive roles assigned to them rendered them like the women writers themselves into a womanhood that has been for centuries - the sacred hearth, at one home - tomb - womb, a woman always being stilled into silence” (Wattal 14).

In the earlier fiction in English written by Indian Women as early as the middle of the nineteenth century, post-independence fiction by women achieves a separate identity. The first important woman novelist in Indian Fiction in English was Kamala Markandya, followed by Ruth Prawar Jhabwala, Nayantara Sahgal and scores of women writers. Anita Desai occupies a significant place in the Canon of Indian women writers. As a third world woman and a diaspora writer, Anita Desai explored a vast array of themes in her fiction, mostly characters trapped in an existential limbo, barren and shattered drifters, chiefly rootless and nameless, going on a quest for self-identity, but unable to as they are essentially dislocated and displaced. The theme of alienation has been dealt with more persistence and authenticity, by Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi.

The alienated person is a stock figure in Nayantara Sahgal’s novels. Anita Desai is another Indian novelist who has thrashed the theme of alienation in a systematic way. In her first novel *Cry, The Peacock* published in 1963, the central female protagonist is Maya whose character is an exploration of the alienated human psyche.

In Maya is a story of a Young, sensitive girl obsessed by a childhood prophesy of disaster, whose extreme sensitivity is rendered in terms of immeasurable human loneliness. The
novel’s beginning itself brings to the fore the theme of husband-wife alienation by unfolding the relationship of Maya and Gautam. (Pathak 37)

Diagonally opposed to each other, in attitudes, temperament and character “Gautam thrives in his own world…his hardness…his coldness and incessant talk of cups of tea and philosophy”. (CTP 9) What pains Maya most is her “loneliness in this house”. “I was alone”, she complained, “Yes, I whimpered, it is that I am alone” (9).

Her another novel is *Voices In The City* which traces the spiritual journey of a lean and hungry looking journalist, Nirode, a world weary character.

The novel is a tragic exploration of personal suffering which is the consequence of the feverish sensitivity of this young intellectual who has lost his way in contemporary India. It explores the inner climate of youthful despair and is permeated by the existential angst. (Bhatnagar 39)

*In Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Sita, like Maya finds herself alienated from her husband, who, like Gautam fails to understand the psychological predicament of his wife who is in her fifth pregnancy. Finding herself cut off from all familial roots and comprehension, she flies to her father’s island, Manori, in order to bring some meaning unto her chaotic life over which she has no control.

Unlike Third World Women Writers like Anita Desai, for the Black Woman writers, as Barbara Smith suggests, “problems of literary production
are compounded by racism. Black writing by both women and men in the States exists as a ‘discrete sub category of American literature’ (Eagleton 42). *Iola Le Roy, Shadows Uplifted* by Francis Ellen Watkins Harper is considered by many to be the first novel by an Afro-American woman which was published in 1892. By that time, the country had experienced historic events like the civil war and reconstructive periods that affected the nature of life for Black people and for women. An abolitionist and a Black feminist Francis Harper is viewed as one of the leading figures in the National struggle to free Blacks from slavery and she became the spokesperson for the many black women who were not yet free to speak. The Black slave women were not identified, as white women who were, with the roles of wife and mother, but primarily and specifically with the roles of mother and worker. It was then not surprising that “the Black women as many were one of the most dominant images to emerge in Southern life and literature. In the struggle against slavery the novel emerged as an effective tool and medium for exposing the evils and abuses against the Blacks and as a genre, it could be used as a source of both moral instruction and entertainment. Harriet Beeches Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, despite its reading as a romantic novel did provide much support for the Abolitionist Movement. There was a fierce urge among the Blacks to prove their worth, since “one of the most hurtful accusations made against them by proslavery advocates was that Black people were culturally inferior and had not produced, and never would be capable of producing works of art” (Christian 19). In an interview in 19th century, Toni Morrison asserted:

I want to participate in developing a canon of Black work there was no doubt to Morrison becoming one of America’s best novelists, an important contemporary novelist and a major figure in America’s national literature. Her main characters, particularly Black women, are dynamic Blacks
living in small town and coming to grips with their search for selfhood in the empty, meaningless world, whether urban or agrarian to which they belong. (Preface X)

As her basic theme and subject of her first major work, Morrison chose the obsession of Blacks with an American standard of beauty that seemed both inescapable and destructive. The publication of *The Bluest Eye* in 1970 attracted the world’s attention for it

…Contains one black girl's universe; alienation from the white world in a cady shore, a sad nigger girl made pregnant by her father and eventually driven mad, class conflict among black playmates, derelcted adults fighting each other and spilling up, a father who denies his son and most of all that sad little girl, who wishes her eyes were blue, the bluest eyes in the world. (Sokolov 96)

In Morrison’s second novel *Sula* (1973), she creates two central characters, Sula and Shadrack, people who are non-conformist social rebels who simply refuse to toe line the prevailing social standards and code. Sula resides with her mother Hannah, in the house of her grandmother, Eva Peace. Initially Sula models her world vision from these women. However her inability to find any meaning in the prescribed domestic roles of the women of the Bottom society coupled with her desire to be “distinctly different” (S 118) leaves Sula spiritually and physically alienated. “She had no centre, no speck around which to grow” (103). Unlike Pecola, Sula lives out her own life, creates her own realities and sets out her own personal aims: Pecola escapes in madness, Sula rejects society for a moral self-reliance. “Through her characters, problems are conditioned by the black milieu of which she writes,
her concerns are broader, universal ones. Her fiction is a study of thwarted sensitivity” (Bischaff, 23).

Beloved is Toni Morrison’s fifth novel and won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. The novel traces the experiences of an escaped female slave, Sethe’s quest for meaning and wholeness in slavery and in freedom. The novel is a record of the cruelty, violence and degradation meted out as a Black family, besides her physical and psychological fragmentation of the Black family particularly the victimized slaves. As a slave woman on the run brutally hunted and pursued to the point of insanity, she flies from one place to another, and pregnant with her fourth child, the unbiased and unimaginable terror she faces, defines the terror and alienation she undergoes as a woman.

Beloved returns eighteen years after her death. To Denver’s question, “What did you come back for?”, responds, “To see her (Sethe’s) face. She lets me alone by myself” (B 75). In most of Morrison’s characters, the women, in particular, emerge as traumatized victims, lost bewildered by their blurred identity of racial suppression, colour, sex and gender marginalization.

In both the writers writing across the continents, one finds a thematic and ideological similarity in their manner of creating their fictional works. Both Anita Desai and Toni Morrison deal with the psychic aspects of characters. With the emergence of women writers, there is a tendency on their part to bring the female perspective and point of view to women’s experience producing women-centered novels to inscribe their views. The specificity of the female experience demanded an approach that women alone could articulate, write about female bonding. Hence a plethora of themes like motherhood, sisterhood, mother-daughter relationship and other sexist relationships. Women do have different kind of needs, wants and expectations.
While alienation itself as a social and cultural condition and symptom suffered by all, irrespective of sex, race, color, class or gender, the female human species experiences this same condition much more acutely and excruciatingly. Different function of her body and sexuality has pushed her into a private sphere where she is forced to experience specific aspects that continue to alienate her. Both Toni Morrison and Anita Desai’s novels focus on the process of motherhood. Women are alienated as mothers because they do not contract the conditions of their motherhood. In both writers, we have a range of women characters that celebrate or repudiate their motherhood. There is Pauline Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* who finds her motherhood, a total burden and the family is an unnecessary baggage, she wants to get rid of. She watches, “White men taking such good care of their women and they all dressed up in big clean houses (BE 97). Pauline finds it increasingly difficult to return to her own life which she considers as ugly, undisciplined and cumbersome and hence as a result, “more and more…neglected her house, her children, her man” (101).

She alienates herself from her family, making herself unavailable to them. Pecola lives a life of deprivation and the total alienation of the child mother breach is, when Pecola tells her other ‘self’ that her mother could not believe her father raped her. Due to the biological close proximity of the mother to the child, the mother was more likely to be available. Most frequently children turn to their mothers in trust and faith and Pecola finds herself rejected by her mother who chooses to repudiate the bonds of kinships, Pecola’s alienation is complete.

We see that Pecola is overburdened by parental neglect, abuse, insults and violence. She is impelled by a misguided notion that as an alienated child, she is responsible for the violent behavior of her parents. She is a scapegoat,
she thinks that others see her blackness as a ‘curse’. Pecola decides to take her fate into her hands. Her desire is to make radical expressions of her determination to make her life better for herself “I was so lonely for friends” (87). She speaks to the friend whom she had created in her mind. She of course longs for blue eyes, a sign of acceptance in the white persons world. A blue–eyed child is liked and loved by all. But Pecola being a Black, wishes for blue eyes. When her wish is not granted, she blinds herself physically, she becomes mentally off. She turns inward to the dark world of the victim, where she can define love on her own terms and leaving the blue glaze of her mutilated or crazed eyes to look upon her victimizing world.

As for the Breedlove family, they too have wishes. Pauline Breedlove wishes for a house and a family like the one for whom she is a servant. “Power, praise, and luxury were hers in this household” (101). Life here is ordered and neat. Finding satisfaction in this white family’s household “she stopped trying to keep her own house” (101). She established an intimate connection with the family. They give her “what she had never had – a nickname - Polly” (101). “She is the ideal servant” (101). Yet Mrs.Breedlove’s wish can never have fulfillment. She is the “ideal servant.” Her wish is to be the “ideal” mistress of her own house, yet she is neither white nor rich and her wish is bound to fail.

She prefers only the white children to serve and fondle them than Pecola who is born of Pauline’s womb but who is ugly. When Pecola spills a blueberry pie on the white family’s floor, Mrs. Breedlove says, “my floor” (87). Pecola is slapped to the floor and abused verbally. The family’s little girl, “in pink,” starts crying. Sending her own child out the door, Pauline begins to call the white child “baby,” and when asked who the other child was. She will not say that Pecola is her daughter, only “don’t worry none” (87)
Whatever be the kind of unconditioned allegiance and service the black women rendered, they were a gated community and there was a prescribed role for black women in the larger community that did not allow individual self expression. The “free life” that Sula desires in the 1940s was not easy for a black woman to realize. Whatever defiance of rebellion Sula chooses to exhibit has to be within the boundaries of her ethnic community. Viewing her activities as evil, her community ostracizes Sula and Nel, with differing attitude towards the wifely role. Like so many women writers, “Morrison equates marriage with the death of female self and imagination” (Duvall, 82). Nel assumes the stereotypical role of the wife “sometimes sweet industrious and loyal” (83), after marriage, she devalues into the finding of her wifely role becoming one of the women who had “folded themselves into starched coffins” (122).

Sula finds her existence without any ambition, drab and lifeless. She chooses to find her existential meaning in her connection with men, her sexuality to define herself. As the community ostracizes her, the only man she can prevail upon is Ajax and her other half Nel leaves her. Sula dwindles into her reflective rebellious self, stubbornly confronting death with as much ease with which she exercised her sexuality. Motherhood is conceived as another alienated experience for women which no father or man can understand, the biological states of pregnancy and motherhood itself, in Morrison’s terms, are experienced as a splitting of the self: Expressing this splintering of the self, Julia Kristeva says in Women’s Time.

Pregnancy seems to the experienced as the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject, redoubling up of the body….the arrival of the child, on the other hand, leads the mother into
the labyrinths of an experience that, without the child, she
would only rarely encounter love for one other. (26)

What is central to Morrison’s novels is the theme of the individual
versus society. The conflict that arises out of this confrontation inevitably
renders the individual an outcast, a stranger, a rebel and an alien as they simply
do not confirm with the social norms and regulations. The Blacks as a race
were looked down as a community who were meant to labor and not
recognized as persons in their own right, being constantly denied an identity,
they were viewed as objects to serve, nameless and faceless. If conditions were
worse for the Black man, for the Black woman, it was intolerable. Trapped in
an existential anguish of womanhood, functioning always as the ‘others’ other’,
thrice suppressed by virtue of their race, colour and sex and further removed
from the social ordeals and domestic travails of the White woman. The Black
woman, was the toiler and served as the mule for them. As Maya Angelou
avows:

not only for keeping the Black family alive, but also the
White family. Black women have nurtured a nation of
strangers, for hundreds of years, they brutally nursed babies at
their breasts whom they know, when they grew up, would
rape their daughters and kill their sons. (48)

Black women, Morrison explains have had “the ability to be the ship and
the safe harbor” (Caralyn Denard 175).

In Beloved, Sethe recounts her feelings to Beloved, “you sleep on my
back, Denver, sleep in my stomach. Felt like I was split in two” (B 202).
Morrison examines that motherhood in its denied form, as the mother enslaved,
and reduced to functioning as a breeder. The chronological narration of the novel, traces the journey of Sethe, it charts the 1870s, the suffering humiliation and degradation of Sethe and other black people working on a white plantation named “Sweet Home”. Sethe’s bonding with her children is of terrifying proportions, that for her the children are better off dead “their fantasy futures protected from the heinous reality of slavery. It is better, Sethe’s act argues, to die in the cradle than to live out one’s full life span soul-dead, a zombie/ puppet daily treading the process requirements of someone else’s life and needs” (71). The father figure is totally absent, the other half who is responsible for the procreation of children is not there to share the responsibility of the welfare and future of the children. It is the mother, who in her alienated state, grieves and mourns the fate of her children. In Sethe, Morrison deliberately creates a character whose strength will not break under the weight of the atrocities that push her material bonds into such isolation away from her community out of history itself, so far from the rest of life that they can be scrutinized as almost the sole forces in Sethe’s life.

Sethe can never imagine her own future without her children. Like Son in Tar Baby who ends up in the swamp of his mythic forefathers, wandering as an island in isolation from any society, community, or tribe, Sethe cannot participate in the ongoing life of hers; she cannot imagine herself into history. Sethe’s past, the killing of her daughter returns to haunt her, the baby ghost drives her sons right out of the house isolating her into a totally female realm. Sethe lives alone with her daughter Denver, having decided to face the storm all by herself though this act estranges her from her own community. Her fixation on the past is by never mingling with the Black community, by protecting the only child who stays with her, her daughter Denver.
The concept of mothering is equally important for Indian women novelists writing in English. Writers, like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Shoba De’, depict this concept as central in their novels. Almost all characters in Anita Desai’s novels face the dilemma of alienation. Her novel *Cry, The Peacock* depicts Maya, married to a much older man, a matter of fact, business like, Gautama. An ever-widening gap of communication between the husband and the wife is felt throughout the novel. Her childless, motherless state further reinforces her alienation, the “bleak comfortless figure of her husband makes her yearn. “Had there been a bond between us, he would have felt its pull…But, of course there was no none...there was no hand, no love, hardly any love” (CTP 108). In *Voices In The City*, Desai projects on the mother-son relationship. Nirode aims to systematically reject everything, including his mother, whom he calls "that old she cannibal” (VC 103).

Nirode shares a love hate relationship with his mother. This ambivalent attitude towards his mother is a product of his ‘unconsciousness social conditioning’. The traditional concept of Indian motherhood is one of sacrifice, fortitude and suffering and living a highly morally rigid life. Nirode finds it impossible to tolerate his mother's independence and her continued friendship with major Chadha. The estrangement between Nirode and his shadowy and impersonal mother is complete. Anita Desai’s *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, her fourth novel returns to the theme of alienation in marital relationships. Having reached middle age and a mother of four children, Sita is full of rage, fear and revolt when she discovers she is pregnant for the fifth time. Reviewing her past and the present, she finds only loneliness, boredom and madness of a woman, a wife and a mother. To escape the terrors of motherhood, she escapes to Manori, ‘the island of miracles’ (WSGS 31). The island “concretized the feeling of isolation of Sita. She retreats into it as an obsessive desire to recapture once again her childhood innocence and purity”
(Sinha: 213). However she finds the island changed, the magic of her childhood has worn off and she finds herself in total isolation and alienated from her children as well. One of the common themes that unite both the women writers is their treatment of the theme of motherhood from a woman’s perspective.

Another theme that runs parallel in the fictions of Anita Desai and Toni Morrison is the theme of female bonding or sisterhood or sisterly kinship among women. In the three novels of Anita Desai selected for analysis, there is a complete lack of female bonding, these women characters have no supportive or sustaining force to carry them through the travails and miseries of life. These three women in these novels, Maya in *Cry, The Peacock*, Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* and Monisha in *Voices In The City* are already broken and shattered and they are mostly lonesome, sensitive educated, motherless and alienated from everything. Maya is alone in her misery, her pet Toto is almost a surrogate for the child she never has. The pet’s death is a colossal loss to her which Gautama uncaringly brushes aside. In the absence of her husband’s love, she can find no sustaining emotional support from either her brother, as he had run away from home long ago, nor from her father who is on a long tour to Europe. At her in-laws’ place, neither Gautama’s mother nor his sister is compassionate enough to share her feelings of loss and alienation, instead they hound her saying what she needs is therapy. Her friends Leila, who lives a contented tie with her tubercular husband and Pom who enjoys the warmth and nurturance of motherhood are denied to Maya who gradually becomes obsessed with the prophesy of death by the albino magician. As Swain and Nayak point out she lives, “the alienation of the individual leading to the annihilation of the self in its identification with death and violence” (Indian Women Novelists 10).
Monisha in *Voices In The City* is also a study in female alienation. Her relationship with her husband is characterized “only by loneliness” and lack of communication. She has no faith, as she records in her diary, in religion:

> If I had religious faith, she writes, I could easily renounce all this. But I have no faith, no alternative to my confused despair there is nothing I can give myself to and so I must stay. The family here, and their surroundings, tell me such a life cannot be lived - a life dedicated to nothing that this house is a protection from death. (VC l21-22)

Monisha is alienated from her equally sensitive brother Nirode and younger sister Amla. She has no friends at her in-laws’ house, her mother too fails to support and her association with brother, sister and mother has withered away. Finding no support or emotional outlet, Monisha resorts to suicide as her final solution. “Monisha’s death does not solve the problem of female alienation” (Parikh 24).

Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* also finds the home life and the suffocating environment of Bombay as intolerable. As Nityanandam points out, “Sita feels totally isolated from her family; her son's physical energy, Menaka’s destructive tendency... her cool husband who was neither an introvert nor an extrovert... all seem totally alien to her nature and temperament” (21-22). Even her children seem to Sita to be “rigid, encased in their separate silences, like larvae in stiff spun cocoons” (19). She is motherless and her father had died soon after. The joint family fails to sustain her emotionally and when Raman moves her to a small flat, still Sita continues to feel alienated. Along with this state of isolation and alienation is her desire to withdraw. Her intention is to leave for the island of her father’s magic and
her childhood dreams. She finds no bonding of any kind for her to go through the ordeal of life.

In traditional Indian families particularly amidst the Hindus, there is a strong familial tie that binds the family together. The family fabric holds generations of families within its fold, members strongly supporting and caring for each other in times of crisis and trauma. Anita Desai’s fiction appeared at a time when the joint families were crumbling like Sita's father-in-law’s age old rotten flat when the nuclear family was in the making. Relationships were torn asunder and mostly women bore the brunt of this separation and isolation. In olden times, as Parikh points out

Women in India were holstered by faith to endure in order to survive. With the urbanization and industrialization, in modern India, the lack of devout and the ceaseless questioning and questing pave the way for women's annihilation. (22)

The Hindu woman finds herself in transforming from the social and cultural ethos of the traditional society, to find herself wallowing in a sea of shifting values. Women, finding themselves suddenly dislocated from their traditional status had to redefine and rediscover their ‘self’ in the rapidly emerging new times of women's freedom, liberation and independence. Anita Desai's women characters are mostly stay at home people, preoccupied with the ‘self’, deeply introspective introverts and possessing a high imagination, these women are above the commonplace, average, everyday seen women on the streets and ordinary homes.
Maya, Monisha and Sita are depicted as women, endowed with deep sensitivity of imagination and with intellectual learning to rationalize, analyze and deduce concepts. As women, they crave for love, and understanding. Both Maya and Sita have a childhood where there is a strong emotional bonding with their fathers. Maya keeps recalling her father’s assurances and the golden days of her childhood at Lucknow and Darjeeling, the carefree existence and the youthful dreams of her girlish days. She grieves, “No one, no one else... loves me as my father does” CTP (43). For Sita, the magic island of her father alone would give her the solace and peace of her childhood. Monisha is bereft of both her parents’ love and her husband is totally nonchalant to her needs. Maya, Monisha and Sita are misfits and tend to alienate themselves by their differences as much as Morrison's women characters Pecola, Sula and Sethe. They are non-conformists and almost societal rebels, in the sense they do not toe line the common place, social and cultural ethics. Highly individualized in their perception, they aspire for things sometimes impossible. What holds together, these sets of characters from two women writers writing across the globe, across cultural dimensions and social behaviors and pattern is that these characters are essentially truncated, fragmented, amputated and alienated by their very difference as a person. These six women are “thinking characters”, their thoughts fit the canvas of the landscape of their interior mind, it pushes out every other factors and the physical being is rendered redundant.

In an evolving society of gross materialistic desires and philistine greed, these characters inhabit a loveless world, of eroding familial ties, social values, cultural and moral dependence. The alienation that affects these characters is intense and emotional. Despite strong familial ties, be it an Indian family or a black family, they find no responsive, supportive backup from their immediate or extended families. As non conforming people, there is no secure place where
they can subscribe to their views, either they have to force themselves to confirm or be within the nobody’s land to simply die or fade away.

The Afro-Americans are known for their firm familial ties, community oneness and their ghettos were symbolic of the sharing and bonding typical of their tribe, when the stability of the familial support slips or is snatched away, the individual totters on the verge of being an outsider and when banished to the outer realms due to their difference, they become totally alienated characters. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola is someone who does not matter.

In fact, Pecola is so far outside this communal activity that she is almost invisible or under erasure. The whores do not acknowledge Pecola’s presence and talk over and around her, which in the Black English oral tradition signifies her ‘otherness’. Pecola could gain entrance to her community by practicing the communal rules of discourse, but she has not learned these rules at home and so she is lost. (Hunter 191)

Morrison creates in the characters of Pauline and Cholly individuals who never really grow up. In the absence of self-acceptance of their own self, they grow up in an oppressed white society, without possessing any self-esteem or self respect. Pauline's education teaches her nothing about the realities that underlie beneath the surface of life, she finds her role model in the beauty of the white women and she begins to imitate their lifestyle. She hates the ‘Blackness’ of her children, and “into her son she beat a loud desire to run away, and into her daughter, she beat a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life” (BE 100). Much as Pecola longs her blue eyes this has nothing to do with her rape by her father. Little girls, particularly in Pecola’s case, born Black, poor and by all standards ugly, scorned and rejected by all long, to be
beautiful, and to be loved; but the Breedloves, contrary to What their names suggest, their battered lives are nourished and nurtured by the depravity, fear, hate and oppression that each member leaps upon the other. Ultimately they breed destruction, and love has little or no place in their lives.

In *Sula*, as doubles, Sula and Nel complement each other they are of a self, close to an intimacy that of “two throats not identical as peas in a pod, but they are represented as “two parts and one eye” (S 147). While Nel shares up in the safety net of marriage, Sula is in the process of making herself. The estrangement between them shatters the notion of sister kinship, until long after Sula’s death, Nel realizes the loss of Sula as a loss of her personal self. Sula herself is unable to react to anyone else in the community, once she severs with Nel. Seen as a rebel she remains a social outsider, and dies the death of a social outcast completely rejected and ostracized by the black community. Like Pecola, Sula lives a lonely life, her mother Hannah hardly realizes her only daughter Sula's need for emotional nurturance. With her mother distancing herself involved with other men, Sula is left on her own. Nel too is driven by her mother to being an obedient daughter, driving her imagination ‘underground’. Pecola, Sula and Nel are far removed from their mothers and trapped in their own isolation from society. They turn inward, trying to hold on to their own emotions, establishing a firm relationship with one another.

For Sethe in *Beloved* motherhood itself becomes an alienating factor that forces her to kill her children as she cannot face the prospect of her children being pushed into slavery. Black becomes an oppressive color, and slavery, a racial tool to repress the Blacks, and as a Black and slave woman, Sethe is a victim of multiple inhumane cruelties. She may be free, but she remains a slave in many ways. She is constantly reminded, she is Black and different. Forced to erase their self identity the black women were sexually exploited, abused,
and made into abject victims of psychological trauma, pain and suffering. While Sethe as a slave struggles to gain her freedom, Beloved is a ghost wreaker by the pain of slavery and death. Beloved returns from the deprived, lonely existence of death to reaffirm her place among the living, as a baby denied of her mother, she returns from the grave to reclaim her place among the living.

As Morrison herself suggests Beloved’s obsession with Sethe can be read in two ways, both as a psychologically damaged real life slave girl and as a ghost. She projects into Sethe the image of her internal mother, the woman who was about to smile at her and who then left her behind. Her sister Denver has little intercourse with the social world like Beloved. She is noticeably dependent on her mother, whom she also fears. “The thing that happened that made it all right, for my mother to kill my sister” (B 205), keeps Denver imprisoned in 124 Bluestone Road. “Her brothers have run away; her grandmother has died, her mother is ostracized by the community and her only playmate for years has been a ghost” (67). All the characters in the novel have experienced not only the material horrors of slavery but a psychic trauma which undermines their sense of self.

Anita Desai attempts to capture in her fiction, the psyche and sensibility of the Indian women. Dependent emotionally and physically on the men, these women characters are depicted as persons with no substance. Desai’s women are typically realistic characters, they represent the middle class Indian women, most of them not economically independent, having no social or political leanings not highly intellectual or learned women, these women are trapped in familial situation of love and marriage but not finding contentment in the ordering of their lives. The range of characters that Anita Desai constructs are vast and varied. Maya in Cry, The Peacock portrays an exploration of a young,
sensitive girl with an alienated psyche whose extreme sensitivity is rendered in terms of immeasurable human loneliness. *Voices In The City* centers above the isolated struggle of Monisha, Amla and Nirod, trying to define their lives in the city of Calcutta. *Where shall we go this Summer?* focuses on marital discord, Sita is oversensitive and unable to relate to her reticent husband. In *Fire On The Mountain*, the elderly Nanda Kaul has retreated to Carignano, having completed all her obligations to the family, now was she asked to be lifted to the pines and aicadas alone. She wanted no one and nothing else. Her great granddaughter Raka has already eased herself into a natural state of reticence and aloofness. In *Clear Light of Day*, Tara’s visit to her prenatal home in Delhi makes up thoughts of the past. Despite their difference the sisters Bim and Tara try to normalize their relationships by recalling and reliving the past. Desai's another novel *Bye, Bye Blackbird* captures the confusions and conflicts of an alienated person very exhaustively. It explores the human relationships subject to a sense of non-belonging, displacement and dilemma. Desai claims that it is ‘most rooted in experience’. The novel gives “expression to disillusionment at racial, prejudice, indifference leading of an anguish of loneliness and search for identity” (Sinha, 211).

The novels *The Village by the Sea, In custody, Baumgartners Bombay, Journey to Ithaca, Fasting, Feasting* and her recent novel *The ZigZag Way* reply different facets of existential experiences. A persistent strain of loneliness, alienation, isolation, solitude and aloneness runs through them like a recurrent thread. Desai herself makes her purpose clear.

“My novels are no reflections of Indian society, politics and characters. They are a part of my private effort to seize upon the raw material of life - its shapelessness its meaninglessness” (Anita Desai’s comment on contemporary novelists, 72) On the contrary, Toni Morrison depicts the trauma of the black
community and of thrice deprived people being black, poor and a woman, their experiences and roles of living in a racist and male dominated society. Her first novel *The Bluest Eye* reveals the tragic effect of racial prejudice but the actual tragedy for Pecola limits from within her home, a place containing repressed and separated individuals who fail to connect with each other. *Sula* is a novel which depicts a rebellious woman who refuses to confirm and chooses to tread a differential path, but getting excommunicated from her only friend Nel, her family Eva and Hannah, community. *Song of Solomon* tells the story of a Milkman. Her succeeding novel *Tar Baby* deals with the themes of racial identity, sexuality, class and family dynamics. While *Beloved* explores the inescapable effects of slavery, *Jazz* combines history, legend reminiscence and identity. Her seventh novel, *Paradise* focuses on all black towns and a violent attack that a group of men make on a small female community at the edge of the town. After a mammoth voyage into the psychological traumas, suffering and pain of the black women, the alienation and isolation in which they wallow Toni Morrison’s descends to her eighth novel *Love*, a fitting culmination and an answer to all the life’s riddles and triangles of human existence and relationship, the novel relates one of Morrison’s great themes, the intimate relationships that women have and the cruelties inflicted by fate and time. The novel is a clear indication of Toni Morrison’s transformation as a novelist, she now focuses on the universal dilemma of human, not just that of black people in general and black women in particular. For the novel is “more than race, it is a story of class, friendship, envy, obsession and most important, the mechanization of love (Sinha 50). Morrison herself has promoted her novel *Love*, to be “perfect”. The novel surmounts all trivial issues and treats problems of larger dimensions, race and gender people and global conflicts. Love may probably be the answer to all women alienated and trapped in a loveless state and living a life full of energy and beauty. The terra firma of her works chiefly
brings out the universal concerns of humanity and questions the relevance of human existence.

Her novels are not merely novels of protest but “conscious as she is of the dilemmas of black people, her novels reflect the tension between protest and transcendence between suffering and strength and between collective and individual identity” (Das, 38). Anita Desai, in *The ZigZag Way*, likewise reveals her as an artist evolving into tackling larger issues and her recent novel is a cue to dealing with concerns not entirely confined to depicting the interior psychic landscape of her characters, but deals with themes like anti-semitism, the demise of traditional and Western stereotype views of India.

However, the writers may have crossed over to new arena, new themes and investigating new aspects of human life and experience, but for sure one has to Zigzag the way to love. Some human conditions never can change, human emotions and feelings may have become dense, more complex variegated at times even vague and nebulous but the symptoms of alienation, of being alienated continues to haunt human lives. Women particularly come under this surge and female alienation by its very essence and nature is different from male alienation. Generally alienation is a condition that impacts all humans despite their age, sex, class, creed, region, religion, race, caste and gender. But belonging to differential species male and female, it is only pertinent that the emotions and feelings that emit out of them are also different. Being pushed into the private sphere, women have for centuries and till date, been confined to domesticity and child bearing Women have undergone numerous experiences, that have left them severely impaired and damaged. Biological experiences like menarche, motherhood and menopause together with gendered notions of femaleness, compressed into the small sphere of domesticity, home management, have rendered the women passive creatures,
with no initiative or enterprise of her own. As Sherry in studying women’s writing puts it,

Women are not numerically a minority in our society – usually something slightly over 50 percent of the population ... and in many aspects women’s lives, experiences and values have been treated as marginal and men’s experiences have been assumed to the normative. In addition, there has been a general tendency to assume that ‘important’ activities are those which occur in the public sphere, while private life and feelings are less important of concern only to the individuals involved. (6)

Many feminist writers have emphasized that compared to men, women are particularly well placed to write about the daily lives and activities of women and may give more attention to women characters than male characters do. As women writers, Anita Desai and Toni Morrison have undoubtedly given more space and scope to detailing small aspects of femaleness in their women characters.

Anita Desai and Toni Morrison have created a spread of women characters who have mostly been as alienated upbringing. They are either close to their fathers in the absence of their mothers, or else apt to divorce themselves off their motherly concern or are rejected by their mothers who hate them. They grow up lonely, unattached and unhappy. Amidst the squalor and emotionally poverty deprived life, they ambitiously dream of entering a husband’s home with idealistic hopes of receiving unlimited love, individual attention and unconditional concern. However these women meet with situations and enter households, where they are deprived of love. They
smother under misunderstanding and are unable to relate to people and become alienated in their relationship. In India, where joint families are still in existence, they stay isolated in homes, where in-laws shun them or reject them or are not in line with their sensibility. Their husbands are totally nonchalant to their emotional needs and are indifferent and unconcerned. They are unable to understand the insurgent need and care of their partners. Desai’s women – Maya, Monisha and Amla, Sita, Nanda Kaul, Ilä Das, Raka, Tara and others - are characters essentially alienated due to some factor or other, caught up in their own selves, they are women who either succumb to their defeat like Maya and Monisha or reconcile to their destiny like Sita and Nanda Kaul or simply triumph over their situational setback like Amla and Tara. Desai does not go into controversial issues like religion or caste. Her novels center around highly stung individuals, emotionally tense and introverts who keep thinking incessantly, without a break. Deeply entrenched within their self, they wish to see around them, matters which suit their sense and sensibility.

Toni Morrison deals with larger issues such as race and gender. The Africans were brought as slaves to America and subject to the worst abuse and harassment that the world has witnessed the two proceeding centuries. All of Morrison’s novels from her first novel *The Bluest Eye* to *Love* “explore both the need for and the impossibility of real community and the bonds that both unite and divide African American Women” (Sinha 48). The black women became the ultimate victim of sorts, they were mammies to the white families and abused by their masters and in turn victimized by the black men, they were pressed into producing babies in such quick succession, that they either aged fast or simply died away. They battled to ensure the safety of their children as they shared a close bond with them and to ensure their survival they chose the cruelest means. Morrison’s novel *Beloved* depicts Sethe as a mother, who kills her daughter. According to Stamp Paid because she “was trying to outhunt the
hunters”. “She loves those children” (B. 243). While the black male who were “the most violent abusers of slave women’s sexuality” (Bloom, 99) rather than the white men, could escape fatherhood and easily yield the responsibility of taking care of his childhood or the Black women, motherhood was something born with their flesh and their love was a fusion with their senses. The black woman was the most ‘alienated’ creature; battling to ensure the survival of her children striving in every possible way to provide the best for her children.

… the black woman was only permitted to do the dirty work of the society. She worked in the homes of white families, doing the house works in the homes of white mistress. She raised white children and she raised her own children. Again, somehow she managed to survive, she managed to see that her children learned to read and write although in many cases she could do neither herself. She worked long hours to make sure that they had food to eat. She continued to teach her children, the ways of her African and African – American ancestors. (Rosenberg 10)

In the body of Black American fiction and Indian English fiction written by women, dominant themes like female alienation and other related aspects as existentialism, isolation, solitude, aloneness etc have been dealt with. From this research, it is clear that female alienation has specific manifestation and dimensions that are exclusively different from alienation that men undergo. The different biological function, societal values, economic liberation, cultural taboos have ensured that women undergo certain specifically different kinds of experience. With all the scientific interventions technologic information and enhanced intellectual ability, the modern world is nearing an existence that forebodes to radically alter life. However the human emotions has not changed
much, human still respond to feelings of joy and sorrow, happiness and all its allied forms would continue to haunt the humans their dreams and imagination, ideology and thought. And writers will continue to address this theme, reworking it within the fabric of their works, again and again, giving it different figuration and replication, Alienation may receive a treatment that can be dispersed and divorce different figuration, may diverse vague or nebulous, concrete or rational however it would be a recurrent perennial theme that would course through literature of all region and countries.

Anita Desai as an Indian English Fiction writer uses it with great efficiency and persistence. The alienated person is a stock figure in her fiction and some of the characters surmount their self imposed alienation, by making attempts to connect and associate with others. Maya in Cry, The Peacock makes numerous efforts to make Gautama understand her desire for him, to somehow evoke in him a passion for her.

In a sudden impulsive longing to be with him, be close to him. I leapt up, full of decisions to make haste. then joining him…. we could go in to the garden together … I went to rouse him from the couch …I saw that he had closed his eyes not with mere tiredness, but in profound, invulnerable sleep and was very far from any world of mine … I hesitated wishing to summon him to me, yet knowing he could never join me. It was of no use. (CTP 81)

Again and again Maya experiences the feeling of being unwanted and in the end it is out of sheer desperation and frustration that she pushes Gautama off the ledge and if Maya herself leaps off the balcony is suspect. Likewise in Voices In The City Monisha too is married to a blind moralist, like Maya. She
finds her life, a virtual imprisonment. Finding no responsive cord of affection and love from her husband and living among in-laws who counted her sarees in her wardrobe, Monisha feels shifted and smothered. Finding no support she takes the only way, she feels that will ease her alienation, she sets fire to her own self, wishing to flee this existence which otherwise threatens to immolate her. The male alienation is depicted through the character of Nirode who wants “to systematically reject his past, his upbringing, his family wealth and tradition – above all he wants to respect his mother. He finds it impossible to accept her independence and individuality. His imbibed social conditioning would not permit him his moral excesses. The shock of Monisha’s death brings individuals out of their separate boxes, isolated as they were. Amla “knew that Monisha’s death had pointed the way for her and would never allow her to lose herself” (VC 245). Nirode too is shocked out of his complacent existence.

He seemed unable to remain still or silent he was filled with an immense care of the world that made him reach out, again and again, to touch Amla’s cold hand when he saw it shake or embrace the old woman in the battered wicker chair, when he saw her weep. (ibid 245)

In Where Shall We Go This Summer?, Sita realizes that the magic of the island has eroded, it was simply a wet muddy place and “her time on the island had been very much of an episode on a stage… The storm, ended the play over the stage had now to be cleared” (139). She accepts life with a philosophical twist, “Life, had no periods, no stretches. It simply swirled around muddling and confusing, leading nowhere” (140). She looks forward to the “great gap between them would be newly and securely bridged” (137). Jamila confirms, “she had enough. She’s gone… she won’t come back”. (142)
The women characters in Anita Desai’s select fiction comprehend that in life, there has to be a level of compromise, reconciliation, accommodation, flexibility and adjustment. Some of them absorb the values after a tough experience, that consciously awaken them to greater issues in life in that comparative order. In striving towards this realization, they attempt to become full fledged characters with a self–identity, conviction and confidence. While some sink under like Maya and Monisha others surface to reach out to life like Sita and Amla.

In contrast, Toni Morrison’s characters confront an alienation which is racial and sexual, aspects like class, color and gender also criss-cross paving the way for individuals to segregate and remain isolated. However while on one hand Morrison has created characters like Pecola, whose alienation leads to her ultimate madness, Sula who simply dies in exile and isolation, Sethe and her daughter Beloved separated due to the onslaught of slavery and its repercussions, she has, on the other hand, produced women with the ‘tar quality’ who are able to sustain and support and guard their family fiercely, for these women, alienation as an issue is almost nonexistent. Among the ‘tar women’ there is Mrs McTeer in *The Bluest Eye*. While Pauline chooses to acknowledge the worth of her family rejecting them, removing them totally from her life. Mrs McTeer works, manages the household, cares for her husband and children, she is a good role model for her children. “She realizes the value and the necessity of the role she serves for her family and community and therefore she does not allow herself worth to be defined on the terms of others” (Denard 176).

Then there is Eva Peace, the mother and grandmother in *Sula*. Eva too expends her energy in taking care of the children and the homeless. She has intense hatred for her ex-husband but cannot resist an ongoing relationship with
men. She is not preoccupied like Pecola with alien standards of physical beauty or measurements of self-worth like Sula. She is said to have her leg run over by a train in order to collect insurance payments to care for her family. She is not a fond mother though she does not play with her children; she goes to a great extent to provide them with what they need to survive.

As far as the women in Morrisons are concerned they are ‘the tar women whom Morrison applauds and whose values, she believes should not be minimized by attention to the wrong value system or by existential longings and separate self-definings. (Denard 177)

This study has attempted to analyze select novels of Anita Desai and Toni Morrison from the perspective of the theme of alienation. A one to one analysis is not a possibility as writing across cultures, across continents, cultures and coastlines these women writers have produced characters who are authentic and reflect the cultural, social and psychological estrangement, from their environment. What is absorbing about these characters is that Anita Desai and Toni Morrison do not conceive women characters who are idealistic or utopian but real and authentic. They pose before their readers, women who are ordinary, common place and whom one would encounter in everyday life. And as women sensitive to small details and subtle nuances that underline women’s existence they try to sketch with a keen insight and vision into the heart of these women before unearthing what lies deep beneath their consciousness. The theme of female alienation has not been focused much, as alienation has been viewed as a social phenomenon afflicting all human without any discrimination. However with women entering the public arena of writing, publishing, receiving awards and accolades, the opinion holds that “women are particularly well placed to write about the daily lives and activities of women
and may give more attention to women characters than male writers do” (Sherry 6). Further she points out.

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)

In the past, works which focus on women were seen as “narrow” or “specialized” while works on men were “general”. This reflected the way in which our culture has evaluated the relative importance of the experience of men and the experience of women. With women writing women centered works, they authenticated women’s experience, giving it a female point of view, and perspective. This study strives to explore the theme of female alienation found in writings particularly in women’s fiction and to study that aspect of alienation in relation to women - hence the female alienation which is scantily found in secondary studies, in application to male alienation contained in primary tests. Though as biological products they share the same space as humans, their differential experiences, activities and emotions created a separate space and alienation is one such space which divides the humans on a linear basis. Alienation as experienced by women in a male dominated society is a significant modern trend.

Anita Desai in novel after novel explores this particular theme of female alienation. The plot and other related mechanics of the novel are kept at a minimal, while Desai expends all her creative energies on the individual. What she obviously implies through her novel is that “nobody is an exile from the society and the individuals should strive to integrate themselves and find
fulfillment” (George 159). The most significant social issue that Anita Desai focuses is the institution of marriage. Trapped in marriage, Desai’s women wallow in misery, she creates a woman who “makes to redefine herself inevitably ends up in lack of communication” (160). Women tend to resign mutely to their fate after a show of fierce rebellion and retreat into their deep psyche, in the process becoming victims to fears, obsessions, neurosis, paranoia or schizophrenia and their communion with other people comes to a dead end. Entirely incommunicable, they ponder existential dilemmas before ending up in alienation. Anita Desai’s significant contribution to Indian fiction in English has been by incorporating psychic aspect of her female characters and alienation has been a major theme which organically unites Anita Desai’s fiction, making her an exceptionally unique novelist. Virginia Woolf, in “A Room of one’s own” points out that “a woman must have money and a room of her own” in contemporary terms, it can be referred to as economic power, the spending autonomy for a woman and a personal, private space where women can just be themselves, instead of catering all the time to the demands of family, children and domesticity. Anita Desai, through Monisha reveals how her privacy is vandalized, her in-laws raid her room leaving her no privacy. Being an intellectual who reads writers like Dostoevsky, Hopkins and Kafka along with bearing Russian, French and Sanskrit through her dictionaries, unfortunately Monisha does not develop her artistic side, but descends the dark steps into oblivion. As Betty Friedan aptly says that a woman to be alive, creative and potential, she should take house work and marriage for what they are. In the changing social and economic times, it is imperative for women to move ahead with the demands of time and create for themselves a private space which will permit them to be employed, be independent and empower themselves as individuals with an identity of their own. Women can be motivated to be as creative and innovative in their tasks. Family itself can become an intolerable burden for a woman who has no creative outlet. For Sita
in *Where shall we go this summer? and for Pauline of The Bluest Eye*, the family itself is a repressive factor which kills their material instincts and demolishes their wish to be good mothers. They almost become anti-mothers breaking the stereotyped version of what constitutes a caring mother.

Having an intense faith and a belief in a higher order of creation, or being attached to realizing an idea, or simply having a vital pastime, a hobby or creatively passing time can be some of the aspects to eliminate the negative effects of alienation. Erich Fromm in *The Sane Society* rightly opines:

The mentally healthy person is the productive and unalienated person: the person who relates himself to the world lovingly, and who uses his reason to grasp reality objectively; who experiences himself as a unique individual entity, but at the same time feels one with his fellow men, who is not subject to irrational authority and accepts willingly the rational authority of conscience and reason, who is the process of being born as he is alive and considers the gift of life the most precious chance he has. (275)

It has been insisted again and again by socialists, philosophers, psychologists, culturalists, feminists, educationists and others that one has to be creatively occupied and the following have been identified as principles which would relieve the symptoms of Alienation. Fromm outlines the Principles to alleviate alienation

1. In order to live able, a man’s life, one has to enjoy the whole fruit of one’s labour.
2. One has to be able to educate oneself.
3. One has to pursue common idea or within a professional group proportioned to the stature of man.

4. One has to be actively related to the whole world (310).

Alienation as a symptom cuts across all race, region, colour, class, sex or gender, religion or caste, it cuts across all boundaries but one has to constantly find ways and means to surmount this malaise. Besides Anita Desai and Toni Morrison, scores of writers have addressed this theme in their works, and approaches from differing perspectives, dimensions and points of view. Female alienation is more crucial severe and sharp and more oppressive on women. Women particularly are emerging from years of subordination and repression and they are equipped to confront situations and conditions alien to their mental makeup. Desai and Morrison have given a spread of women characters, some who overcome or succumb to this modern sickness. Finally it can be said, what was told to a small tribe thousands of years ago.

“\textit{I put before you life and death, blessing and curse - and you choose life”}. For lot of us this could be our choice as well.