

***THE NEW PARADIGM OF MOTHERHOOD: AN ECLECTIC STUDY OF
SELECTED INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION***

**(Dissertation submitted to Nagaland University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy in English)**

By

ANWESHA GOGOI

Regn no: 76/2021

Under the supervision of

Prof. Nigamananda Das



Department of English

School of Humanities and Education

Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema

Kohima, Nagaland-797004

2022

DECLARATION


I, Ms. Anvesha Gogoi, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled *The New Paradigm of Motherhood: An Eclectic Study of Selected Indian English Fiction* is the bonafide record of work done by me under the supervision of Prof. Nigamananda Das, Department of English, Nagaland University. This work has not been submitted, either in full or in part, for any other research degree, fellowship, associateship, etc. in any other university or institute.

Date: 23rd February 2022


Ms. Anvesha Gogoi

Regn. No. 76/2021

Countersigned by:


Prof. Jano S. Liegise

Head
Department of English
Nagaland University
Kohima Campus, Meriema.

Head
Department of English
Nagaland University
Kohima Campus, Meriema



Prof. Nigamananda Das
Supervisor
Department of English
Nagaland University
Kohima Campus, Meriema.

Dr. Nigamananda Das
Professor
Department of English Pb-710
Nagaland University
Meriema, Kohima
Kohima, Nagaland

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work has only been possible with the support, advice, and encouragement of my teachers, friends, family, and well-wishers.

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude towards my supervisor, Prof. Nigamananda Das for his infinite patience and guidance throughout the period of the research.

I am thankful to the all faculty members and the Head of the Department of English and Dean, School of Humanities & Education, Nagaland University for giving me the opportunity to register myself as a research scholar in the department and for being a source of knowledge and encouragement.

I also extend my gratitude towards my father, my extended family, and my friends for supporting me and pushing me forwards.

I dedicate this work in the memory of my mother Sabita Gogoi, my first teacher and an inspiration for the rest of my life.



Ms. Anwesha Gogoi -

Regn. No. 76/2021



Nagaland University

(A Central University established by the act of Parliament, 35/1989)

Department of English

Kohima Campus, Meriema, Kohima-797004, Nagaland, India

NU/ Eng/2022/

Date-23/02/2022

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled *The New Paradigm of Motherhood: An Eclectic Study of Selected Indian English Fiction* is the bonafide record of research work done by Ms. Anwasha Gogoi, Regn no : 76/2021, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during 2021-2022. Submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English, this dissertation has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other title and that the dissertation represents independent and original work on the part of the scholar under my supervision. This is again certified that the research has been undertaken as per UGC Regulations May 2016 (amended) and the scholar has fulfilled the criteria mentioned in the University Ordinances for submission of the dissertation. Plagiarism test of the dissertation was conducted as per UGC Regulations 2018 and 3% of similarity was detected which is permissible as per rules.

Dated the 23rd February 2022

Kohima

Dr. Nigamananda Das
Professor
Department of English Pb-710
Nagaland University
Meriema Campus, Meriema
Kohima-797004, Nagaland

SUPERVISOR

Prof. Nigamananda Das

Department of English

Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema

Kohima-797004, Nagaland, Mob.- +919436608904, Email- ndas69@yahoo.co.in




Nagaland University
(A Central University established by the act of Parliament, 35/1989)
Department of English
Kohima Campus, Meriema, Kohima-797004, Nagaland

PLAGIARISM TEST CERTIFICATE

Name of the Research Scholar	Anwasha Gogoi
M.Phil. Registration Number	76/2021
Title of M.Phil. Dissertation	<i>The New Paradigm of Motherhood: An Eclectic Study of Selected Indian English Fiction</i>
Name & Institutional Address of the Supervisor	Prof. Nigamananda Das, Department of English, Nagaland University
Name of the Department and School	School of Humanities & Education
Date of Submission	24/02/2022
Date of Plagiarism Check	23/02/2021
Percentage of similarity detected by the URKUND software	3%

I hereby declare/certify that the M.Phil. Dissertation submitted by me is complete in all respect, as per the guidelines of Nagaland University for this purpose. I also certify that the thesis/dissertation (soft copy) has been checked for plagiarism using URKUND similarity check software. It is also certified that the contents of the electronic version of the thesis/ dissertation are the same as the final hardcopy of the thesis/ dissertation. Copy of the Report generated by the URKUND software is also enclosed.


(ANWESHA GOGOI)
Name and signature of the Scholar

Date: 24/02/2022
Place: Department of English, NU, Kohima

Name and Signature of the Supervisor with seal



Dr. Nigamananda Das
Professor
Department of English Pb-710
Nagaland University
Kohima Campus, Meriema
Kohima-797004 Nagaland

2/23/22, 9:23 PM

Nagaland University Mail - [Original] 3% similarity - nndas@nagalanduniversity.ac.in



Nagaland
University

Nigamananda Das <nndas@nagalanduniversity.ac.in>

[Original] 3% similarity - nndas@nagalanduniversity.ac.in

1 message

noreply@urkund.com <noreply@urkund.com>
To: nndas@nagalanduniversity.ac.in

Wed, Feb 23, 2022 at 9:01 PM

Document sent by: nndas@nagalanduniversity.ac.in
Document received: 2/23/2022 4:29:00 PM
Report generated 2/23/2022 4:31:56 PM by Original's system for automatic control.

Student message: Anwasha Gogoi's M.Phil. Dissertation

Document : Anwasha Gogoi- M.Phil. dissertation.docx[D128674400]

About 3% of this document consists of text similar to text found in 110 sources. The largest marking is 41 words long and is 100% similar to its primary source.

PLEASE NOTE that the above figures do not automatically mean that there is plagiarism in the document. There may be good reasons as to why parts of a text also appear in other sources. For a reasonable suspicion of academic dishonesty to present itself, the analysis, possibly found sources and the original document need to be examined closely.

Click here to open the analysis:
<https://secure.orkund.com/view/122759708-206602-955541>

Click here to download the document:
<https://secure.ouriginal.com/archive/download/128674400-212341-921504>

Dr. Nigamananda Das
Professor
Department of English PB-710
Nagaland University
K. Jima Campus Meriemae
Nagaland
9700

CONTENTS

Candidate's Declaration

Acknowledgements

Supervisor's certificate

Plagiarism Test Certificate

Abstract

Chapter I : Introduction

Chapter II : Motherhood and Alienation in Anita Desai's

Where Shall We Go This Summer

Chapter III : Neurotic Motherhood in Jerry Pinto's

Em and the Big Hoom

Chapter IV : Motherhood and Individuality in Anuradha Roy's

All the Lives We Never Lived

Chapter V : Diversity of Motherhood

Chapter VI : Conclusion

Works Cited

ABSTRACT

Motherhood has always been a subject of wonder for every living species. It is one of the highly glorified, yet at the same time suppressed role of human being. There are a variety of theories and concepts in various disciplines that suggest the duties of a mother and the importance of the mother in a child's life. In Indian society, there is more or less a concrete image for a perfect or ideal mother. They are regarded as selfless, sympathetic creatures who always sacrifice themselves for others. A mother is expected to have boundless endurance towards others. Furthermore, motherhood has been regarded as the main purpose of every woman's life a long time. On the other hand, there are many women who reject the concrete idea of an ideal mother and want to provide their own definitions of motherhood on the basis of their own experiences. Such opinions are often dismissed or suppressed by the patriarchal society.

However, the problems of women which were in the periphery have now shifted to the center in contemporary times. This change is very much reflected in Indian English literature. Indian English writers have started depicting the sufferings of women. They give the voice to the voiceless women and their issues. The typical idea of an Indian mother is also challenged by various Indian English novelists as they deal with the theme of motherhood from a broad perspective. Their works present the struggle, identity crisis, rebellion, alienation and loneliness of the mother figures. Women often go through emotional turmoil and sometimes even lose their sanity in the process of becoming a "good mother". At the present time, therefore, motherhood has become a subject of considerable psychoanalytic interest.

The primary aim of this work is to study the new paradigms of motherhood represented in modern Indian English novels which are yet to be critically analyzed. This study examines

the modern mother-child relationship and their influence on each other to determine the causes of the mothers' psychological alienation and the stifling relationship with their children. It also attempts at investigating the society's reaction towards the unique mother figures in the fictional world created by the authors. The selected novelists' ways of dealing with the issue of mental health of the mothers are also attempted to comprehend side by side.

The research is based on a study of Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, Jerry Pinto's *Em and the Big Hoom* and Anuradha Roy's *All the Lives We never lived*. The selected novels contain deep portrayals of unique mother-figures who are far removed from the idea of typical motherhood. These characters have a mental universe of their own which project them apart from others. The argument is supported by a reading between the lines of the narrative to go beyond the surface madness or abnormality of these mothers to get a proper understanding of their perspectives.

The selected texts play a major role in reimagining and transforming motherhood beyond the terms of patriarchy. They break the stereotypical concepts associated with Indian mothers. The transition of the traditional, self-sacrificing women without choices to one who is able to analyze and take decisions is the Indian woman as portrayed by these three novelists. The selected writers have created characters that are tormented by some sort of depression and alienation. Their psychological alienation can be considered as the result of the imposed false identity as caring mothers, their lack of freedom and the stifling relationships with their children. These fictions contribute to a growing and much-needed alternative narrative for women to make sense of their diverse mothering experiences and break the notion of one innate or essential nature of motherhood.

The findings of this study indicate some possible differences that can be found within Indian mothers. It questions the typical image of the naive and powerless mother, and

brings forth their need for a space of their own. The mother figures in the selected novels brings the focus to post-natal depression, inability of some women to adjust to the role of a mother, the conflict between motherhood and career and many other issues related to the mother's identity and individuality. This study of the varied experience of the mothers of the selected texts leads to the significance of the concept of 'chosen motherhood', which indicates that every woman must have the freedom to choose if they want to become a mother or not. This study on the changes in the idea of motherhood is expected to provide a new way of looking at women. It is expected that the results of this study will encourage people to alter the age-old image of the typical Indian mother, and to accept the diverse experience of motherhood with a progressive mindset.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter foregrounds the topic of research and its significance. It discusses the concept of a stereotypical 'perfect' Indian mother and the changes in this concept in the contemporary times with an overview of the representation of motherhood in Indian English fiction from the early to the present era. Indian society holds a peculiar idea of the mother, who is often compared to the nation and the native language. Mothers are regarded as selfless, sympathetic creatures who always sacrifice themselves for others. A mother is supposed to be submissive, passive, and always in need of other's approval. Further, she is expected to have boundless endurance towards others. For centuries, motherhood has been regarded as the main purpose of every woman's life. The patriarchal norms makes motherhood look like women's greatest service to humanity. The society believes that "all women need to be mothers, all mothers need their children and all children need their mothers" (Oakley 67). The age-old theory of motherhood jeopardized women's identity and individuality by forcing them to adapt a predetermined socially constructed personality. The traditional maternal theories presume that every woman but not any man possesses an innate quality called 'maternal instinct' to care for others. The norms of motherhood continuously try to bind a woman to the image of the 'perfect mother' which is determined by her capability from maintaining good health of an infant to ensuring his or her good personality as an adult. Indian society tends to blame the mother both for the inconveniences that occur to a child and ones that the child creates for

others. In the meantime, the individual growth of the mother is ignored by the society.

Psychological studies prove that a considerable amount of the dilemmas of women are caused by adjustment to the image of the “ideal mother” that does not permit them to become what they are capable of being. They are regarded as selfless, sympathetic, near goddess like creatures who always sacrifice themselves for others. She is expected to have boundless endurance towards others. This high image of a mother created by the patriarchal society often leaves no room for any clear identity, individuality or self-will for a common mother. The continuous sublimation and suppression of natural desires, the inner struggle to be what they are not creates an intense anguish in them.

In Indian culture and literature, the image of the mother is often self-contradictory. Mothers are regarded as a vital part of the society; as they are compared to the nation and the native language. But in practice, the child is seen as a potential subject; but the mother is often regarded as the background and nourishing soil of her child’s subjectivity-to-be. There might be hardly any mother-figure in early Indian literature whose psyche was seriously ventured. For instance, Kunti in the *Mahabharata* easily let go of her new-born child and the memory never really haunts her. Again, Sita in the *Ramayana* was exiled while she was pregnant and her hardship was not understood by even her godly husband.

But slowly, Indian writers have started presenting more and more realistic female characters. Especially, the women writers brought a big change by transforming their own experiences into literary expression. Both male and female Indian writers have given the voice to the voiceless women and their issues through their literary works. The novelists are now well aware of the emotional turmoil that women undergo while trying to maintain their image of an ideal mother. Many Indian English fiction writers of the era have been

contributing to a much-needed alternative narrative for women to make sense of their diverse mothering experiences and disrupt notions of one essential or normative nature of motherhood. These kinds of works draw attention to the not so bright side of motherhood. These novels are significant because they present the mothers as normal human beings with their needs and desires. These novels prove that mothers are not objects at the service of the child.

Such works include increasingly diverse experiences of motherhood; including lesbian mothers, immigrant mothers, surrogate mothers, single mothers, teen mothers, adoptive mothers, neurotic mothers, and many more. It plays a major role in the necessary re-imagining and transformation of the motherhood beyond the terms of patriarchy. As Woollett and Marshall (2000) aptly state, without these accounts the psychology of motherhood has otherwise “tended to be written in terms of ‘the mother,’ on the assumption that the singular term can stand for and represent all mothers.”

Motherhood is a critical topic because, as Nancy Chodorow argues in her work (1978), it is deeply embedded in our concepts of identity, in the construction of individual subjectivities and in the social organization of gender. Indeed, motherhood has been a complex issue for feminism, with its contradictions, from women’s relations with their mothers to women’s experiences as mothers. Chodorow made the point that because women were responsible for mothering, daughters and sons were treated differently and in consequence, developed differently.

Sigmund Freud described the mother as the child's primary love object and the parent most responsible for its optimal development. Freud's ideas of the difference between male and female behavior provided a starting point for many theories on motherhood. In

Alison Fell's *Liberty, Equality, Maternity*, mothers are very much still objects of discourse. Fell considers motherhood in the work of three twentieth-century writers. This work is particularly valuable and important for its historicization of motherhood in the specific context of the French Republic.

Societal pressure on mothers has been criticized by feminists like Beauvoir, Friedan and Firestone, whose work is helpful in discerning representations of taken-for-granted notions of maternal bliss. Simone De Beauvoir (1949) was one of the first to proclaim that women's ability to give birth was the source of their subordination. In her view, motherhood signaled that women were twice doomed: biologically, during pregnancy when they lacked control over their bodies; and socially, when children restricted them to the home.

Later on, Betty Friedan diagnosed the unhappiness of middle-class, educated, suburban housewives who were pressured into their maternal role and, consequently, felt unfulfilled and discontented. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar wrote about the characters that go out of control and where there are symbolic representations of imprisonment or confinement; of male domination that can drive women to lunacy in their groundbreaking study *Mad Woman in the Attic*. Ann Kaplan (1992) proposed in her work that film, as a popular spectacle, had the power to transform the audience's perception and desire. Similarly, literature also plays a huge role in shaping society's opinion. Therefore the study of these works is also important from a sociological point of view.

Adrienne Rich's text *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* theorized the differentiation between motherhood as determined by dominant discourses and motherhood the experiences of individual women. In *Writing Mothers and*

Daughters, Adalgisa Giorgio provides a valuable cross-cultural context for the study of the mother-daughter relationship in literature. She identifies a move from Rich's concept of 'matrophobia' (the fear of becoming like the mother or becoming one's mother) to a positive relation with the mother's heritage in a quest for the self.

In the field of Indian literary criticism, this area is quite untouched. We can find feministic approaches towards these fictions but the psychological approach is still missing. There are hardly any critical works on Jerry Pinto and Anuradha Roy's portrayal of motherhood; whereas despite its serious themes, *Where Shall We Go This Summer* is one of the least worked novels of Anita Desai. Researchers like Shridhar Sarmah, Geetanjali Singh Chanda discuss the mother figures in Desai's fiction but avoids the negative effect of the children on the mother and altogether the issue of neurotic mothers. R. S. Mathur writes about how the effects of repression, silence and anger in a patriarchal society have fashioned women's characters for centuries, while discussing Desai's works. Self-expression and above all, the expression of anger is a fascinating study towards women's quest for identity. Critical works on Anita Desai particularly deal with these aspects.

One of the selected novelists for this research Anita Desai was born on 24 June, 1937 in Mussoorie, India and spent her early days in New Delhi. With her mixed lineage from her Bengali father and German mother, Desai grew up speaking German, Hindi, Urdu, and Bengali; and learned English at school. Desai completed her schooling from Queen Mary's Higher Secondary School in Delhi, and received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature from Miranda House of the University of Delhi in 1957. Along with Indian writer and translator P. Lal, Desai started the publishing firm Writers Workshop in

Calcutta in 1958. She has taught at Mount Holyoke College, Baruch College, Smith College and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Desai is a fellow at Royal Society of literature, the American Academy of Arts and letters, and of Girton College, Cambridge.

Anita Desai started writing at an early age and published her first story at the age of nine. Her first novel *Cry, the Peacock* was published in 1963. Three of her novels *Clear Light of Day*, *In Custody*, and *Fasting Feasting* were shortlisted for the Booker Prize. *In Custody* was adapted into a film by Merchant Ivory Productions which won President of India Gold Medal for Best Picture in 1994. Desai won the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize in 1983 for her work *The Village by the Sea*. She is also a recipient of the 1978 Sahitya Akademi Award for her outstanding fiction *Fire on Mountain*. In 2014, she was awarded the Padma Bhushan , the third-highest civilian award in India.

Anita Desai's writing style is a concoction of poetic and descriptive language with a remarkable use of images, symbols, and metaphors. She often uses the flashback or stream of consciousness technique to explore the mental universe of her characters. Desai's fiction deals with various themes such as human relationships, marital disharmony, identity crisis, alienation, isolation, escapism, oppression of woman and many others. Her works portrays the crucial and intricate issues in the lives of Indian women and the society's role in shaping the character's lives. One of the most significant contributions of Anita Desai in the field of Indian English fiction is her unprecedented effort and accuracy in the portrayals of the psychological dilemmas of the female characters. Anita Desai can be regarded as a pioneer of psychoanalytical women's fiction in India.

Desai's first novel *Cry the Peacock* (1963) is a fusion of reality and fantasy. Anita Desai

has portrayed the uneven position of men and women in the family, and a woman's unfathomable desire to be understood by her husband. The female protagonist Maya's father loves and protects her but restricts her growth as an individual. After her marriage, Maya is ignored and pushed aside in her husband Gautama's family for her differences. Her lack of an identity and recognition in the society pushes her towards depression and her eventual tragic ending. The fact that Maya cannot be a mother makes her mental condition worse, as the society as well Maya herself think of it as awful. In *Voices in the City* (1965), Desai demonstrates how a woman gains little status only as a mother through the character of Monisha. Infertility is often seen as a stigma for a married woman in Indian society; and Monisha's husband and his family is not free from this conception. *Bye Bye Blackbird* (1971) explores the themes of migration and cross-cultural identity. In another novel, *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), the protagonist Nanda Kaul's life presents the bitter experiences of Indian upper-middle class women who slowly lose their individuality in performing their duties as wives and mothers. The familial confinement made her weary of the company of her own family, and thus she seeks solitude in her later days. Anita Desai skillfully deals with the issues of extra-marital affair and marital disharmony within the story line to present the sense of emptiness and loneliness of an Indian wife.

Another selected author for this study, Mumbai based writer, translator, and journalist Jerry Pinto was born in 1966. He won the Sahitya Akademi award in 2016 for his debut novel *Em and the Big Hoom* (2012). Pinto's works includes various themes but most of his stories are based on his native place Mahim, Mumbai. His works include *Surviving Woman* (2000), *Asylum and Other Poems* (2003), *When Crows are White* (2013), *Murder*

in *Mahim* (2017) etc. Jerry Pinto translated Sachin Kundalkar's novel *Cobalt Blue* from to English.

The third novelist, Anuradha Roy was born in 1967 in Kolkata. She is associated with both writing and publishing books. Apart from five published novels, she writes essays and reviews in news papers and magazines. She worked at Oxford University Press (New Delhi) and a Kolkata based publishing company called Stree before founding the publishing house Permanent Black along with her husband Rukun Advani. She wrote five novels- *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2008), *The Folded Earth* (2011), *Sleeping on Jupiter* (2015), *All the Lives We Never Lived* (2018), and *The Earthspinner* (2021).

This study focuses on analyzing and evaluating the journey through which the mother figures in some selected Indian English fiction go in their identity quest while performing the role of a mother. How these characters face different hardships and how all of these affect their mental condition will be thoroughly explored, examined and analyzed from psychological, sociological and feministic perspectives. The novels selected for the purpose of examining the new paradigm of motherhood in Indian English fiction are Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, Jerry Pinto's *Em and the Big Hoom*, and Anuradha Roy's *All the Lives We Never Lived*. The characters in the selected novels provide a new dimension of looking at motherhood which helps to bring forth the individual characteristics of different mother figures. Moreover through these characters, the readers can get a better understanding of the plight of the mothers in Indian society.

The primary research methodology for this study is qualitative or descriptive. It will be based on a critical close analysis of the selected novels in order to bring out the instances

where the theme of motherhood and mental health is projected. The textual references will be evaluated on the basis of a thorough reading of various books, journals and web based materials etc. on motherhood and psychological problems in the Indian context.

Objectives of the Study

- This study aims at exploring the possible psychological diversity that can be found within the mother figures in the selected novels.
- The chief focus will be on understanding the difference between the mothers in the selected novels and the traditional image of a typical Indian mother.
- It will also discuss the significance of “chosen motherhood” with reference to the varied experience of the mothers in the selected texts.
- Another important objective of this study is to examine the modern mother-child relationship and their influence on each other to determine the causes of the mothers’ psychological alienation and the stifling relationship with their children.
- As some characters in the selected novels undergo different stages of mental illness, this study aims at comprehending the authors’ way of dealing with the issue of mental illness of the mothers.

Hypotheses of the Study

- Motherhood is not universal. The desires, expectations and experiences of every mother are different.
- The socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity have a huge effect on motherhood.

- The responsibility of the mother and the father is separated by the society, which creates a difference in their relationships with their children.
- Many times motherhood is a challenge to a woman's right over her own body.
- Maternity can cause severe mental illness when the mother is not ready to accept the new responsibilities.
- Life outside the household is important for a mother. Women need to have a proper job or hobbies to maintain their individuality.
- The selected texts play a major role in reimagining and transforming motherhood beyond the terms of patriarchy.

This research is an attempt to understand the changes in the concept of motherhood through a detailed study of the representation of the mothers in the selected novels. The introductory chapter deals with the background of the selected authors and their works, along with an overview of representation of motherhood in Indian English fiction from the early to the present era. This chapter also introduces the conceptual and theoretical framework for this research. The second chapter explores the identity crisis of the mother created by the society's negligence towards her needs of a space of her own and an equal foothold in the family. Another aspect of this argument is women's rights over their body and its loss in account of pregnancy. The discussion focuses on the representation of the lonely and suffocated woman trapped in the role of a mother in Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer* in the light of the feminist movement. The comparatively new and positive approach towards neurotic mothers is explored in the third chapter through a critical analysis of Jerry Pinto's *Em and the Big Hoom*. The discussion includes the issues of bipolar disorder, post-natal depression and the stigma

associated with mental illness. Society's different attitudes towards motherhood and fatherhood and the need for a change is also addressed in this chapter. The significance of individual rights and personal liberty of the mothers, dismissing all stereotypical misconceptions is the basis of the fourth chapter. The issue of motherhood and career choices is discussed from a feminist point of view. The argument is expanded to the predicament of the motherless child and his realization of the importance of the individuality of every human being in Anuradha Roy's recent novel *All the Lives We Never Lived*. The fifth chapter is comprised of a comparative analysis of the three selected novels discussed in the preceding chapters. The similarities and differences between the mother figures of these novels are also discussed. Moreover, the authors, their experiences and writing styles will be analyzed side by side for a better understanding of the subject-matter. The concluding chapter includes a brief summary of the previous chapters to demonstrate the progress towards the objectives of the research. This chapter also presents the findings of the research and their significances. The future or the possible scopes of research in this area is presented at the end of this chapter.

CHAPTER II
MOTHERHOOD AND ALIENATION IN ANITA DESAI'S *WHERE SHALL WE*
GO THIS SUMMER

Anita Desai's expertise over portrayal of women's psychological dilemma is indubitable. *Where Shall We Go This Summer* only strengthens her already existing prominent contribution to psychoanalytical women's fiction in Indian English literature. Most of her novels are realistic depictions of women's lives, desires, dreams, hopes, and struggles in the society as well as in their own family. However, her novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer* is unique and significant for its distinctive representation of the theme of motherhood and alienation. In this work, Anita Desai presents the image of a woman who is trapped within her roles of a mother and a wife, and unable to be free from the patriarchal power structure of Indian middle-class society. The lack of freedom and acute alienation of a mother is projected in this novel through the character of the chief protagonist, Sita.

This novel, first published in 1982, brought a new perspective of looking at the concept of motherhood. Anita Desai's portrayal of the mother in this novel contrasted the age old image of the ideal mother- the one who wants nothing else but her child's happiness, and clearly neglects her own needs. Although the ideal mother is considered as soft and emotional, Indian culture and society often neglects the sensitivity of the mother. While the family focuses on the child's growth, the mother's dreams and desires are usually pushed to background. Anita Desai explicitly addresses these issues in *Where Shall We*

Go This Summer.

Where Shall We Go This Summer revolves around the life of Sita, the mother who is considered as mad by her family. Sita is married to Raman, an upper middleclass businessman and lives in Bombay with their four children. The narrative moves back and forth between Sita's childhood and her present life which helps the reader to understand Sita's character in depth. Like most of Anita Desai's fictional works, *Where Shall We Go This Summer* is also a projection of the female character's mental universe. This novel has been chosen to examine how Anita Desai has portrayed the character of a mother who is lonely, sensitive and suffers from boredom and insecurities.

In Indian culture, mothers are either excessively glorified or suppressed. While they attain a high place in culture and society as the creator and caretaker of men, they are often confined to the typical image of meek and selfless creatures. The society has a more or less concrete image of a mother, and women are forced to accept being the ideal mother almost all the time. The satisfaction of motherhood is considered so natural that women who cannot handle pressure of raising children are often treated like sinful persons.

The novelist unfolds the narrow-mindedness of the Indian society through the character of Raman who thinks that being a mother is the greatest achievement for any women. He is quite astonished to know that she is not content in her life in Bombay. Raman is a product of the society that assumes a woman's happiness and fulfillment comes from being a mother. He cannot understand the concept of a mother wanting an identity of her own outside of her life as a mother. When Sita's words and actions hint that she is not happy as a mother, Raman exclaims, "Any woman- any one would think you inhuman.

You have four children. You have lived comfortably, always, in my house. You've not had worries. Yet your happiest memory is not of your children or your home....” (Desai 134)

This confrontation between Sita and Raman not only presents Raman's narrow-mindedness but also draws attention to women's views on other women. Although women are constantly trying to improve their position in private and public spheres, many of them still knowingly or unknowingly helps in taking forth the discriminating rules or prejudices of the patriarchal society. In Indian society, it is often women who teach young girls to adapt into the traits and personality assigned to women. Women have to encounter different kinds of preaching on their different roles and responsibilities throughout their lives. The individual wills and desires of the mothers many a times unacknowledged not only by men but also by some women. Raman's dialogues reveal how some women can judge others solely based on their performance as a mother.

A mother has to constantly make sure that she takes care for her children but does not spoil them in the process. Unlike the western countries, common Indian parents do not show their love for their children with frequent hugs, kisses, or by playing with them. While the children are considered precious for the family, they are supposed to listened to or follow the elders or mostly the head of the family who is almost always an older male. Mothers are expected to teach their children the rules of the household as well as of the society in a strict manner. Therefore, Sita's rare playful behavior with her son is considered unnatural by others. Her delight in finding her son enjoying the ride to Manori is harmful in Moses' opinion. He wonders with disdain, “What would become of a child given so much and such varying attention?” (Desai 19)

Apart from Sita, Raman, and Menaka, there are not many major characters in the novel. Among the other characters Moses and his wife Miriam are important in understanding the views of the outsiders on Sita's life and character. The husband and wife duo represent that section of the society that wholeheartedly believes in male supremacy. They constantly ignore Sita's requests for good food or accommodation though it was their job to take care of Sita and her childhood house. Anita Desai cleverly portrays the theme of gender discrimination by showing how Miriam prepares bland meals for Sita but presents various kind of delicious foods right after Raman's arrival. Thus, as a woman, the mother has to accept a lesser place than her male counterpart even within the family.

Unlike the mother, the father is considered as a driving force of the family. The typical middle-class Indian father is pictured as a strict and skeptical, but hardly present persona in the children's everyday lives. As a foil to the ideal mother's selflessness, softness, and care-giving personality, the ideal father executes leadership quality to manage his family. As Desai cleverly depicts through some little incidents, any discrepancy to these stereotypical images is a shock for many. Moses assumes that the problems in Sita's family occur because of the absence of the father. A mother visiting her childhood home with her children without the company of her husband is an alien concept to him. He thinks, "...there were rifts and dissensions in the family as he had known there would be, must be, since there was no father to hold them together and lead them in obedience, not even a husband."(Desai 18) This remark is a reflection of the male-dominating society, where women's skills and capabilities are overlooked.

Property right of women is also a divisive matter in Indian society. A woman has to leave

her 'father's house' after her marriage to live in her 'husband's house'. Although, a woman can get an equal share of her fathers' property, the male heir usually get biggest share and many a times the property in Indian middle class families. Society's imposition on men to be the one to provide for the family hardly allows any scope for common Indian women to buy a house for their husband and children. Therefore, not many women have the opportunity to get a house of her own. The man being the sole owner of the most of the family properties not only prevents the woman from economic security but also from mental and emotional independence. Raman refers to their house as "my house", indicating his dominance in the household. (Desai 134)

Many children often struggle to be the perfect son or daughter that their parents want them to be. The despair of young individuals who suffer from both peer pressure and strict rules set by the parents are talked about in various mediums. Desai presents the opposite side of the coin by showing how some parents have to endure so much humiliation from their children that even little approvals from the children feels like an achievements for them. This prototype of parenting is quite uncommon in Indian fictions. The mothers' struggle at proving themselves as interesting, admirable, and lovable personality is showcased through a few interactions between Sita and her children. Whenever Karan or Menaka shows the slightest interest in Sita's activities or her surroundings, she feels immensely grateful which reflects in her smile and actions. The hardship of many such mothers who are neglected by their children is clear throughout the narrative.

One of the significant aspects of *Where Shall We Go This Summer* is the narrative voice. Though this is a third person narrative with some dialogues between the characters, the

narrative is consisted of different characters' perspectives. It helps the reader to know how her family and the society view Sita both as a mother and an individual. Anita Desai balances the narrative by illustrating the society's expectations and limitations forced on mothers and simultaneously revealing a mother who does not identifies herself with the typical image of a loving Indian mother.

Anita Desai highlights the interrelation between the role of a mother and wife. A woman has to perform various roles such as a daughter, a sister, a wife and a mother in her life. To analyze the character of a mother, one have to be acquainted with her other roles. Sita's relationship with her husband plays an important role in her actions. The novelist sketches the protagonist's married life in simple yet powerful details of her interactions with her husband. In the middle of the novel it is revealed that Sita's husband Raman was the son of her father's old friend, Deedar. When she was left alone in her childhood house after her father's death, not having any plan for future, she thought of living alone for the rest of her life. But Raman came to cremate her father, took her with him, and sent her to college. At last, as the narrator describes, "out of pity, out of lust, out of sudden will for adventure, and because it was inevitable married her."(Desai 89) On the other hand Sita never really got a chance to decide her future on her own. It is not clear whether she was romantically attracted to him. Nevertheless she felt relieved when she found him beside her when she had nobody to depend on. Raman made her smile when she thought that she would die in the small island alone.

Anita Desai reveals the downbeat aspects of Indian marriages where the husband and wife suffer because of their mismatch. Sita and Raman's marriage did not remain a source of happiness for long because of their different outlook on life. When Sita moved

from her small and progressive family to Raman's huge joint family where the women spent their whole day in the kitchen cooking or planning for the next meal, she could not fit in that household. Though the women in her new family welcomed her with warmth and never complained about her provocative behaviors, Sita's free spirit silently revolted against the suppressive nature of the household and the women's willingness to accept that injustice as natural. When she could not get used to them even after some years, Raman had to move his family to a small flat. Sita accepted that living by themselves was slightly better, but even then she did not feel at home. Being sensitive and emotional, Sita was unable to accept Raman's too practical, and detached ways of living life. She always felt uncomfortable in front of his friends or business associates. She could not never get used to the money oriented, haughty businessman who dismissed art and sensibility as petty matters. But Raman was accustomed to the shallow relationships with his peers and treated everything as business, and thus profitable.

The disparity between the parents often creates a negative environment for children as well. The effect of constant arguments between parents on their children is depicted in various fictional texts, and it has been an issue of concern for intellectuals. But there are very few instances where readers can find what happens when one of the parents along with the children hold dissimilar interests of life views from the other parent. Desai's work is a reminder of how sometimes a parent can be isolated from her partner and children even after spending every single moment with them. In Sita's case she became the victim of alienation as she differed from both her husband and the children. Though both Sita and Raman belong to families of freedom fighters, their upbringings were drastically different. Sita never saw Raman before her father's illness though she knew

his father very well for a long time. While Sita's father dedicated his life for the Independence movement of India, Raman's father Deedar was more practical politician who was well aware of the opportunities they can get in their lives in the independent India. Raman's father was very careful in bringing up his children. Raman and his siblings grew up without being involved in their father's dangerous and susceptible life as a freedom fighter. Therefore, unlike Sita, Raman did not spend his childhood in travelling from one place to another or in situations full of uncertainties. He was allowed enjoy his childhood and adolescence like a normal person, and to have the things that he wanted in his life. It helped Raman to attain the firmness of his personality whereas Sita was unable to voice her needs.

Where Shall We Go This Summer also focuses on the lack of communication between the protagonist and her husband. Although Sita and Raman were constantly at the odds, they never voiced their discomforts to each other. As the narrative discloses, "All through their married life they had preferred to avoid a confrontation". (Desai 30) But that only increased the distance between them. Being unable to share her thoughts and desires, Sita slowly drifts apart from the family. Whereas Raman starts to feel so distant from Sita that his initial reason for beginning a life with Sita is forgotten in the meantime. At the end of the novel, Raman muses how it is hard to believe that he fall in love with young Sita for her "fire and beauty", whose traces he cannot find in his wife's "unloved" and "rejected" face. (Desai 123)

In addition, this novel points out how the mental and emotional hardships surrounding the experience of motherhood are frequently overlooked. While everyone is aware of the severe pain that the mother has to go through at the time of giving birth and the

discomfort carrying the baby within her womb for months, the mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorders are still unknown to common people. Sita's husband believes that once she overcomes the physical discomfort, she will start behaving like any other woman who floats in the almost 'majestic' but a little 'vainglorious' satisfaction of becoming a mother. He expects her to "fill again into that comfortable frame of large, placid joy, of glazed satisfaction." (Desai 29)

Sita tries hard to compromise in her life with her husband and their children. But everything breaks apart when she becomes pregnant for the fifth time. Sita's life was already too miserable to be able to bring another life into the world. The indifferent behaviors of her husband and children made her lose faith in her capacity of being a mother again. The novelist provides the crumbs of Sita's life through the small incidents that slowly pushed her to the edge. When Sita told Raman that she did not want to give birth to the baby, he mistook it as her wish for abortion.

"'Mad!' She gasped. 'You're quite mad. *Kill* the baby? It's all I want. I want to *keep* it, don't you *understand*?"

'No,' he shouted in exasperation, feeling himself made a fool that she spun round and round her finger till he was sick and giddy. 'You just said you don't want it.

Now you say you do want it. What's up? What's up?"

'I mean I want to keep it. I don't want it to be born.'" (Desai 31-32)

Raman's confusion and frustration at this point was natural; but he did not try to understand how and why Sita reached that decision. Raman questions her mental state as her wish is an unachievable one. Nevertheless, Sita was not pregnant for the first time. She already gave birth to four and thus, was well acquainted with the process of giving

birth. Her desire to keep the baby in her womb results from deep trauma that they received from the violent nature of her children. While Raman considers that his wife became mad as she proposed such a bizarre idea, the life in Bombay is just madness for Sita. She desperately wants to go away to a place where she can restore her sanity. She considers the island of Manori as “a refuge, a protection” (Desai 91). Although deep down, she is aware that it is just an illusion, she completely loses her faith in creation. The common idea of all women naturally wanting to procreate and taking ultimate pride and satisfaction in every step of the process is challenged in a drastic way.

Where Shall We Go This Summer is also distinctive for its presentation of the developments in a mother's mental condition. The novel focuses on adult Sita but the narrative goes back to her past as well. Her childhood memories are very important for understanding her current actions. Unlike most children, Sita did not grow up within the familiar warmth of her parents' love and care. Rather, her childhood was full of negligence from parents and constant self-doubt resulted from her father's oblique discrimination between his children. While her mother left them to live her own life, her father was not interested in spending time with Sita. He devoted his life for the people as he actively took part in India's freedom movement. After Independence, her father decided to retire from politics as his goal was achieved. He settled down in the backward island of Manori, in a house that was gifted to him by one of his admirers Mr. Dalwala, a Parsi millionaire. Sita's father thought that Manori would be the perfect place to put his social theories into practice which he had been theorizing for a long time. He renamed the gifted house from Fiona to *Jeevan Ashram* and started helping the poor and uneducated dwellers of Manori.

But Sita in her later age realized that her father's reason to help the poor changed when the fisher woman had touched his feet with her forehead when she believed that her boils were cured after drinking water from the well dug by him. He realized the power of "super-humanity" (Desai 69) which was unknown to him. He became obsessed with becoming the godlike figure that the villagers' believed him to be, which led him further away from his children. Sita never got a chance to talk with her father alone as his *chelas* and her elder sister Rekha were always with him. The rare occasions in which Sita was left with her father alone, "they had all been wordless and agitated by the queerest, the most horrible sensations." (Desai 73) Sita admired her father but nonetheless the void in her life created by the lack of parental affection remained unchanged.

At the same time, Sita suffered from inferiority complex in her childhood as she did not have any remarkable talents like her siblings. Her elder sister Rekha, who Sita later discovered a step-sister, could sing and play the *Tanpura* very well. She often performed in front of their father's followers and admirers. Their father took Rekha as his companion while Sita and her father were strangers to each other even after living in the same house. Sita's father neither enquired about her desires and wishes, nor he allowed her to be close to him. As Sita concludes, "It was one more relationship that had to remain shrouded, a ghost in her life..." (Desai 72) Sita was often neglected by her father and later on the whole nation, as they believed that she was too inferior to be his successor. But it was only Sita who respected and really understood her father's experiment. It was also Sita who remained with her father till his last breath. Rekha left home right after their father's death and never looked back. Later she became one of the most famous devotional singers of India. On the other hand, Sita's younger brother Jivan

was a clever and manipulative boy. He was notorious for his making easily believable stories even in his childhood. Unlike Sita, Jivan was practical and thus able to use the political knowledge in his career. Sita was never close to Rekha, and after leaving the island, Sita never saw Jivan again. She only read of him in the newspapers which expose the crimes and corruptions of different politicians.

As the daughter of a freedom fighter Sita had to spend her childhood days in “jails, crowded assemblies, in mobs, in slums, tenements, and villages where life was not picturesque or calm, but harsh and barbaric.” (Desai 59) Sita and her siblings were deprived of the simple pleasures of childhood like playing games and eating sweets. Hence they had to keep their desires of playing to their hearts content to themselves until their father’s retirement from active politics. Therefore, the carefree life in Manori was a thrilling experience for Sita. As Desai wrote, “She saw the island as a piece of magic, a magic mirror- it was so bright, so brilliant to her eyes after the tensions and shadows of her childhood. It took her some time to notice that this magic, too, cast shadows.” (Desai 59)

It was a little late for Sita to live her childhood; because when they came to live in Manori, Sita was not really a child. The Indian society of that time would have regarded her as a “young woman”; but the environment in which she grew up made her to “withdraw into the protective chrysalis of childhood for longer than is usual for most.”(Desai 58-59) Not only Sita and her brother Jivan started having fun in the island, but also her father’s *chelas*, who chose to live with them. The *chelas* played *kho kho*, raced each other and swam in the sea, while Jivan invented different games of his own to play with Sita.

The novelist establishes Sita's lack of authority over her own life from the beginning through her interactions with her siblings. Whenever Sita and Jivan played, it was Jivan who decided what and how to play. Sita was just instrumental for completing Jivan's elaborate plans of creating the perfect scenario for his games. The games mostly consisted of imitating the events that they often saw, for example, organizing funerals and giving speeches like the Indian freedom fighters. Even though, both of them were equally acquainted with those acts, Sita could never play those games by her own. This lack of independence in Sita's life does not go away in her whole life. After her marriage, she has to follow the plans made by her husband. Even the kids can make her feel inadequate and question her decisions.

Anita Desai carefully constructs Sita's past and brings out her inner most fears and desires through the narration of her childhood. The experience of not being able to do anything according to her own desires and not getting equal importance from her father destroys her belief on her own self. The traumas of her early years haunt her regularly, whereas the present pressure makes it difficult for to forget her insecurities. The character of Sita's father is therefore crucial in shaping her present persona as an alienated and self-loathing mother.

Desai also addresses the issue of dissonance between the mother and the children, and how it can affect the mental health of the mother. In *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, Sita is forced to perform the duty of a mother to the children who do not appreciate her contributions in the family. Although the society talks about the harsh acts of adult sons and daughters who do not take care of their parents, people often neglects the detrimental effect that children and adolescents can sometimes have on their parents.

As every individual differ from each other, it is natural to occur small conflicts between parents and children. But the primary respect and understanding between them is necessary to maintain a healthy relationship. In Sita's case, her children do not understand her views and neglects them as drama or madness. Throughout the novel, it is apparent that the children are very different from Sita. On their journey to the island, Moses observes, "Unlike their mother, who continually broke apart into violent eruptions of emotion, the children seemed rigid, encased in their separate silences like larvae in stiff-spun cocoons." (Desai 18) Sita's children accuse her for every trouble that came their way after her decision to come to Manori. She feels like they are waiting for her to accept defeat and go back to Bombay.

The narrative debunks the Indian myth that the daughter always resembles her mother. The characters of Sita and her daughter Menaka are complete opposite from each other. While Sita often ventured in a world of imagination and expressed her love for art, Menaka "loathed her mother's proclivity for drama, for theatre, for emotion... Being her daughter, she felt most disgusted and hurt by it." (Desai 101) Thus, the differences between the mother and the daughter lead to a state where they cannot understand each other anymore. Instead of the love and warmth that can be found in other mothers and daughters, their relationship executes a sense of dread and uneasiness. Sita declares in one of their arguments that her daughter frightens her which Menaka shrugs off with indifference. Menaka wants nothing but to escape fully from the world that her mother carefully created around them.

The fundamental elements of Sita's character that not only alienate her from her children, but also set her apart from any typical Indian mother. In Indian households, mothers and

grandmothers are expected to be good at singing lullabies and telling stories to little kids. Desai's protagonist differs from the sweet-speaking, story-telling image of the perfect mother. When her firstborn Menaka was a child, she was traumatized after knowing the concept of death. When she asked Sita what would happen to her after her death, Sita could not weave a fascinating story to comfort her child. As the narrative describes, "Sita had been too incompetent a mother to know how to deal with her trauma, how to give her comfort- there was none, and it was not in her to concoct any." (Desai 100) However, Sita's inability to fabricate fairytales for children affected Menaka for years. She has been traumatized by the thought of death for years.

In addition to the differences and conflicts between the mother and the children, Sita's story also destroys the view that every mother and child needs each other in every step of their lives. All four of Sita's children preferred their father over her. Throughout the novel, there is no instance of the children seeking Sita's company except for a few moments with Karan. As a mother, Sita is also quite content without her children. Even in the isolated island Manori, Sita enjoys her own company without any feeling of loneliness. Contrary to her life in Bombay, she can push away the loneliness away for a short period of time in the island. She rarely thinks of Karan and Menaka although they live closely in the old house. On the other hand, she completely forgets about her other two sons that she left in Bombay with her husband. Only after Raman's arrival at Manori she remembers about them. She wonders, "How had she forgotten them for so long?"(Desai 121) When her heart aches with their memories she finds out from her husband that her absence does not have any significance on her sons' lives. The whole idea of the mother and the children being content without the other is different from the

usual way of presenting a mother's character in Indian fiction.

Apart from Sita, there is not any significant mother figure in the novel. Jeevan once informed Sita that Rekha was actually their stepsister. It is indicated that Rekha's mother was a mistress of their father. Apart from that the readers do not find anything significant about this character. Sita's mother is also absent in the whole course of the novel. Sita never experienced the love and care of a mother in her life. The absent mother figure plays an important role in Sita's relationship with her children. Her father's presence was overflowing compared to her mother whose face she did not remember. She did not even have a photo of her mother to search for her. Their father never talked about their mother. Sita thought that her mother died a long time ago. When Jeevan revealed that their mother went away to Benares and left them forever, at first she could not believe that to be true. Later on, she mused on why her mother left her father who was considered as a godlike man, even called as the second Gandhi. "Sita found herself turning into a wanderer, always in search of the ghost. Who, what was she?" (Desai 77)

The parallel between Sita and her mother is significant. Both of them were unhappy in their married lives. Both of them wanted to gain their individuality which was lost in continuously adjusting to their surroundings. While Sita's mother seems to be successful in her attempt to run away from the dreadful life to live on her own, Sita fails miserably in her endeavor. These two similar characters illustrate the ever-present hardships of the mothers who seek freedom from the societal norms and also from their own overpowering families. (135)

Being a mother is not as simple as the society makes women to believe. Though motherhood is a wonderful experience for many women; the discomfort of carrying the

baby in her womb, the unbearable pain of giving birth, and the exhausting journey of bringing up the child are usually not enjoyable for every mother. Sometimes the whole process makes the mother alienated from others and occasionally even from her own self. Therefore it is very crucial to provide the mother a healthy place for her mental and physical wellness.

In Indian society, the mental health of the mother before and after giving birth is not considered as a serious need for concern. The focus remains almost always on the well-being of the baby; and the lack of awareness on mental health makes the mother's condition worse. *Where Shall We Go This Summer* is the story of a mother standing alone without a single person to share her grief with. Her family considers her love for art and nature, and her will to live a free life as madness. Desai carefully presents how it becomes difficult and eventually excruciating for Sita to maintain her identity as a mother. Although initially she tried to live with her without expecting to understand her, the ever-growing pressure of her imposed identity frightens her to the core.

The absolute isolation felt by the mother is quite a new exploration by the novelist. It is easily accepted that motherhood brings comfort and fulfillment; but Sita's incompatible relationship with her children only brings her the sense of alienation. There are mothers who seek love and warmth from their children, but never receive any attention from them. The male dominated power structure of the society puts the father in a position that seems more important for the children. In many families mother's importance is reduced to a caretaker that the children want to get away from. Sita's children also belong to the category that overlooks their mother's efforts. Therefore, when her husband comes to take her back from the island, she waits, "for something more- the news that they [her

sons] wanted her, missed her.”(Desai 121) But the supposedly natural bond between the mother and her sons is missing in this case.

Anita Desai brings out the odd scenario of the disparity between the mother and the children where the young children demonstrate superiority over the mother. Sita gets so little love and attention from her family that she glows every time they accept anything about her. In the later part of the novel it is revealed that Sita’s only happy memory is of two lovers that she saw years ago on a park. The family’s taken for granted approach towards the mother suppresses any alteration of the image of the mother. Although the mother frequently tries to express her desolate state of life the patriarch of the house refuses to acknowledge her natural needs and desires.

In such a situation the issue of individuality and identity of the mother comes to forefront. The division of labor and power between man and woman in the patriarchal society has been a topic of recurrent discussion. The power politics within the family restricts the mother from gaining overall control of the household. In *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, every activity of the family is arranged by the man of the house without consulting anything with the mother. The protagonist of this novel loses her power of freedom so much that her own husband is astonished by her powerlessness at the end of the novel. He realizes, “Control was an accomplishment that had slipped out of her hold, without his noticing it, over the years, till now she had no more than an infant has, before he has begun the process of acquiring it...” (Desai 29) Her desire for freedom and her individual will emerges when she meets a foreign traveler wander in India. In such moments she too wants to go away from her children, but the supposed abnormality of her desire makes her stick to her family. Having to suppress her individuality, Sita has to

search for “a few of these moments that proclaimed her still alive, not quite drowned and dead.” (Desai 45)

One of the crucial drawbacks of early Indian literature on mothers was the narrow range in the characters’ emotional diversity. The stereotypical portrayal of the mothers often neglected their wish to have a world outside their identity as a mother. *Where Shall We Go This Summer* is successful in presenting the mother’s character from a different angle without any unrealistic achievements which are not easy to attain in the patriarchal society. Sita is not a character that is extraordinarily different from the mothers in backward villages who cannot break through the false identities that the society imposed upon them. However Anita Desai is able plant the seed of revolution in the heart of that common mother who despite her obligations to the family wants to express her inner dreams and desires. Desai gives Sita an authentic personality by showing both her abilities and inabilities as an individual. Being alienated from her close companions from childhood, Sita was unable to express her feelings many a times. Even when she bared open her thoughts, her husband and children cannot quite comprehend her. The failure in communication made her question her own capabilities. Her doubts on her own self is clear when she talks to her daughter. Sita told Menaka in one of their conversation, “I should have known how to channel my thoughts and feelings, how to put them to use. I should have given my life some shape then, some meaning. At least, it would have had some for me- even if no one else had cared.” (Desai 108)

Sita was well aware that nobody in the family understood her but she could not find any other companion to share her thoughts as she was bound within their house. Whereas Raman could retreat to his work to escape from the mundane engagements in the

household, Sita had nothing to do but spend her days in a house where no one recognizes or values her individuality. As Betty Friedan in her famous work *The Feminine Mystique* wrote:

“The identity issue for the boy is primarily an occupational-vocational question; he will be a husband and father but he will also and centrally be a worker, while the girl’s identity centers more exclusively on her sex-role whose wife I will be, what kind of family will we have.” (Friedan 245)

In Sita’s case the need of a hobby or an occupation was severe as she felt that she was losing herself in the hustle-bustle of the middle-class business society, where she cannot fit in even after trying for years. If she could engage herself in some works outside of her housekeeping and parenting duties, she could have a space of her own. Definitely there are mothers who are content in taking care of their children and do want to fall into a 9-5 job. But one cannot deny the importance of economic authority of the mothers’ over their own life. It is evident in the narration that Sita sometimes wishes to be like her sister Rekha so that she could have an identity of her own. While Rekha made a living on her own with her singing, Sita could only rely on Raman for her everyday requirements. Sita’s inability to create a path of her own always made her feel inferior to others.

In the earlier time when people used to live joint families, there were enough people to take care of the children. With the decline of the joint families, the whole responsibility of managing the household fell on the shoulders of the mother. Besides, the competition in every aspect of life increased in the contemporary time. Parents are no longer able to allow their children to play all day. The mother has to make sure the children excel both in their studies and extracurricular activities. But in Indian culture, parenting is

considered a fulltime job for the mothers; while the fathers are not expected to spend every possible free time attending their children. The responsibility of taking care of the children singlehandedly leaves very few opportunities for the mother to indulge in her hobbies. However, a little time of doing what they enjoy can boost the mother's spirit. In this novel, Sita never had an opportunity to discover any hobbies or talents of her own. Most of her childhood was spent in utter chaos in the verge of India's independent movement. Lack of formal education and exposure to the children of her own age, bounded her to a rather small sphere of life. The only entertainment they could afford was the songs that her sister and her father's *chelas* sang. But seemingly she did not want to learn to sing Indian classical music and to play the traditional instruments that they had in their home in Manori. Therefore, even after growing up, Sita could not find to do anything pleasurable or satisfactory to pass her lonely moments.

On the other hand, her daughter Menaka could paint beautiful pictures from a very young age. Though Menaka did not value her talent, Sita cherished her drawings. She encouraged her to continue her hobby and even suggested to make it her profession. She was content to know that unlike her, her daughter does not lack in talent. She advocated spontaneity and creativity as high qualities that any individual should possess. But being a too skeptical person, Menaka considered painting as a waste of time. She drew only when she was bored and often destroyed her works afterwards. It pained Sita to a great extent to see the destructive side of Menaka. The conversation between Sita and Menaka about arts and science provides a clear insight of Sita's mental struggles. Sita bared open her insecurities to Menaka to explain the importance of one's individual qualities. She exclaims, "I used to think- after I left this island and had to think what I would do next-

that if only I could paint, or sing, or play the *sitar* well, really well, I should have grown into a sensible woman. Instead of being what I am.” (Desai 108)

The self-loathing buried within her mind is not something new; rather it came from years of negligence from her family. Desai’s narrative traces Sita’s growing agony as it becomes difficult for her to compromise day after day. Sita’s realization of her own innermost desire to be free from the consuming relationships with her close one strikes her hard, which eventually made her leave for Manori. She speaks out to her husband, “it all became harder than before, for me. Very hard- this making compromises when one didn’t want to compromise, when one wanted to- to...” (Desai 135) The novelist also reveals how Indian women have to do the duty of keeping all the family connections by making everyone happy. The society forces them to mold relationship with the family in a certain way where they do not have an equal standing. As Sita laments, “Only *connect*, they say. So she had spent twenty years connecting, link by link, this chain. And what is one to do with a chain? It can only throttle, choke, and enslave.” (Desai 79)

The protagonist of Desai’s novel tries to break free from these metaphorical chains. These chains set by the society for mothers gives her a bitter taste of motherhood; whereas her family’s cruel nature destroys her faith in creation. The image of a woman is almost always linked to creation and preservation in Indian culture. As a mother of four children who despise nature, art, and imagination, she starts doubting the power of creation. Anita Desai’s narration brings up a mother who admits that creation is “merely a freak, temporary, and doomed event.” (Desai 50) In old Indian literature, motherhood was portrayed as something every woman naturally and desperately wants. This idea can be traced back to the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata, where female characters like

Kunti, and Madri summons gods with the help of *mantras* to bear their children. Giving birth to male children was one of the few ways of getting recognition and some power in the family. The culture and society have undergone changes and developments throughout time, but the initial idea of motherhood continued to the modern age.

The arguments of pro-life supporters in the present time show how people often ignore the right of the mother and the consequences that an unwanted child needs to bear. Desai's heroine refuses to bring her fifth child who is safely contained in her womb to the cruel and uncertain world. "She had refused to give birth to a child in a world not fit to receive the child." (Desai 128) Although she does not want to abort the baby, it is clear that she is unhappy with her pregnancy. The dilemma of a mother, who has to get pregnant without wanting to have another baby but at the same time unable to kill a life, pour through the story of Sita. Her sorrow and anger is also can be a result of her lack of control over her own body.

The 'choice of motherhood' is therefore a crucial matter for women. Many women who are forced to be mothers have to live an unsatisfactory life and eventually lose faith in child bearing and rearing. Sita also loses "all feminine, all maternal belief in childbirth" (Desai 50) She compares the fetus of her unborn child to a jellyfish, both "mindless and helpless...opaque and wet and sad."(Desai 115) Even after having four children, she cannot bear a sudden cry of a child. Sita's sensitive nature collides with her practical husband, and her children who took after him. It makes her believe that "Children only mean anxiety, concern- pessimism. Not happiness. What other women call happiness is just sentimentality."(Desai 134)

Although her life as a mother and a wife became a challenge for her individuality, Sita

tried to accept her life as it was for a long time. But in the whole process neither she could understand her family nor could she change herself to be like them. As the narrator of the novel describes, “She never got used to anyone.”(Desai 43) Sita’s unique personality kept her from mingling with the materialistic upper middle class business society that her family belonged to. Sita was misplaced in an environment which slowly plagued her peace of mind. But her family considered Sita as the odd one without trying to understand her point of view. The society itself is built in such a manner that the mother does not easily realize her free will and hence the chance of a revolt is very thin. Sita also kept living in the suffocated place that she called home though she realized her ever-growing gloom and doom. All those pent up emotions burst out with her fifth pregnancy and she all of a sudden she decided to go away from the maddening life of the city to a familiar place to find solace, and perhaps a miracle as well. But the abrupt decision was as much shocking for Sita as it was for Raman. “The plan to escape boiled up in her with such suddenness, she was herself taken by surprise, not realizing that it had been simmering inside her so long although she was herself the pot, the water and the fire.” (Desai 51)

As Betty Friedan wrote in her exceptional work *The Feminine Mystique*:

“It is not possible to preserve one's identity by adjusting for any length of time to a frame of reference that is in itself destructive to it. It is very hard indeed for a human being to sustain such an 'inner' split - conforming outwardly to one reality, while trying to maintain inwardly the value it denies.” (Friedan 426)

The duality of Sita’s life makes her character rather complicated. Many of her actions are termed as madness by her family, whereas she finds her family as mad and unreasonable.

Her wish to keep her baby unborn is impossible, but her distaste for children is not a sudden realization. However she continuously tries to find warmth in the company of her children. At the end she realizes that maybe her escape plan is indeed madness to Karan and Menaka. Without the validation, she always wanted from her children, the mother who never has the opportunity to make a decision on her own eventually loses faith in her plan. She thinks, “What if as her husband had warned, something happened? For all her inspired words, she knew she could not shelter it inside her forever.” (Desai 104) Her mind fights between the thought of keep destroying her own life by going back and risking her child’s life by staying there. Therefore, when Moses shouted with excitement that Raman was coming to the island, at first Sita “felt one violent pulsation of grief inside her, like a white bird flying up with one strident scream, then plummeting down, thinking, ‘it’s all over-’ and then a warm expansion of relief, of pleasure, of surprise- Oh happy surprise!” (Desai 118)

The names of the protagonist and her husband, Sita and Raman, echo the ancient tale of the Ramayana. Like her mythical namesake, the modern Sita also has to suffer largely because of the blind beliefs and prejudices of the society. Desai’s clever choice of these names can be considered as an implication of the similar lives that Indian women have to lead. The world is constantly progressing in terms of scientific knowledge and technological development; however many people still tend to follow and carry forward various baseless gender norms and prejudices.

Thus, a detailed analysis of this novel shows how a woman can be trapped in an imposed identity. As Sita accepts that the end of the novel after her decision to go back to Bombay, for her, “Life had no periods, no stretches. It simply swirled around, muddling

and confusing, leading nowhere.” (Desai 140) Anita Desai’s novel are not some utopian dreams where the protagonist gets a happily ever after. Anita Desai clearly shows that the path to freedom is not easy for a mother; rather freedom is mostly unattainable when they are trapped within the rigid boundaries of the patriarchal society. Sita’s unsuccessful revolt proves the eternal predicament of the mothers in traditional Indian society. However, the seed of revolt is already present in the mother’s heart. The transformation of the mother from a passive participator in the family to taking decision on her own is quite notable. Sita’s journey towards the realization and development of her identity through the obstacles of alienation and isolation from her children is a new direction in the characterization of mothers in Indian English fiction.

CHAPTER III
NEUROTIC MOTHERHOOD IN JERRY PINTO'S
EM AND THE BIG HOOM

This chapter is an attempt to delve into Jerry Pinto's autobiographical fiction *Em and the Big Hoom* in order to understand the world of a mother suffering from manic depression and bipolar disorder. The novel progresses chiefly through the conversation between Em, her son, daughter Susan, her husband and her mother; Em's letters, and diary entries. The narrator of the novel is Em's son, who fears he would go mad like his mother. Like any other person, the narrator also wants a happy family and a healthy mother. The story unfolds as the Em's son tries to discover when exactly her bipolar symptoms began to manifest themselves. His search leads him to a vague yet painful answer that his birth somehow affected his mother's mental health, but along the way he develops an appreciation for his "rough, rude, roistering", yet glorious mother.

Em and the Big Hoom is one of the highly acclaimed yet less critically analyzed fictions in Indian English literature. This novel is a path breaking one in terms of its subject-matter. The novel starts with a letter from Em, signed as 'I', to her 'Angel Ears'. In this letter to her then friend and future husband Augustine Mendes, Imelda writes about how she needed to raise the windowpane between writing the letter so that a butterfly can go out, and about "an impertinent sparrow demanding the last bit of her toast" and she adds at the end of the letter that the sparrow ultimately won. She demands that the next letter from Augustine must be heartwarming or otherwise she will "declare him unfit for human consumption" and throw him to "the lions". (Pinto 1)

This is a perfect introduction to the unique protagonist of the novel. The witty, humorous, sensitive and compassionate sides of Em are revealed in the very first page of the novel. Before the beginning of her manic depression, Em was one of those people who loves truly and deeply but seemed lost in the practical world. She never wanted to take up the huge responsibility of being the bread earner of the family, and do a job that she never enjoyed. Moreover, she worried about working with adults as she did not consider herself as one. Her inability to mingle with the adults as one them foreshadows her inability to become a traditional mother.

Many a times, the superfluous glorification of motherhood creates a lot of problems for women. It is not possible for every mother to act in a similar way, but the society tries to forcefully mould them to a particular kind without any individuality. Pinto presents an unusual Indian mother who breaks away from the stereotypical image of an Indian mother. It is one of the peculiar habits of Em that she smokes beedi all the time. Usually, in Indian society mothers are not expected to smoke in front of their children. But Em breaks all the customs often forced by the society upon women. Em is a rebellious mother who prefers to be friends with her children. Unlike typical Indian mothers, Em talks about sex with her children. She even asks her son if he feels “Oedipal-Shmeedipal” when she talks about her physical relationship with her husband. These serious topics are mixed with humor and cleverness. Em talks about all these things in her normal condition. Other family members also join her, thus lifting the taboo from the subject. It gives the relationship between the mother and the children a different dimension.

Society’s different attitudes towards motherhood and fatherhood are also addressed in this novel. While childbirth is celebrated by both men and women, men are excluded

from all the talks and traditional rituals held throughout the process of bearing and giving birth to a child. Even in today's India, a father taking a break at job for taking care of his wife and the newborn child is very rare. In contrast to motherhood, fatherhood is never considered as a matter of serious discussion. "It was obvious that no one thought much about fathers and fatherhood. Maternity was central." (Pinto 80) It at the same time provides the fathers freedom but it also ignores the role of the father. However, in the Mendes family, the father is their "rock and refuge". The children get the mental support from The Big Hoom and depend on him for every single thing in their household. But Em filled their lives leaving no space in their minds for their father. He was expected to be strong and constant. The comparison between motherhood and fatherhood not only indicates the difficulties of the mother but also shows "what it meant to be a man in India". The narrative provides a large picture of Indian society from a fresh perspective. Pinto's work explores the way the patriarchal society regards motherhood as a natural phenomenon implying that all women are born with the innate qualities and knowledge of being a mother. Em seems to believe that she must always already know how to be a 'perfect mother'. The fact that it is her first child and that she has never had any experience of this kind seems to recede in the background as the idea of women as innate mothers is dominant in the foreground. Even the seemingly innocent games and toys that the children are introduced to are laden with patriarchal norms that aim at training little girls to become perfect wives and mothers. Em realizes that the dolls were one of the means of shaping the personality of a woman as the caregiver. She tells her son, "...the doctor showed me how to carry her, to feed her, and I thought, "I should know this stuff, shouldn't I?" I mean, all those dolls. They were about learning the ropes, no?" (Pinto 53)

Even the casual remarks of Em refers to the ‘ropes’ or bondages that the society creates for mothers.

This novel also addresses the issue of abortion; and the pain associated with this process. Many women in India suffer a lot because of the lack of sex education. A woman’s safety and autonomy is often ignored by the society. Unauthorized and unsafe abortion has been a huge problem in India for centuries. Pinto depicts the dangerous way of abortion conducted by the woman herself. Em jumps from the stairs six times to abort her baby while her friend Gertrude drank a lot of alcohol. Em claims that she continued this process for twenty-six times. Though Em never confirms it, this repeated process has an everlasting impact upon the mother’s mental state. But these issues are often neglected by the society as trivial matters. Even their family-members do not take them to the hospital in order to suppress the news of such events.

The grave yet witty conversations between Em, her son, and daughter cover a lot of different aspects of pregnancy and abortion. Em points out how most of the people who condemn abortion are men who do not have to worry about a family. They dismiss women’s appeal to have abortions as sin when they do not understand the painful process of child bearing and rearing. This work presents a mother figure who had to undergo a painful process to abort multiple babies, and now openly advises her daughter to go to a professional if she gets pregnant without her wanting a baby. Unlike many works, it does not end with one-sided advices for the daughter. The man’s responsibility in the advent of an unexpected or unwanted pregnancy is also discussed in this work. Em instructs her son to take the girl to a government hospital if he makes someone pregnant, and stay with her to support her even after the whole process. This mature conversation between a mentally

ill mother and her children is quite important even in the present time.

In *Em and the Big Hoom*, the novelist displays the effect of childbirth on mothers. Though not widely common, post-natal depression can make a new mother lose her sanity. The narrator of the novel always looks for signs and indications of her nervous breakdown and bipolar disorder. He talks to people who knew Em before the beginning of her manic depression to understand her better. However, when she reveals what she thinks was the cause of her mental imbalance, he is unable to handle the truth. It was devastating to know that his birth might have triggered her illness. But, being her unapologetic self, Em reveals the truth by saying, “I don’t know, Baba, I don’t know why. It’s a tap somewhere. It opened when you were born.” (Pinto 11) The narration describes how much torturous it was for the son to bear the guilt of being the cause of the sufferings of his family. Against all the odds, he always hopes for a miracle to get “a whole mother, a complete family...” (Pinto 67)

Mothers have always been regarded in India as one of the pillar of the family that brings everyone together. Any abnormality to the traditional image of the mother is believed to jeopardize the strength of the family. It is reflected in the family picture of the Mendes. The mother’s mental health affected the day to day life of the whole family. Em’s son, the narrator, remarks, “I didn’t really know *what* we were as a family. I only knew that something was wrong with all of us and that it had something to do with my mother and her nerves.” (Pinto 9-10)

The sufferings of a person suffering from manic depression and bipolar disorder are not easily understandable for an individual who never has to go through a similar situation. Similarly, the condition of a mental patient’s family is quite difficult to understand. For

the outsiders, depression is just a fancy way of expressing angst; but when a mother suffers of manic depression, it takes away both the mother and the child's rest and contentment. The mother's brave approach towards her ever-growing depression which makes her slowly lose her life is equally relief and a torture for the children. Everybody in the family puts on a façade of braveness in front of each other.

However, the treatment of mental health does not receive the required attention from the most people. The patience and care needed for a complete recovery is mostly unavailable in both the private and public sphere. As the narrator laments, "And what can mental health mean in a nation that wants an injection to put it back on its feet the next morning?" (Pinto 65) People's opinions towards physical illness and mental illness are as different as their attitudes towards the health of a child and a mother. Being the centre of attraction, the child receives much more care than the mother. In contrary, as the foundation of the child's development, the mother gets very little time to take care of herself. However, *Em and the Big Hoom* is about a mother who can neither take care of herself nor her children. Besides, many people dismiss the mental patients as something of a taboo, whereas others bombard the family with questions that invade their privacy.

In *Em and the Big Hoom*, although Em constantly suffers from manic depression and bipolar disorder, she manages to retain her individuality. It is one of the strongest points of her character. She fulfills one of the primal and seminal concerns of feminism that a woman is an individual being. Simone de Beauvoir insisted women to intend for equality in their everyday activities instead of being content with remaining as 'the other' sex. Em is brave enough to express her true feelings and desires. Though her family members often get hurt, they do not accuse her because of illness. Because of this Em gets more

freedom to open up. Pinto's protagonist strongly believe that the arrival of a child turns a woman simply to someone's mother without any other definition of her own. Jerry Pinto describes through Em's words how a mother no longer remains the center of her own life which never happens to men.

While childbirth is celebrated as women's creativity, the metaphor of childbirth can be translated into alienation, powerlessness and an acute lack of control. Michelle Boulous Walker thoughtfully states that there are "potential problems associated with the maternal metaphor. It may silence women by reducing her to a productive body, subsuming her sexuality beneath the exigencies of birth."(Walker135) Em considers motherhood as an insult to an independent individual. She refuses to accept the identity imposed upon her by the society. She thinks out of the box with a wide perspective and lives on her own terms. Though she suffers from depression, most of the time she manages to live her own life. But still the thought of becoming a mother is not beautiful for her. Em does not even use the word mother. Instead she says 'mudd-dha' in a bitter tone which shows her distaste to the idea of a typical mother. "Em did not have the standard attitude towards motherhood. She often used the word with a certain venomousness, as if she were working hard to turn it into an insult."(Pinto 51) Her words clearly present the troubles that a mother has to go through. It also focuses on how a mother loses her individual identity after becoming a mother. All these pressures are sometimes too hard to handle and such situations can make a mother lose her sanity. Em comments, "Marriage is all right. At least the person you're having a go is an adult. But motherhood...You're given something totally dependent, totally in love with you and it doesn't seem to come with a manual..." (Pinto 52) She is a well aware of her boundaries, and in times when her

mental health improves to talk about these things, she herself enquires whether she has become a 'devouring mother'. (Pinto 52-53) Although concerns of somehow manipulating or disrupting her children's life are dismissed by them, it is clear that the life of a child whose mother goes through mental illness is not easy.

In contrast to this mother figure who clearly criticizes and disapproves motherhood in her life, but makes sure to enquire her children's opinion on her; the character of Em's mother is way more 'devouring' from Em's standard. Em's mother is a 'solid' woman without deep understanding of her daughter's illness. She believes that the fact that she loves Em is enough to solve everything, whereas Em's mental illness is much more complicated than that. Her role as a mother is limited to her sense of authority over Em. Instead, Em's children play the role of a traditional mother to take care of her mental and physical health. Taking care of either a daughter or a mother suffering from manic depression and bipolar disorder who also tries to kill herself time to time is tough and complicated. But in this case Em receives more mental support and understanding from her offspring than from her mother.

It is also noteworthy that, although Em suffers from mental illness, her criticism of motherhood is not a result of it. When Em was mentally fit or in the narrator's words- a 'whole' person, she never really considered herself as a grown up person. She wanted to live her life in a better way. After completing her Senior Cambridge at age of sixteen, she expected to go to the college. But she could not complete her education because of financial problems and had to work as a school teacher with very little salary. Later Em's mother decided that Em would become a secretary; and Em was forced to work as a stenographer. As she always shied away from adult responsibilities she did not like either

of her jobs. However she liked working at the office as she could spend the weekend on her own. She handed over all her salary to her mother and was exempted from doing any housework. It seemed like a good arrangement to her.

Therefore Em was not ready for performing the duties of a wife, let alone of a mother. Thus all the responsibility was entrusted to her husband. Pinto's narrative makes it apparent that for many women motherhood is a responsibility that they cannot handle on their own. As Em perceives becoming a mother is more complicated than being a wife, because a child is completely dependent upon the mother.

Another important characteristic of Em is that she has an active imagination. She writes skillfully and effortlessly all the time. But the world never took her seriously as a writer. Her inability to realize her own capabilities or to pursue her career in the field that she likes can be compared to Virginia Woolf's imaginative character of Shakespeare's sister. In a world where the talents of a woman can be easily suppressed, a mother who suffers from mental illness is oppressed in many layers without even her knowledge. The late recognition from her son is the positive feedback that she gets on her talent that she perhaps wanted to show the world.

It is noteworthy that Em's relationship with her son and daughter is exceptionally unique. They always call her 'Em' instead of "something ordinary like Mummy, or Ma". (Pinto 6-7) When the mother's manic depression takes a toll on her mind and she keeps diverting topics of discussion, she relies on her son to keep her on track. Em exclaims, "What would I do without you to keep me on the conversational straight and narrow?" (Pinto 40) The dependency of the mother on the child for survival changes the age old concept of the mother being the nourishing soil for her children's development.

In this novel, Jerry Pinto presents a progressive Indian family that does not put all the responsibility on the mother. The whole Mendes family is unique and interesting. They are not simply bound to the typical social norms. It is clear that taking care of Em is never easy for Augustine Mendes. Her unapologetic and straightforward words tend to hurt the receiver of her attention. Em does not perform the common duties assigned to the mothers by the society. Her husband takes over both the responsibilities of a father and a mother. When Em's disease occurs, the whole family has to monitor her every move. Em's son wonders if she could tore a hole in his heart with a single sentence by saying that her mental illness started with his birth, "...what did thirty years of marriage do to The Big Hoom?" (Pinto 17) But the silver lining in the gloomy story is that Augustine Mendes is a compassionate and supportive husband. Though Em often creates problems for the family, he understands and supports her till her death. Em's mood becomes better whenever she has her husband with her. The Big Hoom also understands it well and gives her as much time and attention as he can. The narrator of the novel describes how their father always brings home the things that Em wants without questioning her. In the narrator's words, "The Big Hoom rarely came home from work in the evening with sweets for us when we were children, but he never forgot the two bundles of Ganesh Chhaap Beedi." (Pinto 7)

The novel extensively deals with the issues of bipolar disorder and post-natal depression. The opinions of the major characters of the novel regarding the stigma associated with a mentally ill mother bring a fresh perspective. Jerry Pinto provides justice to the characters with the realistic representation of both a neurotic mother and the supportive father. When he was a child, the narrator often cried because the boys of the neighborhood

mocked him for having a neurotic mother. Through the words of Augustine Mendes, Jerry Pinto declares the importance of normalizing talks about mental health. He compares Em's bipolar disorder to diabetes to show that in both of the cases the person is ill, and therefore the prejudices against a mental patient are unfounded. In both the cases the patient should receive love and care instead of harsh treatment. This normalization of mothers' having mental health issues a new addition to representation of motherhood in Indian English fiction. The narrative attacks the stigma around mental illness and the pressure of motherhood at the same time. It is rare to find another story where the son is the caregiver and the mother acts like a teenage rebel.

Despite the stigma associated with mental illness in India, their attitude towards Em is very progressive. It is appreciative for an Indian writer to present it so beautifully, as most people do not look at these matters with a positive attitude. Many famous philosophers and intellectuals also give bias judgments regarding female psyche. Even Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* (1989), in spite of being a landmark work in this field, suffers from a 'gender blindness' of sorts. The sufferings of the mentally ill women are not addressed well in his work. He devotes only a short section to 'Hysteria' briefly looking at femininity's exclusive affinity to hysterical insanity, and the morality and metaphysics of the disease. It is notable that hysteria is more than often notoriously classified as a woman's disease by many academics. The word hysteria itself is controversial as the ancient Greek 'hystero' literally translates as the 'uterus'. Both the name of the disease and its exclusivity as a woman's one raises various concerns regarding gender inequality and lack of understanding of women's issues. In contrast, Jerry Pinto's portrayal of a mad mother and the family's reactions towards her in his

debut novel brings out progressive conceptions of motherhood and madness.

Pinto's portrayal of the Mendes family carries a certain weight as it is very similar to his own life. He has led a similar life to that of the narrator of the novel. The novelist's familiarity with the sufferings of a mad mother and her children makes the story livelier. Pinto's capability in creating the realistic characters is certainly praiseworthy. Jerry Pinto brilliantly uses Em's diaries and letters to give the readers a peek into her internal monologue. But even after exposing all her life to her family, nobody really has any access into her inner world in her difficult time. But unlike other mental patients, Em calls herself mad and has some insight into her condition. As the narrator tells us, this extreme behavior is not about madness alone. Or perhaps madness is characterized by her lack of sympathy towards herself and towards others. The doctors keep changing the labels of her illness thus showing how it is almost impossible to know madness.

Em is a true epitome of the 'new woman'. Unlike many other mother-figures of Indian literature, she is not a suffering and a submissive model. Em is assertive and self-willed; the new woman, who still suffers, but not in silence as she used to be. Em has a voice and the best thing is that her family acknowledges her voice. The mother is not any more a mere living being raising her children; she is an individual being with emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs. The much needed representation of the women who do not want to take the responsibility of becoming mothers is fulfilled through the character of Em. It plays a major role in the necessary re-imagining and transformation of the motherhood beyond the terms of patriarchy.

CHAPTER IV
MOTHERHOOD AND INDIVIDUALITY IN ANURADHA ROY'S *ALL*
THE LIVES WE NEVER LIVED

The fourth chapter aims at a thorough analysis of Anuradha Roy's novel *All the Lives We Never Lived* in order to explore the concept of freedom and identity of Indian mothers. Roy's work provides a parallel between the independence movement of India and the fight of a young mother for her own autonomy. The story of Gayatri, the narrator Myskin's mother, shows how the society overlooks the domestic behaviors of men while judging their overall personality whereas women's whole personality is judged based on their roles as wives and mothers. Gayatri's father encouraged her to dance and paint, and provided her every possible opportunity to gain more knowledge. He even took her to Bali in an attempt to travel with the great Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore and to see the folk culture of Bali. In contrast to her father, her husband dismisses her individuality as he considers her talents as insignificant and unnecessary.

While the male characters fight against colonialism, the women characters of the novel are victims of double colonization. Apart from the colonial injustices by the foreign governors, women had to tackle the patriarchal dominance by the men of their own country. Gayatri's husband Nek Chand, who is a professor and a freedom fighter, boasts that he is never scared of knowledgeable women. But his long lectures on freedom turn out ironical when he discourages his wife in pursuing her hobbies.

Gayatri's character personifies all the mothers whose individuality ends with their children's birth. Roy puts forward an understanding of the woman who wants to pursue her dreams and desires instead of spending her time taking care of her child. Gayatri's affection for her son is questioned when she demands a life outside of her role of a mother. The narrative voices the knowledge that people like Gayatri are not devoid of maternal instincts. But the society often mistakes their need for identity and individuality as cruelty towards their children. The choice of choosing whether to become a mother or not is a rare privilege in Indian society.

The misconceptions regarding motherhood is so deep rooted in people's mind that they cannot imagine a mother who is not ready to sacrifice her individuality for her child. Gayatri had to marry thirty-three years old Nek Chand when she was only seventeen because her mother and brothers believed that motherhood was the perfect solution to temper her rebellious spirit. As expected, the new responsibility changed her life but not in the way her family imagined. The novelist breaks the predominant idea about mothers that they forget every worry with their children. Gayatri cries out with frustration, "Myshkin. Myshkin....As though nothing else matters. As though every other part of the world stopped after Myshkin came into it." (Roy 92)

Roy's protagonist does not use stereotypical Indian method of parenting. For instance, unlike most mother-son relationships, Myshkin is responsible for waking Gayatri up every day before going to school. Gayatri allows her son to explore the world on his own and teaches him about both the good and bad sides of the world. Her unconventional ways of living, dressing, and talking astonishes her neighbors. It becomes clear that the men-centric society cannot tolerate a free willed mother who paints and dances instead of

submerging herself in the kitchen. Nek Chand and his neighbors keep criticizing Gayatri for a single incident of dancing in their garden while she was only eighteen for the rest of her life in Muntazir. As the Urdu name of their town Muntazir means, she impatiently waits for a change and eventually leaves for Bali with Walter Spies and Beryl de Zoete.

In *All the Lives We Never Lived*, Anuradha Roy showcases how a woman's different identities can clash. Gayatri wants to be free from her relationship with her husband as it slowly overpowers her whole existence; but her protectiveness towards her son makes her stay longer in the company of her domineering husband. When she finally goes to Bali to live her own life, she extensively plans to take Myshkin with her. Her failed attempt to gather enough money for Myshkin's journey torments her; and at the end she decides to come back to India so that she can take care of her son. Her letters to her friend Lisa are filled with her dream of introducing Myshkin to a free, uncompromising world which she is deprived of.

It is noteworthy that every mother of Gayatri's time does not share her will for individuality or the courage to follow her dreams. Anuradha Roy created other characters that represent the majority of women who do not realize the injustice towards them. Unlike Gayatri, the other mother figure, Dinu's mother is simply known as 'Dinu's mother'. Nobody remembers her name anymore. She stays within the house and hardly meets any other men except their relatives. Her life has no definition of her own but she feels contented as she has no idea about the life outside her household. She openly criticizes Gayatri and every other woman who goes to the town.

Another remarkable element of the novel is the abhorrence Gayatri's mother develops towards her. Anuradha Roy is successful in presenting a realistic mother-daughter

relationship while highlighting their differences. Being a product of the patriarchal society, Gayatri's mother is unable to approve the freedom that Gayatri gets in her childhood and adolescence. Therefore, when Gayatri's father falls ill after their journey from Bali and eventually dies, she blames Gayatri for everything. Gayatri's mother and brothers marries her off in the first opportunity they get after her father's death. The characters of Gayatri's mother and Dinu's mother represent all the women who carry forward the patriarchal rules and force other women to follow them. The contrast between the liberal nature of Gayatri's father and the conservative actions of her father proves that one does not have to be a woman to fight for women's rights.

The novelist also portrays the character of Myshkin's step-mother from a different perspective. In Indian folklore and children literature, the step mother is most of the time presented as a heartless cruel person. The step-mother's sufferings are often ignored. In this novel, Myshkin's step mother Lipi is also a victim of the patriarchal society. Lipi suffers a lot as a young widow and a mother of a girl child. The status of widow's in Indian society has always been very low and Lipi's inability to provide a male child provided fuel to the cruelty of her in-laws. On the other hand Myshkin's father considers his marriage with Lipi more as a kind of charity than romantic companionship. The novelist conveys the predicament of common mothers who do not have any means to provide for themselves and their children through the character of Lipi.

Anuradha Roy does not create a utopian world for Gayatri after her escape from her long confinement within the walls of the house. She skillfully discloses the tragic consequences of Gayatri's choices while retaining great compassion for those choices. Gayatri works hard as a painter to collect money to bring her son to Bali. She makes

some brilliant paintings some of which is kept in the local museum. But the chaos of the war finally catches her companions and she is left alone. At last she decides to come back to India as she cannot withstand her separation from Myshkin anymore. However, she falls miserably ill and nobody comes to know about her death. Her whole chapter of escaping from and coming back to India shows both her strength and the inevitable hardships of the women of her time.

One of the significant aspects of the narrative is the unreliability of the narrator. In this novel, Roy presents the character of Gayatri through the eyes of her son Myshkin. The narrative alternates between the past, when the narrator Myshkin's mother left India and settled down in Bali and the present, when the now old Myshkin Chand Rozario rediscovers the past through his mother's letters. Myshkin himself reveals that as he becomes older, he is no more certain of his childhood memories. Moreover, his power of imagination is so rich that he can imagine himself in any place or situation. Thus the novelist leaves the readers to take Myshkin's narration with a grain of salt. Roy ends the novel in a manner that confirms the tragic ending of Gayatri while fulfilling her dream of becoming an artist. Though attaining the freedom for the mother is hard, Roy's protagonist proves that a mother also needs to get the chance to pursue her own visions.

Anuradha Roy juxtaposes the past and the present, and facts and fictions to present the eternal predicament of Indian mothers. Though the story is set in the colonial period, the characters are not much different from the present era. There are still women like Gayatri who are forced marry and to have children at a young age. Working mothers are still blamed for any problems that occur to their children while the fathers are only responsible for earning money to sustain the whole family. The contrast in the image of

the perfect mother and the perfect father still creates a lot problem for both parents. The liberation of the mothers from the stereotypical image of the caregiver is much needed for a better change in Indian society.

CHAPTER V

DIVERSITY OF MOTHERHOOD

This chapter is dedicated to discuss the differences in the lives of the mothers discussed in the previous chapters. It explores the psychological similarity and diversity that can be found within the mother figures. It is found that all the mothers in the selected texts seek some kind of freedom in their lives while leading their distinctive lives.

The selected fictions present the struggle, suffering, identity crisis, rebellion and protest, alienation and loneliness of different mother figures. Anita Desai's serious concern is the "journey within" the character with the help of memories or stream of consciousness technique. Desai's protagonists undergo psychological trauma and upheaval: it is this factor that leads to the fundamental decisions in their lives. The trauma of existence in a hostile, male dominated society that is conservative and taboo-ridden is convincingly presented in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*. She portrays the inner conflicts of her characters and also underlines their individuality and quest for freedom.

On the contrary, Jerry Pinto's characters show the bright side of the story with their understanding and intimacy. Unlike Sita, Em is able to maintain her own identity, but she suffers from mental illness more than Sita. Sita's illness results from compromising for a long time. Her children's ungratefulness makes her situation worse. Compared to her, Em is lucky to have the support of her children. Both of them want love and attention from their respective partners. The Big Hoom makes Em feel better by providing company but Raman is unable to understand Sita's needs.

Anuradha Roy's protagonist Gayatri in *All the Lives We Never Lived* resembles the

character of Sita's mother from *Where Shall Go This Summer*. Both of them abandons their husbands who maintain saint like images as freedom fighters; but do nothing for the women in their own family. Both of their whereabouts remain mysteries for their children. The similarity of these two characters strengthens the claim that attaining the freedom of living their lives on their own terms is difficult for Indian mothers.

The excessive glorification of mothers by comparing them to objects that do not have a voice of their own is not helpful in empowering the mothers. Indian mothers do not desire a place at the altar but an equal footing in their household as well as in the society. All three of the chief protagonists in selected novels defies the patriarchal norms and tries to make a path of their own. However, they have to stop at a point because of the society's pressure on confining every mother in a specific position in the family. The novelists are able to portray both the revolt and the eventual failure of the mothers in their battle for identity.

The modern mother-child relationship and their influence on each other are crucial in the discussion of the novel representation of motherhood in Indian English fiction. In all three of the novels, the readers get to know the mothers from their children's perspectives. In Desai's novel, the children have a huge influence on disrupting Sita's mental peace with their aggressive behavior. Her supposed madness is fueled by the malice and ungratefulness of her children. In contrast, Em's children help her in keeping her head high even in the edge of losing her sanity. The character of Myshkin can be placed between these two types of characters. As a product of his father's upbringing, he tends to believe his mother's departure as a consequence of her extramarital affair. However, he realizes his mother's quest for her identity after reading her letters. In all

these cases, the children's attitude towards their mother affects their mothers psyche.

The selected novelists use memories or the stream of consciousness technique to bring out the characters' relationships with the memories of the past and their confrontation with the reality of the present. In *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, Sita tries to relate to her childhood days while caught up in her mundane life as a mere wife and mother. On the other hand, the narrator of *Em and the Big Hoom* urges his mother to revisit the past so that he can find a key to her madness. Similarly, the old Myshkin in *All the Lives We Never Lived* recounts his childhood to understand the life of his mother, who left him while he was only nine.

Presenting a mother with unstable mental health as the chief protagonist of a novel is not a regular occurrence in Indian English fiction. Anita Desai gradually develops the plot of the novel that explains Sita's sudden bizarre demand for keeping her child in her womb forever. But her psychological problems are left unattended. It is obvious that she is not ready to go back to the suffocating life, but she has to compromise as she does not have any other choice. As a product of the patriarchal society, Raman is not ready to accept Sita's psychological needs and her transformations. On the other hand, Jerry Pinto's protagonists fight against mental illness till the end. The search for the reason behind Em's manic depression and bipolar disorder becomes a core element of the novel. The novelist creates awareness for mental health of the mothers through his work.

The characters of the selected novels put light to the desires of women outside their identity as mothers. However, this study does not indicate that motherhood is problematic for every woman. The conditions vary from person to person; and the characters of Sita, Em, and Gayatri represent only a small part of Indian mothers. Motherhood can be a

blessing for a particular woman, whereas an obstacle for another one. This aspect of motherhood needs more discussion as it is often neglected by the society. A force to change the traditional image of the mother in Indian society is proved to be an urgent need of the present Indian society. In this case, Indian English novelists are doing a great job by creating different mother figures through their works. There is scope for additional study on the theme of motherhood and madness in other Indian English novels from an economic and political perspective.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Among all the different experiences of motherhood, one thing is certain that every woman needs their personal space and deserves to live on their own conditions. The works of the selected novelists brings forth new images of Indian motherhood. People carry a lot of stereotypical misconceptions about mothers and they tend to judge every single mother on the basis of those misleading notions. Their individualistic features are often overlooked. However, in contrast to the earlier picture perfect images of Indian mothers, the contemporary writers bring forth mother figures that are more realistic with their flaws.

Many a times motherhood becomes a challenge to a woman's right over her own body. Many women lose their command over body as they are forced to conceive for the family's sake. Furthermore, sex-selective abortion is still a huge problem in many places of India. These occurrences suppress women's voice. The novelists portray how women losing this right can lead to psychological trauma and sometimes hatred for their children and their own body.

The study of the varied experience of the mothers in the selected texts leads to the significance of the concept of 'chosen motherhood'. Every woman must have the freedom to choose if they want to become a mother or not. Pushing a woman to have a baby, when she is not ready for the responsibility can cause severe anxiety and depression. 'Chosen motherhood' or the choice to have a child without any guilt or pressure makes the experience of motherhood more pleasant.

The socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity have a huge effect on motherhood. The responsibility of the mother and the father is separated by the society, which creates a difference in their relationships with their children. Taking care of children is always categorized as feminine task and assigned to women. If a father helps in managing the affairs of his own children, he is considered as an extremely helpful person to his wife. However, the woman is not credited for her continuous work in the house by considering them as a natural duty of women. This allows the father to have some space of his own and his occasional showering of gifts makes him the favorite parent of the children.

The life outside the household is important for a mother. Women need to have a proper job or hobbies to maintain their individuality. The novelists attempted to convey the message about the essentiality for women to assert their own identities. Only through asserting their self-governed identities they can attain a liberated self, a space for themselves, and would be able to leave a mark on the society as individuals. The authors suggests that women cannot expect their individual needs, both physical and mental, to be fulfilled unless they themselves take their own responsibilities. If she does not cherish her own individuality, no one else will do that. Therefore it is essential for a mother to assert herself first as a self-sufficient individual on the same level to man.

In Indian society, the child is seen as a potential subject; but the mother is often regarded as the background and nourishing soil of her child's subjectivity-to-be. When there are numerous works on children, we seldom find literature focusing on a mother's psyche. These kinds of works draw attention to the not so bright side of motherhood. The much needed representation of the women who try to take a different path is fulfilled through

the characters of Em, Sita, and Gayatri. These novels are significant as they present the mothers as normal human beings with their needs and desires. These novels prove that mothers are not objects at the service of the child.

The selected texts play a major role in reimagining and transforming motherhood beyond the terms of patriarchy. They break the stereotypical concepts associated with Indian mothers. The transition of the traditional, self-sacrificing women without choices to one who is able to analyze and take decisions is the Indian woman as portrayed by these three novelists. The selected writers have created characters that are tormented by some sort of depression and alienation. Their psychological alienation can be considered as the result of the imposed false identity as caring mothers, their lack of freedom and the stifling relationships with their children. These fictions contribute to a growing and much-needed alternative narrative for women to make sense of their diverse mothering experiences and break the notion of one innate or essential nature of motherhood.

This dissertation is a small attempt to analyze the representation of the unique mother characters with all the hardship, misery, shame and incarceration endured by them. This kind of literature includes increasingly diverse experiences of motherhood, including lesbian mothers, immigrant mothers, surrogate mothers, single mothers, teen mothers, adoptive mothers, mothers using assisted reproductive technologies, and all the other mothers in the margins. Therefore, there are scopes for conducting research on such other representations of motherhood in Indian English fiction.

Works Cited

Ashmore, Richard D and Lee Jusim, editors. *Self and identity: Fundamental Issues*. Oxford University Prsee, 1997.

Bagchi, Jasodhara. *Interrogating Motherhood*. Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2017.

Baumgardner, J., and Richards, A. *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.

Beauvoir, de Simone. *The Second Sex*. Jonathan Cape.1960

Bhatnagar, P. 'Indian Womanhood: Fight for Freedom in Roots and Shadows,' *Indian Women Novelists*. edited by RK. Dhawan, Set. I. Vol. V. Prestige Books, 1991.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 2006

Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. University of California Press.1978.

Desai, Anita. *Where Shall We Go This Summer*. Orient Paperbacks. 2019.

Dolezal, Luna. *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism and the socially shaped Body*. Lexington Books. 2016

Fell, Alison. *Liberty, Equality, Maternity*. Routledge Publishers. 2017.

Freedman, Estelle. *The Essential Feminist Reader*. Modern Library, 2007.

Freud, Sigmund. *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*. Dodo Collections, 2015.

---. 'Femininity', *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Norton, 1963.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. W.W. Norton, 2001.

Gilbert, Sandra and Gubar, Susan. *Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press. 1979.

Giorgio, Adalgisa. *Writing Mothers & Daughters: Renegotiating the Mother in Western Narratives by Women*. Berghahn Books, 2002.

Greer, Germain. *The Female Eunuch*. Paladin, 1991.

Hirsch, Marianne. *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*. Indiana University Press, 1989.

Kaplan, E. Ann. *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama*, Routledge, 1992.

Krishnaraj, Maithreyi. (Ed.) *Motherhood in India: Glorification Without Empowerment?* Routledge, 2010.

Kumar, Gajendra. 'Feminist Critical Theory and the Novels of Anita Desai'. *Critical Essays on Anita Desai's fiction*, ed. Jaydipsinh Dodiya. Sarup & Sons, 2003, pp 1-8.

Lorde, Audré. 'Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women redefining Difference'. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Crossing Press, 1984, pp.114-123.

Marshall, H., & Woollett, A. Fit to reproduce? The regulative role of pregnancy texts. *Feminism & Psychology*, vol. 10, issue 3, 2000.

Millet, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. Double Day, 1970.

Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. Routledge, 1991.

Oakley, A. Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms. *Doing Feminist Research*. edited by H. Roberts, Routledge, 1981, pp. 30-61.

Paranjpe, Anand. *Self and Identity in Modern Psychology and Indian Thought*. Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000.

Pinto, Jerry. *Em and the Big Hoom*. Aleph Book Company. 2013

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. Norton, 1976.

Roy, Anuradha. *All the Lives We Never Lived*. Kennebec Large Print. 2019

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Harvard University Press, 1989.

Walker, Michelle Boulous. *Philosophy and the Maternal Body: Reading Silence*. Routledge, 2005.

Wandor, Michelene. *The Body Politic*. McMillan publishers, 1972.

Warner, Judith. *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety*. Riverhead Books, 2006.

Waugh, Patricia, editor. *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Wolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. Maple Press Private Limited, 2019.