

**Mothers and Daughters: A Study of Selected Fiction by  
Indian Women Novelists in English**



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April 2010

# Mothers and Daughters: A Study of Selected Fiction by Indian Women Novelists in English

*A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy*



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*Dedicated to my parents*

## STATEMENT

I hereby declare that the matter embodied in this thesis, entitled **Mothers and Daughters: A Study of Selected Fiction by Indian Women Novelists in English**, is the result of research carried out by me in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, India under the supervision of Dr. Rohini Mokashi-Punekar, Associate Professor, in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences.

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## CERTIFICATE

It is certified that the matter embodied in the thesis entitled **Mothers and Daughters: A Study of Selected Fiction by Indian Women Novelists in English**, submitted for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** by **Arpana Nath**, a student of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, India, has been carried out under my supervision. It is also certified that this work has not been submitted anywhere else for the award of a research degree.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The subject of women's writing represents an intervention within feminist studies in India that explores the psychological, emotional and social concerns of women. Much attention has been paid by feminist scholars in recovering lost traditions of writing by women writers. The idea behind this is to pay emphasis on the woman's perspective and on the nature of experiences that shape women's identity, the processes of self-formation and identification. It is not only difficult but also impossible to give a single voice to women's writing in general as the variety of responses and artistic expressions mirror the complex patterns of social and cultural spaces that define the parameters of women's lives and women's responses to them in everyday situations. This precludes any attempt at generalized assumptions of gender. Women in different parts of the world are affected differently by the demands of cultural and material reality. What remains important, however, is the uniqueness of the experiences captured through the written word in the stories told thereby making visible the interior lives of a set of people that would otherwise have remained closed and unavailable. Writings by women throw light on aspects of women's experience and their inner life, on the recesses of the mind that are silenced by codes of cultural conditioning that privileges reticence over expression in women. These writings are significant as they give the reader local specificity and grounding. Not only that but also they show the intricate ways in which women's lives are deeply embedded in the cultural matrix of patriarchal structures.

The issue of women's writing has raised many questions not only on the issue of women's self-expression and creativity through the medium of the written word but also on the validity of the enterprise itself as a separate genre of literary studies. Elaine Showalter, who first coined the term "gynocriticism", traces the history of women's writing in the west as having evolved through a series of interrelated phases of development characterized by intense conflict and repression. As early as the 1920's Virginia Woolf had insisted on the importance of economic independence and privacy for women writers. The works of Showalter and Woolf are important to our understanding of women's writing as a genre. Showalter's work apart from analyzing the different stages of the development of women's writing also foregrounded the psychological pressure women authors had to undergo writing under the influence of a largely masculine canon. The effects of the "anxiety of authorship" (Bloom "The Anxiety of Influence") and what could have been the effects of psychosocial repression for women artists because of societal intolerance of female creativity has been analyzed by Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar in their book *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (2001). Virginia Woolf's work, on the other hand, was a penetrating analysis of the impediments to women's literary creation that discouraged professional women writers. According to Woolf, Victorian women will have to kill the angel in the house in order to find the leisure and economic means to reach creative fulfillment. Woolf's essay "Professions for Women" was one of the earliest attempts at excavating the material conditions and the implications they had for women writers.

The articulation of gender concerns is not the same for different cultures and times, as the constitution of gender itself is culture-specific. The insights provided by the discussion of the above works on women's writing provide us a useful opening for a

discussion of women's writing in India and its historical and cultural antecedents. The publication of the anthology *Women Writing in India* (1993, 1999) by Susie Tharu and K Lalita in the nineties gave a new visibility to creative writing by women not just in contemporary times but over two centuries of writings by women with very marginal representation in the mainstream literary tradition. It is almost two decades now since the two volumes were published and the scene today is quite different as the rapidly increasing presence of women writers of fiction in English is too significant and exciting for anyone to miss or overlook (Bharat 11-12). Along with the growing number of women writers of fiction in India is the equally significant visibility of the number of critics in English. Meenakshi Mukherjee, Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan and Rukmini Bhaya Nair to name a few, are among the many who figure prominently in the critical literature produced on Postcolonial writing by women. These writers and critics together may be said to have contributed to establishing standards for creative writing by women. Not only have they succeeded in bringing awareness about writing by women in English but they have also succeeded in drawing attention to writing by women in the various Indian languages. This has been made possible through translations which have helped to create a new niche for women in terms of publishing and attracting the attention of the world to their writing.

In fact contemporary Indian women writers in English are quite aware of their unique location. Critics like Meenakshi Mukherjee have drawn attention to the largely metropolitan hue that characterizes women's fiction in English in India. According to her this spurt in writing by women is a "phenomenon emerging from a particular class of the urban elite" ("Women Creative Writers" 18). It is therefore not possible to read English texts by Indian women novelists in the same way we read texts by western women in English as

in the case of Indian women writers, the choice of language, that is, English, “is an act of aesthetic or political option loaded with historical meaning... Historically English in India cannot be regarded as a transparent value neutral medium of communication” (11-12). In other words, we cannot ignore the class bias of English writing in India. Though concerns about female identity still continue to be the predominant themes, these writers have shown a desire to explore issues that go beyond the problems of gender to the negotiation of other themes like postcoloniality, nationality and history. At the same time it must also be noted that the choice of English as the medium of literary creation places these writers in a discerning position where they often take strength from both Indian English writing and indigenous literary traditions. While such a stance does increase the chances of duplicating some of the shortcomings of earlier generation of women writers, it may be stated that the growing significance of translation, which has become a major literary activity in itself, has made it possible for literary works in other Indian languages and those in English to enter into a meaningful colloquy. Knowledge of literature in other Indian languages by women writers like Krishna Sobti (Hindi), C.S. Lakshmi (Tamil), Mahasweta Devi (Bangla), Irvati Karve (Marathi), Mamoni Roisom Goswami (Assamese), Ismet Chughtai (Urdu) among other significant women writers has now started informing the creativity of writers in English. Current debates on women’s writing in India have many voices. While writers like Gita Hariharan do not find it a very useful label – “It’s not a terribly useful label if it just becomes lazy, a way to ghettoize” (qtd. in Phillips 1) – others like Manju Kapur feel that women’s writing is distinctly different from male writing as women’s experiences are different from those of men (Phillips 1). According to Shashi Deshpande, a creative artist works in a different way from a sociologist or a historian (“Writing and Activism” 29). Jaya

Mitra asserts that women's writing is "a departure from mainstream literary language", the different experiences of women demand a different idiom (186-87). Mahasweta Devi rejects feminism and submerges her identity in the larger category "human"; she owns to being a writer, not a woman writer.

In the "Introduction" to the second volume of *Women's Writing in India* (1999), Susie Tharu and K Lalita retrace the history of reception of the well-known Telugu classic *Radhika Santwanam* in 1910 by the poet Bangalore Nagaratnamma. The Telugu poet Muddupalani, a woman writer, originally wrote this in the eighteenth century on the theme of Radha's desire for Krishna rendered in very evocative terms. The reprinted edition of this classic work in 1910 was publicly criticized as vulgar, filled with "crude descriptions of sex" (3) and completely unsuitable for public readership. What the reviewers, mostly male social reformers and writers, found shocking was that it had been written by a woman. The government had to finally ban the book under pressure from social reformers and ordered the seizure of all the published copies of the text on charges of threat to the moral well being of its readers. The ban remained in effect until the State Government revoked it in 1947.

The controversy surrounding the publication and reception of *Radhika Santwanam* is a telling point of the ideological manifestations of gender constructions in colonial times. The nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century in modern Indian history were the years when the controversies and debates on gender were hotly debated in the public space. Social change became an important issue for the reformers and the situation of women with respect to gender relations within the family and society was the first to receive the attention of reformers. In fact it became the central issue in debates on Indian

nationalism (Chatterjee 250). However the discourse of education was a gendered programme as much of the benefits of British education policy accrued to the upper caste males who were quick to seize the opportunities thrown open by an English education. The British language policy clearly aimed to make inroads and take root in the social and cultural life of the nation by producing a set of anglicized subjects whose loyalty to the imposed culture could be usefully employed in the task of administering the nation. In course of time this education policy gave birth to a class differentiation and much of what came to be known as modern Indian literature was a product of this English-educated urban middle class (Tharu and Lalita). Education was still out of bounds for the lower castes and women. Tanika Sarkar's discussion of Rassundari Devi's autobiography *Amar Jiban* (2001), one of the earliest of women's memoirs from the nineteenth century, tells the reader of her secret efforts to educate herself. Rassundari Devi's autobiography clearly shows the gender role restrictions women had to live with. Women like Rassundari Devi who were self-taught had to hide their scholarly accomplishments from the disapproving eyes of others for fear of censure.

## I. The Discourse of Domesticity in Colonial India

Even though social reformers were in favour of change and advocated the education of women there was a peculiar paradox working through the question of women's education in the nineteenth century reform movement. On the one hand, the reformers felt that the nation could not advance without improving the situation of women. Educating women would empower them and give them some agency to control their lives. Although the efforts of the reformers would credit them as being on the side of feminism, yet their aim

was not to give equal status to women. Their efforts were directed by their belief in modernization and progressive participation of women in their roles as wives and mothers in the process of nation building without really questioning the patriarchal structure; it was only a means to an end. On the other side, the reform movement was vociferous in its demands to root out traditionally accepted practices of folk and popular culture participated in by women as crude and vulgar. Sumanta Baneerjee's discussion of forms of popular and elite culture in nineteenth century Bengal indicates a preoccupation with the construction of a new respectability by the educated elite that tried to model itself on western ideas of propriety and called for a disavowal of popular culture, which was earlier a part of common culture shared by all. Women artists and the world of folk culture continued to exist, but lost their earlier credibility and began to be increasingly viewed as licentious and disreputable. Middle class women were strictly warned from associating with women dancers and singers. As Nita Kumar has pointed out the story of women's education in India has largely been represented by an upper middle-class English-educated male intelligentsia. Not much is known about how women themselves viewed their situation and the response to the reform movement. In fact a distinct female culture can be located in the practice of traditional oral and folk narratives, songs and dances, balladeers and performers that subvert gender stereotypes and provide a space for women to give voice to the everyday concerns of their lives (Baneerjee). Literary and artistic work by women artists in the vernacular languages that had descriptions of female desire and erotic pleasure were denounced as vulgar and dangerous. The works were held responsible for the degeneration of the Hindu culture. A number of such works by women artists were banned. The ideological shift that had started influencing the upper caste Hindu intelligentsia under the influence of the

European thoughts and attitudes had affected the body of work by women artists popularly known as “women’s tales” and these were systematically removed from the public space.

Unlike the social reformers, who imagined women to be entrapped in domesticity and without any agency or voice, women’s texts such as Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain’s *Sultana’s Dream* (1905) and Rassundari Devi’s *Amar Jiban* written during the same times are instances of women’s writing which give pictures of an alternate reality and suggest that “emancipatory female struggles were being carried out in homes across India” (Lakhi 5). Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain’s *Sultana’s Dream* reproduces an inverted discourse of male subjugation that unmasks the social relations of power inscribed in attributes of masculinity and femininity in an ironic manner. Such an understanding of *Sultana’s Dream* is possible only if we place the work in its cultural context to see the “complex ways in which women’s experience was being sculpted and how particular women were negotiating, subverting and yet reproducing dominant discourses” (Lakhi 7). It clearly indicates that women’s location in specific socio-cultural milieus both determine their positionality and are structured in return by their agencies as well. One of the places to look for such unique subversions are literary works by women which “... offered them a way in which they could simultaneously conform to and dissent against such conventions, using textuality to enter the masculinized public sphere” (Lakhi 8). *Sultana’s Dream* may then be read as “an example of imaginative subversion in which literary images of freedom are the beginnings of a critique of social reality, not an escape from it” (Lakhi 9). These works give us a picture of women’s lives during colonial times and suggest of women’s agency defined by themselves even if in a modest way and carried out in the confines of their homes. Earlier historiography had ignored these efforts by women writers as most historiographers draw on materials by male

writers. However to read *Sultana's Dream* or Rassundari Devi's *Amar Jiban* as representative of women's agency in a general way is problematic as it is mediated by questions of class and caste; both Rassundari Devi and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain were part of an upper caste/class hierarchy. Nevertheless these are significant instances of women's self-representation within the problematic question of the nationalist agenda and are useful in charting a possible discourse of domesticity in colonial times.

In these writings the public events of nation building are shown to be intimately connected and interlinked with women's experiences within domestic spaces and clearly reveal the disjuncture between the private and the public to be superfluous constructs (Burton). Social reformers and leaders of the nationalist movement tried to keep the two areas distinct and separate. Even though women participated fully in the nationalist movement, it did not lead to reinforcing their image as autonomous subjects. Rather they were cast in the mother image. This is true of both the nationalist movement as well as the imaging of women in locally organized mass movements. An example is the non-Brahmin or the Self-Respect movement in the South that questioned the systematic exclusion of the lower castes from participating in social life (Srilata). While the movement itself was a powerful one for drawing attention to the empowering of the non-Brahmin sections of society, the women activists of the movement and the issues they raised did not receive due recognition (Devika 121). Women continued to be defined in terms of their domestic roles as mothers and wives; they became the symbol of an authentic Indian culture. In fact the glorification of the role of the mother came to be expressed in public platforms in passionate terms and later became identified with the nation. This association gained widespread popularity and acceptability through the literary representations of women by writers like

Premchand in Hindi and Gobardhanram Tripathi in Gujarati. Even though Premchand supported the ideology of reform and advocated social change through women's education, he too "upheld a separate sphere for women and saw westernization as disruptive of tradition" (Thorner and Krishnaraj 26). Gandhi can be credited with having involved women in public affairs during the nationalist movement in a manner unprecedented previously. However, he continued to believe that the proper sphere of women was the home where they could remain unsullied from corruption by outside influence. Gandhi's conception of women's role was a complementary one to the masculine role. He was much ahead of his time in his thinking that mere legislation was not sufficient to help women enter the public domain. What was needed was a change of heart on the part of men, a change in the attitude of men towards women that can lead to a transformation of gender relations. Gandhi's views on women were, however, influenced by his location as an "urban, upper caste, upper class" Hindu male's perception of what a woman should be (Krishnaraj 29). As Maitreyi Krishnaraj states in her article "Permeable Boundaries",

Although Gandhi represented a radical departure from the earlier social reformers, he nonetheless reflected the same ambiguities and inconsistencies since he was unable to free himself from his own class and caste background. (28)

Irrespective of their socio economic identity, it is the role as a mother that gives women a unique position in Indian society. This notion seeks to juxtapose emotions of motherhood with the constructed notion of motherhood, where there is often an attempt to circumscribe women within socially prescribed roles while denying them the right to articulate their individual needs and desires. It is therefore not uncommon to find that

writings on motherhood, especially in the Indian context, have tended to associate the mother, not just with divinity but also with the nation (Chakraborty “Mother in Fiction and Film”). In fact, in the nationalist agenda, “the figure of the woman which had the most emotional potency was that of the mother” (Mukherjee “Gender and Nation” 125). Critics like Meenakshi Mukherjee have pointed out that three different discourses worked in tandem to construct an idea of gender in India. These are the discourse of the family (the biological mother), the discourse of religion (devi or the goddess) and the discourse of the nation (the motherland) (“Gender and Nation” 125). Each of these discourses contained within them a series of further multiple discourses. The primary objective of Indian nationalism was to fashion an identity within which the autonomy of the nation could be located, and it was the Indian woman who was entrusted with this responsibility. Social reformers and nationalist leaders felt that the nation could not advance without improving the status of women. Educating women was the best way to counter the prevailing Hindu conservatism such as the practice of sati, child marriage and opposition to widow remarriage. Nationalist discourse produced a new ideal of femininity that considered women to be the repositories of tradition and created new distinctions between home and the world (Niranjana 209-218). Within this division women had to take up the burden of maintaining the distinctiveness of Indian culture.

### The Discourse of the Family (The Biological Mother)

According to the upper caste social norms of patriarchy in India, a woman does not have any social existence outside of her roles as wife and mother. In fact the only way a woman can expect social legitimating of her personhood is as a wife. In the role of a wife, a

woman's primary function is to assist her husband in performing rituals and giving birth to sons. The status and well-being of a woman as wife in the husband's family and in the community is dependent on her ability to produce male heirs. In case a woman fails to give birth to a son or is found to be infertile, it is not unusual for the husband to take a new wife since the supposed function of a wife is to produce sons who will then carry on the family name. The circumscribed functionality within which womanly duties have to be performed in marriage makes motherhood the only fit and logical outcome of marriage. Even though motherhood is central to the structural configuration of the family, the elevated status of the mother does not carry any significant empowerment. It is "glorification without empowerment" (Sinha 49-57).<sup>1</sup> Anthropological accounts of the traditional Hindu marriage ceremony repeatedly emphasize the centrality of procreation and although the traditional symbolism of marriage rites represents women as a source of sexual energy, there are clear indications for women to express them in 'safe' ways (Selwyn 684-689).

Within the economy of the household, women occupied a position of exchangeable resource, with the daughter as someone to be given away, as opposed to the son who was entitled to a share of the inheritance. In the hierarchy of power relations in the domestic domain women have a marginal status. The ascribed inferior status of women has percolated down to influence the legal and medical spheres as well. This is seen in the reform movement in debates around the control of female sexuality during the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century (Chatterjee 233-253). Under conditions of patriarchy motherhood becomes a means to perpetuate male dominance. Patriliney is the central social relationship and women become a means of social and economic exchange between males. Women are defined and valued by their ability to produce sons to carry on the father's

name; children are born to men, women bear the children of men. Motherhood therefore is a crucial instrument in the domination of women. Men control women as their wives, daughters and also as the mothers of children. Even though the wife is central to the existence of the household her function is confined to her role as wife and mother; she is a means to an end “the means of attaining purushartha: the goals of a man’s life, especially dharma and kama” (Roy 5).

### The Discourse of Religion (Devi or The Goddess)

On the one hand, motherhood is deified, but paradoxically, the myth of the mother’s quasi-divine status is premised upon her capacity for voluntary self-sacrifice. Feminist scholars like Uma Chakravarti have pointed out how the structure of Brahminical patriarchy is integrated into the caste system (271-295). Pointing out the role played by religious traditions in naturalizing the subordination of women, Chakravarti argues that caste and gender hierarchies are the organizing principles of upper caste social order. The control of women’s sexuality was a precondition to the maintaining of caste purity and the safe transfer of patrilineal succession. Her discussion of Nur Yalman’s work, which explores the relationship between gender and caste, reveal that the sexuality of women is controlled more than that of men, and in the Hindu worldview it is the main principle in social organization where family structure is organized “to preserve land, women and the ritual quality within it” (272-273). The three are interlinked and it is virtually impossible to sustain this structure without the control of women’s sexuality. Hence a great deal of importance is given to the disciplining of female sexuality, which is usually done through imposing seclusion and closely monitoring women’s movements.

Her analysis also demonstrates how women were co-opted into the system. Women's cooperation was secured through the internalization of ideology, economic dependence, class privilege and veneration upon conforming to its norms. It is clear from her discussions that women did not always simply live in patriarchal cultures as victims but they at times actively collaborated with it for their own ends. However as Chakravarti points out these were restricted to women from upper caste that stood to gain most from being co-opted within the system. This was also a way to strengthen the foundations of the patriarchal establishment. Thus it is mostly women from upper caste who became its beneficiaries by accepting a marginal status within it.

### The Discourse of the Nation (The Motherland)

Sudhir Kakar's discussion of the ideal mother figure explores the male bias in the construction of motherhood ("Mothers and Infants" 84). Kakar's discussion also leads one to believe that the mother-son bond is the main projection in the cultural representation of maternity in India. One of the popular projections linked the nation as mother whose sons bravely fought against foreign invasion to rescue her from the degradation of subjection. The nationalist movement in India used the iconography of "the motherland" and women as "mothers of the nation" (Bjorkort 170-216). Within this framework, the ideology of motherhood became an important means of representing the nationalist spirit and the symbolic construction of the nation as motherland became a "domain, which the colonized could claim as their own" (Bagchi 1-2). The nationalist iconography projected a woman's body that was in danger of being violated by foreign males and her honour had to be protected at all costs through the sacrifice of its citizen warriors (Peterson 44). It was

through the “iconography of familiar and domestic space” that the nation began to be frequently imagined (McClintock 62). Within this framework, the ideology of motherhood became an important means of representing the nationalist spirit.

Over the years, feminism has questioned this symbolism associated with motherhood. It has been suggested that even though the symbolism of motherhood successfully bridged the social, political and religious domains of colonial society, the ideology reinforced a view of women through their reproductive powers (Bjorkert 84). According to this ideology of motherhood, the reproductive function of women became the sole justification of women’s lives that not only put them under pressure to produce sons, but also denied them fulfillment. In this popular imagination around the nationalist construction of the nation as the motherland, we do not find any reference to the ‘daughters’ of the nation, those women who had participated with equal energy in the nationalist movement. As many historians and postcolonial critics have pointed out, though Indian nationalism brought women out into the public sphere, it may have not been as effective in freeing women from patriarchal subordination to men. Ketu Katrak in his essay “Indian Nationalism, Gandhian “Satyagraha” and the Engendering of National Narratives” has argued that the resistance to colonial rule in the form of passive resistance appropriated gendered representations of the nation as a strategy of control and subversion “only for the purpose of breaking colonial authority and not patriarchal authority” (395-96). As noted by Kakar this over valorization of the maternal is largely a male construct produced by male fantasy. Its reverse is the fear of female sexuality. The ideal of motherhood is achieved by delinking sexuality from motherhood. In the popular symbol of women as mother feminine identity is based on qualities such as self-sacrifice, affection and kindness.

Theorizations on gender issues in India have pointed to the impossibility of separating gender and caste from discussions of patriarchy. V. Geetha's discussion of patriarchy highlights the intimate link between family arrangement and the economy (3387-3388). According to her the economic power of men and their domination of production is a determining factor in the organization of the household. Women are assigned to the sphere of reproduction that is understood in terms of a sex/gender system with defined social structures and kinship networks. The caste system plays an important role in the organization of gender relations and social relations. Geetha's discussion points to the exploitative nature of the caste system where two types of exploitation takes place, that of human labour and women's reproductive capacity. It also points to the fact that debates about capitalism and women's subordination often become debates on development and the role of the modern state. This has led to a theorizing within feminist studies of the state as both patriarchal and as a potential challenger of patriarchy. Women's status within the state is at best as partial citizenship because of the complex interweaving of gender and kinship in Indian society. While heterosexuality and procreative sex are the norm and are crucial to the construction of normative sexuality, it becomes clear that a multiplicity of sexual practices do exist in actual practice. While we know that patriarchy exists, the myriad forms in which it exists and is deployed needs to be understood through a nuanced understanding of its multifaceted presence through an examination of women's everyday lives. The construction of motherhood is one such potential field to locate the analysis of patriarchy and its impact on women's lives and lived experiences.

Since the time of the freedom movement, the configuration of the nation as mother or 'Bharatmata' has been a prime metaphor of the nation in popular consciousness. A part of

this ideology of nation building was a derivative of the reformist period that equated woman with culture and viewed the safekeeping of conventional values to be the main function of women within the home. In the course of the nationalist movement this became a representative idea where women symbolized the maternal body of the nation that had to be rescued and protected from the plunder of imperialist economy. Even though the nationalist movement enabled women's political participation, women themselves remained marginal to the discourse of reform. They were neither the subjects nor the objects of this debate. Rather women became the ground on which the tradition-modernity paradigm was contested. Lata Mani has pointed out that,

Tradition was thus not the ground on which the status of woman was being contested. Rather the reverse was true: women in fact became the site on which tradition was debated and reformulated. What was at stake was not women but tradition... (118)

The contention between the tradition-modernity paradigms has continued to be one of the dominating themes in Indian Fiction in English. It is a crucial trope in the understanding of women protagonists within Indian English writing as it is a pointer to the way the category of gender has been historically constituted in the Indian subcontinent and is important in so far as it helps us to understand how women are viewed and how women view themselves and the way in which they respond to ideas of tradition and modernity (Hasan 103). The conception of the nation as mother was a crucial signifier for the nationalist movement that created alternative meanings of everyday life while reformulating the terms of nationalism, the definition of gender being a crucial component of this "Indianness" (Gibson vii-xxiv).

The fixation on the identity of motherhood that revolves around the idea of the bearing and rearing of the male child is an important part of the socialization of Indian women.

## II. Mothers, Daughters and Motherhood

Although there has been much theorizing on gender and nation, the constitution of the female subject within the context of societal and family relationships has not received scholarly attention in women's studies in India. The devaluation of women – mothers and daughters – in patriarchy still continues; the male child is still the longed for child; the desire for the male child has led to what Geeta Aravamudan describes as the “disappearing daughters” syndrome.<sup>2</sup> Such deeply embedded patriarchal beliefs disempower women. But motherhood itself as a lived identity of women has not been examined in any degree of depth. Given the social and cultural milieu of Indian patriarchy and its devaluation of women, the mother-daughter bond becomes a useful lens to examine the social construction of motherhood in India.

As noted by many feminist writers, critics and psychologists, the mother-daughter relationship is a bond that has been underplayed in patriarchy. This situation can be contrasted to the mother-son relationship about which a profusion of information and interesting stories exist in a variety of genres across cultures as compared to the mother-daughter bond. The relative obscurity of the mother-daughter bond in literary cultural discussions has prompted feminists to term the mother-daughter bond as a ‘lost tradition’ (Davidson and Broner). Feminist psychoanalysts, commenting on the mother-daughter relationship, have drawn attention to the problem of splitting of the feminine self which patriarchal culture demands of them (Flax 60). In reality mother-daughter relationships are

often more complex as social factors and contexts of patriarchy, immigration and class locations can significantly alter our understanding of the mother-daughter bond. The idealization of the maternal figure (of the ‘good mother’) is largely a male construct: “Virtually every popular depiction of mothers and sons—in art, popular fiction in various Indian languages, the autobiographies of famous Indian men, mainstream cinema, folk tales and legends and proverbs—corroborates the mother’s sentimental prevalence” (Kakar and Kakar *The Indians* 96). On the other hand, Indian women “do not sentimentalize their mothers in this way. For daughters, the mother is not an adored and adoring figure on a pedestal: she is a more earthy presence, not always benign but always there” (96). While there is a profusion of material on the mother-son bond, the mother-daughter association has received little attention in feminist studies in India. There is a paucity of theorizing on the mother-daughter relationship within Indian feminism. Radhika Mohanram, for instance, writes that “the most significant difficulty is not interpretation of texts but location of materials” (20). While it is easier to find stories of mother-son relation and father-daughter relationship in myths and in modern Indian literature, there seems to be a “curious silence on the thematic of mother-daughter relationships” (20). Mohanram indicates that one of the reasons for this marginalization of the mother-daughter relationship is the overwhelming investment in heterosexuality within Indian culture. Another reason for this is the fact that no such category exists or is seldom valorized so that it becomes culturally difficult to access women’s experiences or articulations around this theme in Indian familial relationship. As Mohanram states:

Not even a skeletal blueprint exists for the narrative of mother-daughter relationships within the master discourse of Indian fiction. This is not to say

that there are no significant female characters in Indian mythology—rather, this particular relationship is just not valorized. (20-21)

This gap in feminist theory in India seems to be somehow filled by creative works by women writers in English which draw attention to the conflicted nature of the mother-daughter relationship.

### III. Objective and Rationale of the Study

The subject of the mother-daughter relationship and its representation in Indian Women's Fiction in English may be said to be a recurrent but hardly examined motif in contemporary writing by women. We can see this theme exploited with regular frequency in the works by many women authors writing in the nineties. In the fiction by these writers, the mother-daughter relationship is depicted, more often than not, as a fraught relationship that questions the ideal of motherhood. What is intriguing about the contemporary portrayal of motherhood in these novels is that they not only try to look for alternatives to the socially constructed roles of wife and mother but also create a feminist space where the ideological burden of such patriarchal constructs that impact women's lives can be reexamined. Indian Women's Fiction in English in the nineties has increasingly questioned the ideal of motherhood and its cultural representations prevalent in Indian society. The selection of novels included in this study shows the scope of such influences on the identities of women. These novels in effect reveal the material powerlessness of the mother, while she is eulogized as life giver and nurturer. In this way these novels expose the ideological burden, which the individual woman has to bear, and effectively capture the stirrings of female discontent against such role expectations. With the possible exception of Shashi Deshpande

whose works spread across two decades, Manju Kapur, Kavery Nambisan, Anjana Appachana and Arundhati Roy are the more contemporary authors in the burgeoning area of Indian Women's Fiction in English. Through the motif of the often troubled mother-daughter relationship, this body of creative writing raises the question of where do women stand within the public/private discourse and what kind of tension is generated between their professional and family selves, public and personal lives. While feminist literature has questioned the patriarchal institution of motherhood, there is little or no discussion about mothers who fail to see the need to nurture. While this very statement goes against the grain of feminist articulation, it may in a sense be better enabled to recognize and present complexities and nuances in the mother-daughter relationship. The theme of closeness and identification discussed in the earlier paragraphs can be used as a point of comparison in analyzing the mother-daughter relationship in Indian Women's Fiction in English.

The mother-daughter relationship in the novels discussed in this study is frequently a fraught relationship. It remains to be seen if writings by women in the Indian languages correspond to this significant feature. This however is outside the scope of the present study. Unlike the theme of closeness and identification between mothers and daughters that can be found in the narratives of Black women writers and in Dalit women's autobiographies read in translation, the portrayal of mothers and daughters in these novels is quite different from the portrayal of mothers and daughters in the other two genres of writing. A reading of these novels reveals a difficulty in forging meaningful ties between mothers and daughters. In these stories mothers and daughters labour under feelings of alienation and estrangement and attempts at establishing meaningful communication are difficult to come by. Much of the postcolonial literature on gender discusses the subject of women's sexuality in the

context of the nation. It is interesting to note that creative work by women authors have tried to fill this lacunae in feminist studies through a representation of the mother-daughter relationship. Such works take a critical look at the hegemonic ideal of motherhood and its affect on the lived identities of women through an examination of the mother-daughter relationship.

Class and caste intervene in shaping women's subjectivity. This difference in location can provide an alternative perspective on mothers and motherhood and how this can affect patterns in mother-daughter relations. Given the hierarchal nature of Indian society where class and caste affiliations are the determining factors of social privilege or exclusion, it may perhaps not be unjustified to suggest that the affiliation to such social grouping can have a self-limiting structure. The category of gender and 'woman' then clearly cannot be studied in isolation from contexts of class and caste which are important in constituting the subjectivities of women that function to keep intact and reproduce those very hierarchies which define the normative structures of patriarchy. Is it then possible to view the conflicted nature of the mother-daughter relationship to be an outcome of social location and the values enshrined in the idea of a self-denying motherhood?

#### IV. Selection of Primary Texts

This thesis looks at a selection of six novels. These novels are Anjana Appachana's *Listening Now* (1998); Shashi Deshpande's *Small Remedies* (2000) and *Moving On* (2004); Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998); Kavery Nambisan's *Mango-Coloured Fish* (1998) and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997). All of these novels were written and published in the last ten years or so, a fact that indicates the growing presence of

women authors in contemporary Indian English Fiction in English. These novels not only focus on the theme of conflicted or non-normative mother-daughter relationships but also make a statement about female sexuality and desire. The novels convey a more subtle and nuanced perspective on sexuality and motherhood than the conventionally attributed ideas of motherhood in terms of images of extreme veneration or outright rejection. These novels seem to offer paradigmatic structures through which we can better explore the theme of conflicted mother-daughter relationship. These structures may be divided into three predominant and typical sets of issues which constitute chapters three, four and five respectively.

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter; Chapter 2 gives the main theoretical perspectives available on the subject which the subsequent chapters will draw upon for analysis of the primary texts. Each of the subsequent chapters is organized around a central theme. Chapter 3 is titled “Feminist Mothers”. It will look at the cultural contradiction between the dominant ideas on motherhood and the lived experience of motherhood. This will be studied with reference to Shashi Deshpande’s novels *Small Remedies* and *Moving On*. Chapter 4 is titled “Difficult Mothers”. It will look at the psychosocial development of women under patriarchy and the reproduction of female subordination through the institution of motherhood. Chapter 5 is titled “Mothers as Matriarchs”. This chapter will look at gender bias as a recurring theme in women’s lives where women of the older generation uphold this inequality. This will be studied with reference to Kavery Nambisan’s *Mango-Coloured Fish* (1998) and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997). Chapter 6 offers a few remarks by way of conclusions.

## Chapterization

The following is a chapter wise distribution of the proposed study:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Mothers and Daughters: Themes and Contexts

Chapter 3: Feminist Mothers

Chapter 4: Difficult Mothers

Chapter 5: Mothers as Matriarchs

Chapter 6: Conclusion

## Theoretical Framework and Methodology

There is a great deal of debate on the subject of appropriate methodology for scholarship about women. Because feminism is involved in so many disciplines, questions pertaining to appropriate methodology have always been controversial. Women's studies is known to be an interdisciplinary field that draws on many different disciplines. Scholarship about women now exists in a number of fields each of which may use different methodology. It may also be noted that feminist work in different domains of knowledge raises different issues. Feminist work related to medical science, for example, raises different issues from feminist work in the fields of literature, sociology or interdisciplinary women's studies. It is now generally agreed that scholarship about women cannot have only one methodological approach. The present study is mainly grounded in literary analysis. As such it relies on a mix of theoretical perspectives such as postcolonial feminism, cultural

studies, subaltern studies and feminist anthropology so that it is possible to see the subject from as many perspectives as possible.

## V. A brief overview of chapters

### Chapter 1 : Introduction

The first chapter is a general introduction to the work. Section I briefly introduces the context. It provides a historical overview of the development of feminism in India and its relation to the reformulations of social ideologies in general and gender ideologies in particular through the nineteenth century in the context of the construction of the 'new' woman during the nationalist movement; Section II discusses the theme of mother-daughter relationship in the context of Indian Women's Fiction in English; Section III lays out the main objective and hypothesis of the study; Section IV gives an outline of the structure of the thesis, while the last section, Section V, summarizes all the chapters.

### Chapter 2 : Mothers and Daughters: Themes and Contexts

This chapter outlines the general background of the study in the context of the various theoretical perspectives available on the subject.

The relationship between feminism and motherhood is a problematic one and it has generated a number of debates within the feminist movement. Feminist thinking on motherhood emerged during the decades of the sixties and the seventies through the eighties. Feminist critiques of motherhood first emerged in the writings of Simone de Beauvoir, Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millet and Betty Friedan. Their writings were concerned with the demystification of motherhood, a view that considered motherhood as the root of women's

social and economic exploitation. This view was shared by many during the second wave feminist movement. Feminist writers such as Betty Friedan and Shulamith Firestone felt that for women to have a sense of personal autonomy and identity that was grounded outside the family, women must have some amount of freedom from the burden of reproduction. Second wave feminists felt that motherhood prevented women from realizing their full potential. As such to affirm motherhood is to indirectly encourage women's subordination. Women must be allowed the freedom of choice to embrace or reject motherhood.

During the seventies and the eighties there was a shift in the terms of the debate on motherhood. These decades saw the reemergence of a positive value in women's mothering function. Instead of denigrating motherhood, the new tide of feminism celebrated women's power to give birth while it criticized the patriarchal structures of society that exploited women's reproductive powers. Feminists like Nancy Chodorow, Dorothy Dinnerstein and Adrienne Rich tried to bring awareness to the patriarchal ideology behind the institution of motherhood and to explore the relationship between women as individuals and as mothers. While Nancy Chodorow offered a psychoanalytic account of why women want to mother, Dorothy Dinnerstein focused on the structural inequalities within family and social relationships that naturalizes women's motherhood and childrearing as the typical social models for women. Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976) looked at the social conditions that shaped the experience of motherhood.

The third and ongoing phase of engagement with motherhood combines some of these earlier concerns with new insights. Current perspectives on motherhood debate on issues such as the reconceptualization of family forms, the use of reproductive technologies,

surrogate motherhood and abortion. These insights provided by western feminist thinkers as well as work done in the Indian context will be used to analyze the novels under study in subsequent chapters.

### Chapter 3: Feminist Mothers

This chapter analyzes two of Shashi Deshpande's novels *Small Remedies* (2000) and *Moving On* (2004) in order to see how the construction of womanhood as motherhood and the ideals enshrined within it interferes and creates conflict within the mother-daughter relationship. Feminist theorizing on motherhood have indicated the primal importance of the mother-daughter bond in determining a sense of self in women. Nancy Chodorow for instance had indicated that women want to recreate the closeness and intimacy of the mother-daughter bond by becoming mothers themselves. While this perspective is not an uncommon one, literary representations in fiction by women have tried to enquire about the constraining constructions of motherhood that prevents such identification within mother-daughter relationships. The literary representation of mothers and daughters in these two novels show how the reality of motherhood and the expectations of society that reinforce a good mother paradigm present a problem for the mother-daughter relationship which in itself present a stinging critique of patriarchal values.

*Small Remedies* presents two different aspects of the mother-daughter relationship portrayed through the mother-daughter relationship between Bai and her daughter Munni and through the relationship between Leela and Madhu. Savitribai Indorekar or Bai as she is known is a famous singer, who renounces her marriage to pursue a career in music. Born into a conservative Brahman family and married at a young age, Bai's love for music pushes

her to put aside the roles of wife and mother and follow her dream to be a professional singer. This in itself was a bold decision for a woman to take coming from a traditional family as the pursuit of music as a profession was only open to men. Women artistes had a limited role to play and were not taken seriously. It was viewed as inappropriate for a woman from a respectable family to be seen performing publicly. This is evident from the way Bai's guru Pandit Kashinath Buwa refuses to teach her music because she is a woman. Seen against this background Bai's decision to leave her husband to fulfill her dream speaks of her courage and determination to forge a path of her own against the expectations of society. But her decision to choose a life for herself puts her in a complicated situation with her daughter Munni who finds it extremely difficult to accept the nontraditional lifestyle of her mother. Munni would rather like her mother to be like other mothers who devote their time and attention solely to domesticity. While the conflict between Bai and Munni underscores patriarchal culture's tendency to view women in terms of a socially mandated good mother image it also points to the importance of viewing mothers as individuals and subjects.

On the other hand is the relationship between Leela and Madhu. Although not her biological mother, Leela shares a deep bond with Madhu. Madhu who lost her mother as a child is brought up by her father. After his death Leela takes on the role of a surrogate parent to Madhu and both of them share a warm bond. Leela represents a happy cooperation between being a mother and attending to the demands of her work. In fact it is Leela who encourages Madhu not to stop working after she is married and gives birth to her son Aditya. Both Leela and Bai embody an ambivalence and offer resistance to forms of conventional motherhood as they both choose unusual ways to express their maternal identities: Bai by

naming her daughter Munni as Meenakshi Indorekar i.e with her own last name while Leela creates an alternative mothering identity that has its roots in connection and empathy rather than being biologically defined.

A similar theme is explored through the portrayal of the difficult mother-daughter relationship between Mai and Jiji. Just like Bai in *Small Remedies*, Mai prefers to nurture her creativity through her writing. Although she does not openly rebel against being a mother like Bai, she does have a questioning attitude towards social norms and expectations and is not very comfortable with motherhood. Thus Bai and Leela, Mai and later on her daughter Jiji, through their experiences of birthing and mothering question and challenge valorizations of motherhood fostered by conservative patriarchies.

#### Chapter 4 : Difficult Mothers

This chapter comprises an analysis of two novels, Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) and Anjana Appachana's *Listening Now* (1998) to look at ways by which the discourse of femininity is used as a regulatory mechanism in the disciplining of bodies and to control female sexuality in the context of postcolonial Indian society. Feminists like Susan Bordo have argued that femininity is inscribed on the body through a number of social mechanisms. Accordingly cultural codes exercise a great deal of power on women by constructing gendered bodies and subjectivities of women. At the same time it is not entirely correct to assume that women blindly submit to the control of such discourses in the reality of everyday lives. This chapter will attempt to demonstrate how the more private structures of feeling in women subtly oppose attempts to control their minds and bodies through an examination of these texts.

Set amidst the time of partition, *Difficult Daughters* narrates the struggle of its protagonist Virmati who is torn between the demands of family duty and her desire for independence. The story is narrated in flashback. This is a time when a new national ideal of femininity was developed. Virmati's desire for education to carve out an identity for herself may be explained in the context of the development of this new ideal of femininity that assigned women to the domestic sphere. Accordingly it was considered a woman's duty to be a wife and mother. Women were to play the role of the nurturer within the realm of the domestic while men acted their independence and autonomy in the outside world. For a woman the natural progression was from marriage to motherhood. In fact during the time the ideology of motherhood was especially eulogized as bearer of sons who struggled for independence. The trope of the nation as mother became a rallying cry during the nationalist movement. While it could successfully bridge the social, political and religious spheres of lives, it led to a view which came to value women on the basis of their biological role. This belief became firmly entrenched among middle class consciousness. It gave rise to the idea that equated femininity with domesticity, which became a self-limiting bind for young women in which their developmental needs were overlooked.

Virmati is thus trained from an early age to be a surrogate mother to her siblings. But Virmati chooses the path of self-development and gratification in the outside world. This is a cause of inner tension in Virmati's life because her expectations do not correspond to the societal framework of feminine conduct. From the standpoint of her mother Kasturi Virmati's choices are seen as failures, which only succeed in bringing disgrace on the family. Virmati attempts to fit in the ideas of modernity into her life under the influence of her professor husband which further alienates her from her family, especially her mother.

The novel thus questions the actuality of the situation in which women can have education but do not have the power or freedom to choose for themselves. Later on when she has a daughter of her own Virmati tries to teach her to 'adjust, compromise and adapt'. She is unable to forge a strong bond with Ida perhaps because she ends up imposing the same limitations on her daughter that she had resisted as a daughter. Ida remembers her mother as a bad tempered woman and she cannot recall a time when it was right between them. She describes her mother's presence as a hindrance. It was only after Virmati's death Ida begins to see her mother not simply as a 'mother'. She tries to probe into those parts of her mother's life that stores the submerged memories of another Virmati, as a young woman committed to her goal of establishing an identity of her own. Ida's attitude towards her mother's sexuality offers an alternate perspective on the elision between the maternal and the feminine in patriarchal cultures in which women are silenced as mothers. The exploration of conflict in mother-daughter relationship between Virmati and Ida thus questions the construction of an identity of motherhood that denies the mother's sexuality and it also problematizes the theme of how the daughter confronts her mother's sexuality.

A similar theme is explored in *Listening Now* that examines the price of non-conformity for women in the light of the mother-daughter bond. *Listening Now* is about the life of Padma, the main protagonist, and her daughter Mallika. The mother and daughter share an intense bond, where the daughter seems to be somewhat protective of the mother's vulnerability. Padma is an unwed mother. Carrying a burden of guilt and shame, Padma hides the fact of Mallika's illegitimate birth from her daughter. Her friends Madhu and Anu and her mother and sister help her in hiding the circumstances of Mallika's birth. Padma realizes that the weight of raising a daughter alone is more than what she can handle. Padma

realizes that the price of non-conformity for women is too great; she is forced by her peculiar circumstances to live a life of secrecy and shame. While the idea of maternal altruism is an accepted fact, the novel presents an interesting side of motherhood in which maternal altruism functions in a subtle way in securing one's aim. This is mainly presented through the character of Padma's mother Rukmini. In spite of not being educated Rukmini is a shrewd woman who knows how to get what she wants from her husband and family and maintains her power in the family. The two novels explore mother-daughter relationships from a context in which non-conformism in the mother is a problem for the daughter.

## Chapter 5 : Mothers as Matriarchs

This chapter will deal with age related hierarchy in the context of the mother-daughter relationship. While this study as a whole focuses on the theme of conflicted mother-daughter relationships in Indian Women's Fiction in English, this particular chapter will analyse the mother-daughter theme through the analytical grid of age, class and caste hierarchies. This will be done through the analysis of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Kavery Nambisan's *Mango-Coloured Fish* (1998). In this context, the chapter will concentrate on the concept of the matriarch, and the manner in which it plays out in a wide range of settings.

The idea of the matriarch has social and cultural significance especially for women in patriarchal settings where there is limited access to opportunities for self-definition. A large measure of the importance attached to the status of the matriarch comes from age related hierarchies. It may also be noted that women can become matriarchs only after successfully completing and living out the roles of wife and mother. Deniz Kandiyoti has

explained this situation in terms of a 'patriarchal bargain' where women strategize and bargain for power in a system that renders them powerless (Kandiyoti 274-290). The matriarch is thus a powerful participant in social and family situations. The notion of a matriarch is more generally associated with hierarchal relationships. It is particularly associated with the antagonistic relationship between mothers-in law and daughters-in-law. In this chapter the idea of the matriarch is used not to delineate the competitive nature of the former, but it will be seen in relation to mothers and daughters. This dichotomy within the mother-daughter dyad undermines the popular sentiment of warm attachment. While not denying that such warm attachments do exist, the main aim of the chapter will be to explore a less discussed facet of the relationship, the powerful, domineering and intrusive presence of the matriarch who uses her power to maintain the status quo.

In *The God of Small Things* this aspect of the mother-daughter relationship is presented through the relations between Ammu and her mother Mammachi. Mammachi is the matriarch of the family. As the wife of John Ippe, Mammachi has a good social standing. In private Mammachi had to endure the cruelty of her husband. Ippe presents a picture of a successful, happy family man but in private he is a cruel husband and father. Both Ammu and Mammachi suffer violence at home for years. Yet these experiences shared by both of them do not create any warmth or solidarity between them. Ammu as the daughter has to suffer neglect and deprivation. She is not allowed to complete her education as her father thought it an unnecessary expense for a girl whereas Chaco, her brother, is sent to a foreign university for an education even though it depletes the resources of the family significantly. Mammachi's adoration of Chaco is partly understandable; Chaco helped stop the regular violence that she had to undergo at the hands of her husband. But as it appears, this is not the

only cause of her devotion to Chaco. Rather it is also because he is the son of the family, the sole male heir of Ayemenem.

On the other hand Ammu and her children Rahel and Estha are treated as outcasts in the family. In fact the lack of warmth and attention towards Ammu is conveyed to the reader in a number of ways. As a daughter and a divorcee who married a Hindu, it is not just Ammu but her two children Rahel and Estha whose outsider status in the family is constantly emphasized by Mammachi and Baby Kochamma. Ammu does her best to maintain her dignity despite the difficulties she has to endure. But when Mammachi and Baby Kochamma learn of her involvement with Velutha, a lower caste paravan, it leads to an outrage in the family followed by Ammu's confinement and the murder of Velutha.

As an upper caste Syrian Christian woman Ammu does the unthinkable by loving Velutha. He is persecuted and beaten to death by the local police when Baby Kochamma falsely implicates Velutha of rape. In the whole drama surrounding the Ammu-Velutha affair, it is Baby Kochamma and Mammachi who are mainly responsible for the fated end of their lives. Baby Kochamma is jealous of Ammu because she is a bold, fearless woman who refuses to be a victim of male oppression; she dares to struggle as a manless woman. This hostility and resentment increases after Ammu divorces her alcoholic husband and returns to her home in Ayemenem. Ammu is unlike Baby Kochamma and Mammachi in many ways. Mammachi endures years of domestic violence and Baby Kochamma suffers from a sense of unrequited love. She is allowed to pursue an education only after it becomes clear to her father that she had passed the marriageable age. Thus both Mammachi and Baby Kochamma are dependent on the goodwill of the male members of their family to secure their interests.

This is the reason both Mammachi and Baby Kochamma always try to please Chaco in whatever way they can. Mammachi therefore overlooks Chaco's escapades with lower caste women as "men's needs" but she is livid with rage over Ammu's affair with Velutha. When Baby Kochamma and Mammachi learn about Ammu and Velutha, they retaliate; Ammu is locked up in her room and Baby Kochamma tells the police that Velutha has raped Ammu. The novel thus presents a situation where the mother figure is a powerful person but who instead of being an agent of change she uses her power over her family to perpetuate the inequalities of caste and gender.

A similar state of affairs is visible in *Mango-Coloured Fish* where the tensions in the mother-daughter relationship are caused by the overly possessive attitude of the mother. In *Mango-Coloured Fish*, Shari must escape from the influence of her domineering mother if she is to discover what she wants from her life and establish and find a sense of self within her own consciousness. It has been pointed out elsewhere in the earlier discussion that class and caste are significant factors that determine social position. It also plays an important role in shaping a maternal sensibility. If it is accepted that mothers socialize their children into the rationale of the particular class or caste position, then clearly the values attached to such social markers must be first integrated within the assigned mother role.

This is seen in the way Shari's family tries to advance their social position by marrying Shari into a wealthy family. Thus the aspirant family, especially her mother, desperately tries to marry her to Gautam who will advance Shari's position socially. Shari is reluctant to marry Gautam as she loves Naren, a blind poor teacher. It has been pointed out that the family is the new site of reproduction of social and gender inequality in India

(Beteille 435-51). Shari's mother plays the role of the matriarch who tries to secure social advantages for her daughters through the traditional route of marriage and motherhood instead of encouraging Shari to move towards economic and emotional self-sufficiency. In contrast to her mother, Shari's brother and her father demonstrate a more affirmative position. Both of them encourage Shari to discover her own individuality, which draws opposition from Shari's mother. Shari's mother as the powerful matriarch of the family is the one who shows more social conservatism than the father or brother who are presented as more progressive and tolerant of the daughter's need to individuate. The discussion of these two novels demonstrates how women are guilty often of maintaining the status quo. This chapter looks at the theme of mother-daughter conflict from such a perspective.

## Chapter 6 : Conclusion

It is now recognized that the mother-daughter bond is vital to the healthy development of female identity. It is also used as a metaphor in feminist studies to understand women's relationships more widely. In a sense it describes both the continuities and the discontinuities of issues that have been the concern of feminists at different points of history in the emergence of the feminist movement. In whatever context we may choose to view, the mother-daughter relationship can provide a perspective on the formation of women's identity in patriarchal settings. Despite this, the mother-daughter relationship has not received sufficient attention in feminist theory in India. In the context of Indian Women's Fiction in English the mother-daughter relationship is often depicted as a fraught relationship. This interpretation of the mother-daughter relationship is significantly different

from what we find in the representations of mothers and daughters in other related genres of women's writing such as Black women's writing and Dalit women's autobiographies.

In these two genres of writing the mother daughter relationship is experienced as an empowering bond. The closeness and connection that characterize the mother-daughter relationship in Black women's writing and in Dalit women's narratives attests to the powerful presence of the mother figure. In fact empowerment through education is a recurrent theme in many Dalit women's testimonies. The life narratives of Dalit women, for instance, show a strong sense of self and an awareness of the humanizing capacity of education to liberate the subject. Narrating lives of pain and humiliation, Dalit life narratives by women often recall how often mothers played an important role in ensuring education for daughters. For instance in her autobiography, Shanta Bai Dhanaji recalls how her mother encouraged her to complete her education, despite the many problems at home. The powerful presence of the mother figure is revealed in the way she describes her mother's enthusiasm for education:

Experience was her guru, she had a tremendous fighting spirit. I feel, the more she had to struggle the stronger became her will to fight and the brighter the fire within. Besides now she had no more the support of Baba, my father. That was why she became absolutely confident and self-resilient.

(qtd. in Rege; trans. Maya Pandit 24-5)

Through a discussion of the mother-daughter relationship in the selected works of fiction, this study tries to survey the emotional significance of the mother-daughter relationship and how it is constituted within webs of discourse and relations of power.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Hindu Code Bill (1941-56), which tried to arrive at, a social consensus on family laws for the majority of Hindu community in India brought out the fractured social morality on motherhood in Indian society.

<sup>2</sup> Gita Aravamudan. *Disappearing Daughters: The Tragedy of Female Infanticide*. New Delhi: Penguin India, 2007. The book provides a compelling account of female foeticide in India. One of the startling insights provided by the writer is about the common assumption that female foeticide happens only among the poor. Contrary to this perception Aravamudan's work reveals the rich and the educated in urban areas equally practice that female foeticide. Her investigation reveals that there is an intimate link between female foeticide and factors like wealth, education, success of family planning, and medical progress. It is found that all too often these factors actually work against women. Her study found that educated women, especially housewives, are also likely to practice female foeticide mainly because they are unhappy with their situation and would prefer to have sons.

## Chapter 2

### Mothers and Daughters: Themes and Contexts

This chapter outlines the various theoretical perspectives available on the subject of the mother-daughter relationship. It also incorporates a discussion on gender and patriarchy, as it exists in India and the politics of gender and reproductive health in India vis-à-vis the girl child as it frames the discourse of motherhood in India. The chapter is divided into nine sections, each of which discusses a certain facet of the argument. Section I is a brief history of feminist studies in motherhood. It examines some of the major themes that have emerged from the time of the second wave feminist movement during the sixties and the seventies to the present time. Section II is an examination of how motherhood is theorized in Black feminist writing. Section III discusses the mother-daughter relationship from the standpoint of Anglo-American feminist psychoanalytic theory. Section IV is a discussion of gender and patriarchy, which examines the notion of ‘bargaining’ by women within family and social relationships in order to understand how structures of patriarchy impact the lives of women. Section V is a discussion of motherhood in the context of patriarchy in Indian society. It is an examination of how women are positioned within the discourse of motherhood in Indian society. Section VI is a discussion of the status of women, especially the girl child, in Indian society and discusses it in the light of evidence from sociological studies that suggest the prevalence of son preference as a grim reality of Indian life. Section VII is a discussion of gender and reproductive politics in India, especially the use of Assisted Reproductive Technologies. It explores the question of whether patriarchal beliefs aided by technology have led to the creation of new patriarchies

that subtly disempower women and girls. Section VIII and Section IX are a summing up of the main points in the previous sections and is a brief discussion of the significance of the theme in relation to its representations in Indian Women's Fiction in English.

Drawing on autobiographical elements, Adrienne Rich described the mother-daughter relationship as a bond that held the potential for the greatest mutuality or the most painful estrangement. Rich's writing was part of an effort to know about women's everyday lives as they related to other women in their lives. Feminist explorations of women's issues have addressed women's subordinate status in relation to men but few studies have tried to deal with the issue of women's relation with other women in their own families and their marital homes. By writing about the mother-daughter bond Rich was in fact pointing to the relative absence of writing on female relations, especially the mother-daughter bond which she feels has been overlooked in the annals of patriarchy (226). Whether it is theology, art sociology or psychoanalytic theory, it is the mother-son dyad that is privileged; the mother-daughter bond is trivialized and minimized. As Rich points out "daughters have been nullified by silence" (226) and consequently a distinct female world separate from the world of male concerns, a world in which women as mothers and daughters had an important place is lost to us: "the loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy" (237). In most cultures the mother-daughter bond remains underrepresented. Indian culture also foregrounds the mother-son relationship and it is difficult to find a tradition of representations of mother-daughter relationship in India. In Indian mythology, literature and art we can reasonably expect to find an abundance of stories that speaks of mothers as figures of strength, courage and fortitude, but there are very few instances of powerful mother-daughter connections to be found among them. Radhika

Mohanram has highlighted this silence surrounding the mother-daughter bond in India. As she rightly points out the problem of studying mother-daughter relationship in Indian contexts is that of locating materials rather than its interpretation which suggests that it does not exist or has not been articulated in the cultural history (20).<sup>1</sup>

The patrilineal nature of Indian family life often overlooks women's relationships with other women. The mother-daughter bond is one such area, which can tell about the kind of connections women maintained with other women from their natal families, that is their mothers and grandmothers, and with the female members in their marital homes. Given the normative structure of family life in India, women's embeddedness in relationships is a truism. This is evident from personal narratives of women and ethnographic records (Gulati and Bagchi).<sup>2</sup> Despite being constrained by the social roles of wife and mother many of these stories tell about the quiet resilience of ordinary women who struggled to find a place for themselves. These narratives speak of the role mothers often play in the lives of their daughters, whether for better or for worse. Often the mother's unmet demand for personal space spurs in the daughter a similar need which she can later on concretize through the means of education. Sometimes it is "the role of renegade predecessors in the family who set out a pattern of independence that paved the way for, or, inspired" a daughter to carve out an independent path on her own (Gulati and Bagchi 12). Several women authors speak of the determining influence their mothers and grandmothers had when they "came forward in situations of stress to exhibit unforeseen strengths and flexibility" which helped the daughters to achieve their own goals (11). All of these relationships are not smooth and mothers have been known to be cruel and oppressive towards daughters as many women's personal narratives suggest, contrary to the cultural idea of the self-sacrificing good mother.

Interviews with women, personal narratives and ethnographic literature are a good example of this, which record the diverse experiences of the mother-daughter bond. These narratives also point to the women's perception about their situations and even though not overly bitter most consider the fact of "being born female into a culture that denigrated, distrusted and ultimately feared women" as the biggest obstacle of all (12). In *A Room of One's Own* Woolf writes: "we think back through our mothers if we are woman" (72). The daughters in these stories think back by trying to understand the constrained circumstances of the mother's life which also propels the daughters to improve their own chances through education and self-awareness. As Adrienne Rich states,

The most notable fact that culture imprints on women is the sense of our limits. The most important thing one woman can do for another is to illuminate and expand her sense of actual possibilities. For a mother, this means more than contending with the reductive images of females.... It means that the mother herself is trying to expand the limits of her life. *To refuse to be a victim*: and then to go on from there. (emphasis in original, 246)

It means that the mother can positively influence the daughter towards strength and empowerment whereas patriarchal attitudes negatively impact women by constantly role splitting them into the "other". Mothering and non-mothering thus acquire significance in patriarchal culture as women's reproductive and biological capacities are used to severely disadvantage them; that which is most hers is stolen from her. A mother is both more and less than a person. The mother's identity as a person in her own right separate from her role as a mother is very easily overlooked. Women have been idealized and also exploited as

mothers and to affirm women's intrinsic human value in the face of subtly disempowering and reductive images is an extremely difficult task.

In the context of Indian Writing in English, recent years have seen creative work by women authors, fiction and short stories, that have explored this theme. Movies made in regional languages have also tried to deal with the theme but the mother-son dyad has remained the popular subject of mainstream cinema in India.<sup>3</sup> Indian culture continues to be largely patriarchal in orientation with the general subordination of women (Kakar and Kakar *The Indians* 41). It however needs to be mentioned that the status of women in India cannot be seen solely through the lens of patriarchy as women's identities are formed to a great extent by the class, caste, community and ethnic group to which they belong. Even though similarities to women in other patriarchal societies do exist, with respect to the formation of gender identity there is a great deal of diversity among women within India which calls for a more focused and nuanced understanding. The modern Indian urban woman, clearly a product of the emergence of the growing middle class in the last few decades, is one of the most important developments in the transformation of Indian society. Caught between the crossfire of changing ideologies, Indian women find themselves in the precarious position of having to negotiate the tension between traditional and modern attitudes. Within the growing middle class it is the woman who occupies the pivot of all the changes happening in contemporary Indian society. Tradition still continues to influence middle class women's minds that exonerate women's domestic and maternal roles as central to her identity. How women respond to these changes is not an easy question to answer but if the spurt in new themes and genres in women's writing in India is any indication of social transformation then women have started to assert their right to their mind and body against the claim by

patriarchal ideologies. The subsequent chapters will examine in greater detail some of the themes and issues related to the discussion of mother-daughter relationship and its representation in women's writing in India.

## I . A Brief History of Feminist Theory on Mothering

Motherhood has been studied from a variety of perspectives. Feminist thinking on motherhood in the west developed in three stages during the decades of the sixties and the seventies through the eighties. Feminist critique of motherhood begins in the sixties with the writings of Simone de Beauvoir, Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millet and Betty Friedan who not only opened up the discussion on mothering, motherhood and feminine roles but also raised the important issue of viewing the mother as a subject (Featherson and Holloway). In mothering practices it has always been children's needs and perspectives that have been prioritized over that of the mother. Studies in feminism have tried to deal with women's issues in relation to men and children. These second wave feminists were highly critical of the role motherhood played in women's oppression. The seventies however saw a recuperation of the mothering role. Feminists tried to revise and reinterpret motherhood to give a different perspective on difference. The mid-seventies saw a proliferation of writing on the subject of motherhood in the works of feminists like Adrienne Rich, Nancy Chodorow, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Juliet Mitchell, Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva. In the third and on going engagement with motherhood studies, there is a shift in perspective from early feminist attack and denigration of motherhood to subsequent feminist celebration and appropriation of mothering as work. Current studies on motherhood and

mothering practices integrate and complicate previous insights with new conceptual understanding of problems that were earlier ignored (Hansen 5-6).

One of the key questions that remains unanswered for feminist theorizing on mothers and motherhood beginning from the sixties has been finding the construction/definition of motherhood which is the most helpful for mothers (Holloway and Featherstone). Feminist perspectives on motherhood have come from a variety of disciplines including psychoanalysis and philosophy. In recent years there has been a shift in focus in psychoanalytic studies. The andocentric Freudian model of psychoanalytic development in young boys and girls excludes the role of the mother in the pre-oedipal stage and has been widely critiqued by feminists. Freud himself admitted his lack of understanding of female subjectivity (Lectures). Freud privileges the role of the father in the early development of the girl child. According to Freud, the young girl substitutes the mother as the love object with the father when she discovers the lack of the male organ in the mother. The girl child needs male acceptance and approval to validate her femininity (Schreurs). Feminist psychoanalysts have critiqued this view. Irigaray, for instance, critiques psychoanalysis for its theoretical bias. According to her psychoanalysis is unaware of the historical and philosophical determinants of its own discourse (qtd. in Whitford 46-47) and takes issue with the fact that psychoanalytic tradition beginning with Freud and Lacan have systematically effaced maternal subjectivity by ignoring the crucial pre-oedipal stage where the infant's first contact is with the mother before its entry into the symbolic. The infant's knowledge and experience is here based on contact with the maternal body. Irigaray's main thesis is that the whole of Western culture rests on the murder of the mother (Whitford 47). Irigaray believes the pre-oedipal stage to play a crucial role in developing

gender subjectivity. This is particularly so for the girl child whose first love object is the mother and one of Irigaray's chief interests is the mother-daughter bond, which she considers is devalued in patriarchal society. Her formulation of the theory of sexual difference is based on her idea that women need to have an identity as women, separate from their identity as mother: "The relationship with the mother needs to be brought out of silence and into representation...with emphasis on the identity of women as women, separate from their identity as mother" (Whitford 25-26).

The significance of the first contact with the maternal body and its importance in the psychosexual development of the subject is the main argument of Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject. Kristeva signifies the maternal body as "abject". Abject literally means to cast out (Andermahar 7). It constitutes a moment of transition and recognition, a halfway position, at the level of individual psychosexual development, when "we separated ourselves from the mother, when we began to recognize a boundary between "me" and other, between "me" and "(m)other" (qtd. in Felluga). As she writes in "Stabat Mater":

Let us call "maternal" the ambivalent principle that is bound to the species, On the one hand, and on the other stems from an identity catastrophe that causes the name to topple over into the un-nameable that one imagines as femininity, non-language or body. (qtd. in West)

The abject is therefore both a threat and a response to the breakdown of meaning, a reestablishment of "primal repression." It is that which "disturbs identity, system order" (qtd. in Andermahr 7). While Irigaray's arguments seem to point to a systematic repression of the maternal in the pre-oedipal phase before the entry into the symbolic order that may have consequences for other forms of mothering, Kristeva's main emphasis is on the

problem of separation and differentiation at the level of the individual. Although Kristeva has been criticized as idealizing the maternal, Susan Rubin Sulaiman, art historian and critic, feels that Kristeva has used the figure of the mother as “dissident” whether male or female (Sulaiman 46). In analysis of maternal narratives Sulaiman offers the concept of the “playful mother”, a concept that views motherhood as a “potentially subversive cultural and social force” (46). This view of the mother associates the mother “not only with taking care of children, but also with sexual desire, intellectual power and political engagement” (46). Her position is similar to that of Helen Cixous who stressed the “erotic and sensual aspect of the mother’s relationship to the child in giving birth or breast feeding” (qtd. in Sulaiman 46).

Feminist theoreticians and psychoanalysts agree that gender identity develops most deeply through the preverbal and nonrational experience and on the importance of the problem of differentiation in the formation of women’s core identity. The inability to differentiate and individuate from the mother impedes the development of women’s core identity and is an important issue in the examination of the mother-daughter bond (Flax “Mother-Daughter Relationships” 3). According to Jane Flax the problem of separation and individuation have their roots in “social existence, especially patterns of child-rearing” (3). One of the reasons why feminist psychoanalysts fault Freud’s theory of the unconscious is the omission of the social conditions under which child rearing is carried out. The abstract, universal model of Freud’s unconscious fails to address the question of human development as it happens in and through contact with other people in society. Feminists like Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein have emphasized the centrality of the preoedipal stage and the mother’s role in the formation of gender identity “as they develop in and through social relations...” (Flax 3). Dorothy Dinnerstein, for instance, questions gender

arrangements in the *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (1976) and argues for the recognition of the work that women do in relation to child-care. Despite the fact that adult women are the main caretakers for infants and young children their work remains devalued. Dinnerstein's ambitious project draws attention to the private aspects of women's life and the nature of child rearing practices that secure women's sexual subordination and prevent them from leading more productive lives. "To Dinnerstein, this asymmetry in sexual roles is being crucially reinforced by the way we continue (though with less and less biological necessity) to maintain infancy as a kingdom ruled only by mother" (qtd. in Snitow 1). In her seminal work on motherhood, *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich makes a distinction between motherhood and mothering. According to Rich Motherhood represents the patriarchal institution that is deeply restrictive and oppressive for women; mothering represents the non-patriarchal experiences of mothering that are female defined and can be a source of power. Rich highlighted two aspects of patriarchal motherhood: i) that mothering is natural to women and that child rearing is the sole responsibility of the biological mother ii) while the institution of mothering gives them the sole responsibility of child rearing they do not have the power to control the conditions under which they mother. Rich was the first feminist thinker to point out the ambivalent nature of maternity. Rich's work challenged the traditional view of mothers as loving nurturers but that mothers can be victims of violence and are capable of violence themselves. Although Rich was the first to point out the complex relationship between motherhood and mothering, she did not theorize on how the possibility of mothering could be realized. Her contribution lies in altering the conventional understanding and in visualizing a possible form of mothering that gives agency and value to mothers and motherwork. Nancy Chodorow, on the other hand, locates female

subjugation in women's exclusive mothering and calls for shared parenting (Andermahr 188).

Current research on maternal thinking combines perspectives from earlier work that has led to a reconceptualization of family forms—the contracting of families by choice and not by obligation (Rothman). There are demands for adoption rights for gay and lesbian couples and recognition of their families. What emerges is a new terminology of parenting, a technical and legal language that removes affective associations of kinship: “contracting couples”, “surrogate mothers”, “genetic parents”, “gestational motherhood”, “custodial and non-custodial parents”, state-of-the-art-babies—this language has entered the public discourse. The new terminology is a signpost to a new reality, a way of thinking that treats people as objects and commodities. This is most clearly demonstrated in the notion of “surrogate” motherhood. However these new reproductive technologies are more about the “production” of babies and the commodification of women's bodies—the problem of parenting that earlier theorists like Chodorow, Dinnerstein and Rich pointed out still continue to exist. Feminist thinking on motherhood has yet to develop a woman-defined language of motherhood (Rothman). While the earlier definition of motherhood considered it as a status, post-feminist critique of motherhood views mothering as “an activity, as service, as work” and children are the products produced by the labour of mothering (Rothman 7). Current perspectives on mothers also examine the recent trend of women's radical rejection of motherhood towards a childfree feminine identity (Gillespie 122-136) and the everyday resistance practices of childless women in non-western societies to destigmatize themselves (Reissman 111-135). Some of the earlier theorizing on mothering, such as the perspective on shared parenting, a prime concern of Dinnerstein, Rich and

Chodorow, that identified oppression in women's exclusive childrearing work are still relevant to feminist discussions that question why men cannot do mothering work. Cultural representations of mothering still privilege the psychological needs of the child while removing the care-giving mother to the periphery (Everingham 3). The great diversity in mothering practices are also by issues of class, ethnicity and sexuality as mothers does not have control over the social conditions of mothering. Women who are not well placed have to shoulder the burden of mothering at great personal cost: "Mothering, the actual work of it...is underpaid and undervalued work.... The product of that work may well be valued, but that doesn't mean that the work itself, or the worker herself is valued" (Rothman 13). The above discussions on mothering are grounded in the interplay between the biological and the social; perspectives from feminist philosophers such as Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking: Toward A Politics of Peace* (1989) argues for the importance of viewing the mother as a subject in her own right in order to prevent the devaluation of women. She introduced the concept of mothering as work that transcends gender. Ruddick makes a distinction between birth mothers, those who undergo labour, from mothering work, which need not be gendered. According to Ruddick a mother is "a person who takes responsibility for children's lives and for whom providing child care is a significant part of her or his working life. I mean "her or his". Although most mothers have been and are women, mothering is potentially work for men and women. This is not to deny... that there may be biologically based differences in styles of mothering.... I am suggesting that whatever difference might exist between female and male mothers, there is no reason to believe that one sex rather than the other is more capable of doing maternal work". (Ruddick 40-41).

## II . Black Feminist Writing and Motherhood

One of the most significant sources that have contributed to the literature on mothers and motherhood and the mother-daughter bond is Black feminist writing. It is important to note that representations of mothers in Black feminist writing present a different vision of motherhood “one that includes ongoing connection and recognition of the mother’s social position, her strengths and her struggles on behalf of her family and community” (Bassin 6). Adrienne Rich’s *Of Woman Born* made a crucial distinction between the patriarchal institution of motherhood and women’s experience of mothering that both inhibits and encourages creativity. According to Rich “motherhood” refers to “the patriarchal institution of motherhood that is male-defined and controlled and is deeply oppressive to women” while “mothering” refers to women’s experiences of mothering that are female-defined and centered and potentially empowering to women” (O Reilly 2). In writing *Of Woman Born* Adrienne Rich declares, “this book is not an attack on the family or on mothering except as defined and restricted under patriarchy” (qtd. in O Reilly 2). According to Rich patriarchal motherhood demanded from women “a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mother’s bondage, to become individuated and free” (Rich 236).

Studies of American-Indian and Afro-American myths and philosophy suggest an alternate pattern of mothering. In Afro-American traditions of mothering, mothering is a site of power. Rich’s analysis had drawn attention to two interrelated themes in Afro-American motherhood that distinguish it from Western (white, middle class) patriarchal motherhood and had pointed out that mothers and motherhood is crucial to the construction of the Afro-American culture. The Afro-American culture recognizes that

mothers and mothering are what make possible the physical and psychological well-being and empowerment of Afro-American people and the larger Afro-American culture. The focus of black motherhood in both practice and thought, is how to preserve, protect and more generally empower black children so that they may resist racist practices that seek to harm them and grow into adulthood whole and complete. To fulfill the task of empowering children, mothers must hold power in African-American culture and mothering likewise must be valued and supported. (O Reilly 14)

Rich had indicated three traditions of mothering in Afro-American culture that distinguish it from Eurocentric assumptions of motherhood that are also empowering to black mothers and make black motherhood a site of power and resistance. These are: “Other-mothering/Community Mothering”; “Motherhood as Social Activism”; and “Nurturance as Resistance” (qtd. in O’ Reilly 11). The concept of other-mothering has been defined as “acceptance of responsibility for a child not one’s own, in an arrangement that may or may not be formal” (James 45). Njoki Nathain Wane has explained community mothering as an arrangement where women typically past their childbearing years take care of children from the community (112). Both of these survival strategies ensure the psychological and physical well being of children regardless of the presence of the biological mother and hence make empowerment possible. “Biological mothers are expected to care for their children. But African and African-American communities have also recognized that resting one person with full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible. As a result, “othermothers”, women who assist blood-mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities, traditionally have been central to the institution of Black

motherhood” (Collins 47). Community mothering therefore redefines motherhood as a form of social activism and empowers them: “Black women’s feelings of responsibility for nurturing the children in their extended family networks have stimulated a more generalized ethic of care where Black women feel accountable to all the Black community’s children” (Collins 49). Black motherhood thus values mothering work and empowers black women. As Nina Jenkins says black motherhood “is a site where black women can develop a belief in their own empowerment. Black women can see motherhood as providing a base for self-actualization, for acquiring status in the black community and as a catalyst for social activism” (206). A third way in which Afro-American motherhood is constructed as a site of power is in the notion of “nurturance as resistance” where Black women’s “nurturance of children is understood to be an act of resistance” (O Reilly 12). In her work “Homeplace: A Site of Resistance” bell hooks observes the black family as a site of resistance. She states:

Historically, African-American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack) had a radical political dimension. Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid of domination, one’s homeplace was one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where one could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied to us on the outside in the public world. (176)

By loving their children black mothers enact an act of resistance that defies racist discourses that projects blacks as others and objects (O Reilly 12). Black motherhood in this way not only empowers mothers but also makes a strong political statement.

### III . Psychoanalysis and the Mother-Daughter Relationship

Psychoanalytic scholarship on the early stages of development of young children during infancy follows a male centric model. In his later work Freud realized the importance of the preverbal stage in female development. Theoretical and clinical accounts in psychoanalysis on the mother-daughter bond focus on relational issues and unconscious conflicts. Jane Flax's psychoanalytic model of the mother-daughter dyad presents some interesting insights for female development under patriarchal family arrangements. Flax's argument prioritizes the importance of both nurturance and autonomy for women in intimate relationships, particularly in the daughter's association with the mother. But the psychological significance of the bond remains unattainable for many women as patriarchal norms result in conflicting responses within both the mother and daughter and the failure of the mother to support the daughter in meaningful ways creates a measure of estrangement in the mother-daughter dyad. The mother-daughter bond is also important from the point of view of gender identity development. Under the patriarchal system, becoming aware of gender means that the child recognizes that men and women are valued differently. Men are more socially esteemed than women and the forming of gender identity means that the child will internalize the asymmetries of power and esteem (Flax "The Conflict between Nurturance and Autonomy" 173). According to Flax the socioeconomic location of mothers impinges on the mother's ability to provide emotional support to the child. Because the mother receives her training under patriarchy, she harbours deep-seated conflict about being

a woman and a mother. The ambivalent feelings affect her ability to nurture a child. Flax further argues that “mothering is not gender neutral and women relate differently to male and female children” (173). As mothers identify more with their girl child, mothering tends to be more conflict ridden for women with a girl baby and may at times stimulate the mother’s unresolved wishes for nurture. Women also feel more conflicted about demonstrating physical affection with the girl baby because of society’s fear of homophobia. Given the contradictory demands of patriarchal culture that conditions women to be nurturers while asking them to forgo their own need for nurturance, it is not surprising that women feel conflicted about being female even if at an unconscious level. Mothers identify and sympathize with daughters because of the future plight, and for sake of the girl child wish that she could have been born a male. The mother’s unresolved conflicts make it difficult to be emotionally available to the daughter when it is most important to do so: “It is not that women totally lack the experience of being nurtured, but it is rather that their experience takes place within a context in which the mother’s conflicts render the experience less than optimal and in some cases profoundly inadequate” (Flax 175). Because of the contradictory psychological pulls it becomes difficult for the daughter to form a separate self-identity and the need for autonomy demands the severance of symbiotic closeness with the mother. This is experienced as a conflict where the daughter risks losing the mother’s affection in order to realize her need for autonomy. The mother also re-experiences her conflicts about being a female through her daughter and the daughter acts out the mother’s unconscious fears: “Autonomy, rather than being experienced as a way of pleasing the mother and being supported by her, is experienced as a rejection of the mother, for which the daughter in turn will be rejected. The bind is reinforced by her growing

awareness that the world is divided up into male and female. Fathers are on the outside of the family, of the self; while mothers are defined by their role in the family. Fathers symbolize autonomy and independence” (Flax 179).

Thus the conflict between nurturance and autonomy represents the difficulty of reconciling two opposed situations that is further intensified by the patriarchal structure of the family. Flax offers an interesting explanation as to why mothers favour sons over daughters. According to Flax this is an unconscious playing out of the mother’s desire for influence in the outside world through the son. Authority belongs to the father and is passed on to the son after him. By aligning herself with the son the mother claims a share in the control of which may otherwise be unavailable to her in any other situation. In fact women’s chief bargaining power with patriarchy comes through their sons. Deniz Kandiyoti’s analysis of patriarchy shows how women often exploit their matriarch status to gain control in household decision-making. Women, according to Kandiyoti, are preoccupied in fostering life-long loyalty in sons at the expense of the marital bond between the son and wife, which is made secondary to the mother-son bond. In this way the mother herself fulfills her own need for autonomy and achievement. While the woman unconsciously uses her son to express power in the outside world, she depends on the daughter for emotional security and finds it difficult to allow her to individuate.

The competing claims of patriarchal norms and role expectations for women cause rivalry and tension in relations between women and the formation of a female self undivided by conflict is difficult if not impossible to achieve. Women’s autobiographies and psychoanalytic accounts confirm the importance of early mothering particularly in the

context of the mother-daughter relationship. Nancy Chodorow for instance discusses the non-linguistic nature of the early mother-child bond and the physiological and psychological requirement caretaking demands that leads to the assumption that women's mothering role is a natural one, "to see this relationship as a less socially constructed relationship" (74). According to Chodorow what most studies on the mothering role ignore, whether from an anthropological, sociological or psychoanalytic point of view, is the question whose interest does exclusive mothering serve. Chodorow argues that psychoanalytical writing on the development of the early mother-infant relationship confuses the argument of exclusive mothering by the biological mother with the argument for the "necessity of constancy of care and a certain quality of care by someone or some few persons" other than the biological mother (74). She gives a number of examples of studies in parenting that suggest that several people can share mothering without any detrimental effect on the child's well being and there is no clinical evidence to suggest that exclusive mothering gives better care. Rather she feels that exclusive mothering serves the interest of society in maintaining patriarchal structures and produces "achievement oriented men and people with psychologically monogamic tendencies..." (76). It thus reinforces patriarchal values and women's subordination through motherhood in heterosexual relationships. Most accounts of mothering also do not raise the question as to why only women mother. Neither sociological theorists nor psychoanalytic accounts have questioned the assumption as to why women's mothering is seen as natural. One view of mothering favours an explanation of biological determinism while another argument attributes women's mothering to behavioural conformity consequent to socialization. One of the arguments given for this assumption is the lactation and pregnancy function of women, which equips them to be mothers. Some

psychoanalysts and gynecologists believe that women have a maternal instinct which makes it natural for them to mother. However the argument for the biological basis of parenting in humans is at best speculative and no conclusive proof has been found. Another line of argument put forward is the role training argument, which suggests that women's mothering is a learned behaviour acquired through the process of gender role socialization. Girls identify with their mothers and a large part of the training in gender socialization prepares them to play their future roles of wife and mother. Chodorow argues "women's capacities for mothering and abilities to get gratification from it are strongly internalized and psychologically enforced. Women are prepared psychologically for mothering through the developmental situation in which they grow up, and in which women have mothered them" (39).

According to Chodorow while these flaws do not invalidate the psychoanalytic claims they do show how to read it. It in effect points to the flaws in clinical and theoretical accounts that do not question why women and not men parent. Chodorow claims that the explanation for this can be found in the early development in the mother-daughter bond. The pre-oedipal experiences of both boys and girls differ; separation and individuation remains key themes in the pre-oedipal development of the girl child and the preoccupation with these issues are prolonged in a way for the girl that they are not for the boy. These issues remain dormant throughout childhood and are revisited again during adolescence when the daughter feels the need to reorient the mother-daughter bond in a way that both empowers her and liberates her emotionally. Gender differences are produced in the pre-oedipal period and are a result of the "asymmetrical organization of parenting which founds our family structure" (108-110). Chodorow's views support Flax's argument that mothers' feel more conflicted

about their bond with the daughter than with that of the son. They tend to identify with their daughters and have difficulty in viewing them as separate from them. The issues around separation and individuation remain particularly important for female development and are more important for girls than for boys because “children of both genders growing up in families where women, who have a greater sense of sameness with daughters than sons, perform primary parenting functions” (110). Girls experience adolescence as a period of renewed crisis and conflict. Psychoanalysts have pointed out that the transition to adolescence is more difficult and conflict ridden for girls than for boys and the issues for conflict are about a girl’s relationship to the mother (Blos 1962).

#### IV. What is Patriarchy

Sylvia Walby has defined patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. This definition of patriarchy underlines the importance of viewing patriarchy as a social structure rather than as the exploitative acts of individual men. However, women have a dialectical relationship to patriarchal environment in which they do not live out their lives merely as passive victims trapped in the patriarchal structure but also act out of rational self-interest (Mirchandani). The experiences of women under patriarchy are different as local culture and practices structure patriarchies and these structures have diverse effects on various women’s lives. Expressing a similar view Deniz Kandiyoti says that patriarchy is not monolithic but exists in different forms across different countries, continents, cultures and religions. She gives two general examples of forms of patriarchy: sub-Saharan Africa and classic patriarchy from the Middle East and Asian subcontinent. Her examination of gender relations in sub-Saharan Africa

suggests that women have relative autonomy in negotiations of gender and power and their resistance to patriarchy is found to be more overt than under classic patriarchy. The concept of negotiating power or bargaining under patriarchal conditions is more prevalent in classic patriarchy where patriarchal authority and patrilocal residence are critical issues. It cuts across religions and is mostly practised among the Hindu, Moslem, and Confucianist cultures (Kandiyoti 274-290). Under classic patriarchy girls and women are subordinate to men and are given away in marriage to patriarchal households. Women have less strong ties with their natal homes and their status within the household depends upon their ability to produce sons. The role of sons is critical in this cyclical process - women, according to Kandiyoti, are preoccupied with ensuring the life-long loyalty of their sons, attempting to make the conjugal bond of son and wife secondary to the mother-son filial bond which becomes a form of social control, suppressing romantic intimacy between son and wife.

One way of dismantling such power imbalances, according to Kandiyoti, is market forces. As women enter the labour force and the income of the household increases women may enjoy some freedom from the control of patriarchal households, making their control by mother-in-law more difficult. Women do not live their lives as victims trapped in patriarchal structures. Women's coping strategies, what is termed as the "patriarchal bargain", show that women strategize within the circumscribed nature of patriarchal system in order to enhance their life options.<sup>4</sup> Patriarchal bargain represents the rational choices women make in order to maximize their life options. Women both accommodate and resist male dominated systems and the bargaining is the partial accommodation of patriarchy in order to deal with it in any given society. These strategies vary depending on the class, caste and ethnicity of women and the bargains play an important role in shaping gendered

subjectivities in women. The reproduction of patriarchy happens through the patrilocal household in which the senior male exercises control over everyone including the younger men. In this system women are subordinate not only to the male but also to the senior female, the mother-in-law. Women's status in the household depends upon her ability to produce sons. Under the logic of the bargain women accept the deprivation and hardships as young brides till the time when the young daughter-in-law comes to the same position as the mother-in-law when she will have the same authority and control over the others: "Women's life cycle in the patriarchal extended family is such that the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law" (Kandiyoti 279). However, even when women seem to be able to make choices within the circumscribed limits of the patriarchal system, they do not have the power to change the system as they are already framed by the discourse of patriarchy.

## V. Motherhood in the context of Patriarchy

Kandiyoti's explanation of family relations under classic patriarchy throws light on the way family relations are structured in Indian society. Like in most other cultures, in India too, the household is an important unit within which domestic relations are organized and its significance lies in socializing the different members of the unit. Historians have focused on the social significance of the household in early India and on some of the prescriptive norms that influenced the organization of domestic relations within the household (Roy 3-18). These prescriptive norms from the scriptures have the weight of religious sanction. One of the earliest of Hindu lawgivers Manu had clear directions for the role and function of a

householder and by extension the organization of gender relations within family and within the larger social context. Accordingly male authority and control over women and children are recognized as the guiding principles in the constitution of the family. For women entry into the family was either through marriage or by virtue of being born into it. Death was the only way to exit from the household. The birth of sons was sanctified through rituals. This was seen as a way to strengthen the bonds between the father and son while the girl child was excluded from any such privileges. The girl child thus occupied a marginal position within the family; her membership to her natal family is considered at best a partial affiliation (Roy 11). This inequality between the son and daughter, men and women is reiterated throughout the text and is justified and legitimized on grounds of religious sanction. Kumkum Roy's comments on how family relations are organized within the household suggest the centrality of the wife to the existence of the household even though her function is limited to her role as wife and mother; she is a means to an end "the means of attaining purushartha, the goals of a man's life, especially dharma and kama" (5). The emphasis was on the strict subordination and instrumentality of the wife with clear provision about activities that should be discouraged in women such as singing and dancing. As Roy notes, one of the important instructions was "the need to control the wife" (6).

Feminist scholars like Uma Chakravarti have pointed out how structures of Brahminical patriarchy are integrated into the caste system (271-295). Pointing out the instrumental role played by religious traditions in naturalizing the subordination of women and the lower castes, Chakravarti argues that caste and gender hierarchy are the organizing principle of upper caste social order. The control of women's sexuality was a precondition to the maintaining of caste purity and safe transfer of patrilineal succession. Her discussion of

Nur Yalman's work, which explores the relationship between gender and caste, reveal the control of women's sexuality more than that of men and in the Hindu worldview it is the main principle in social organization where family structure is organized "to preserve land, women and the ritual quality within it" (25-28). The three are interlinked and it is virtually impossible to sustain this structure without the control of women's sexuality. Hence a great deal of importance is given to the disciplining of the female sexuality. This is usually done through female seclusion and the close monitoring of women's movement (272-73). Her claims are substantiated by textual examples from a number of Brahmanical texts of early India such as the *Manu Dharma Shastra*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* that contain norms of prescriptive behaviour for men and women. In the Vedic texts and the Dharmashastras female nature is constructed as fickle and sinful. References to the fickle nature of women are also found in Buddhist texts of early India (Chakravarti 290). Her analysis also demonstrates how women were co-opted into the system. Women's cooperation was secured through the internalization of ideology, economic dependence, class privilege and veneration upon conforming to its norms. It is clear from her discussions that women did not always simply live in patriarchal cultures as victims but they at times actively collaborated with it for their own ends. Her argument is similar to what others like Kandiyoti have pointed out about women's negotiating strategies. However as Chakravarti points out these were restricted to women from upper caste that stood to gain most from being co-opted within the system. This was also a way to strengthen the foundations of the patriarchal establishment. Thus it is mostly women from upper caste who became its beneficiaries by accepting a marginal status within it.

Critiques of Indian feminism have pointed to the class/caste divide within the feminist movement in India. Women's movement in India is largely viewed as upper caste in orientation because of which women from lower castes have remained by and large outside of its influence. In the circumstance when any or all of these ploys failed it was quite within the bounds of law and religious prescription to use violence. In fact religion sanctioned the use of violence when all else failed. The shift to agricultural economy and urbanization in the Vedic and post-Vedic times saw the emergence and the subsequent establishment of class and caste structure of society (Chakravarti 279). The subordinate and inferior status of women is thus legitimized through the discourse of religion and this rhetoric is used to further strengthen the gendered role within the household by defining access to resources (Roy 7).

Within the economy of the household, women occupied a position of exchangeable resource, with the daughter as someone to be given away, as opposed to the son who was entitled to a share of the inheritance (Roy 7). In the hierarchy of power relations in the domestic domain women have a marginal status. The ascribed inferior status of women has percolated down to influence the legal and medical spheres as well. This is seen in the reform movement in debates around the control of female sexuality during the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century and in the wider discourses on the politics of childbirth in Bengal (Engels). Under conditions of patriarchy motherhood becomes a means to perpetuate male dominance. Patriliney is the central social relationship and women become a means of social and economic exchange between males. Women are defined and valued by their ability to produce sons to carry on the father's name. As seen in the first chapter, children are born to men, women bear the children of men. Motherhood therefore is a crucial

instrument in the domination of men. Men control women as their wives, daughters and also as the mothers of children: “It is a woman’s motherhood that men must control to maintain patriarchy. In a patriarchy, because what is valued is the relationship of a man to his sons women are a vulnerability that men have: to beget these sons, men must pass their seed through the body of a woman” (Rothman 15). While most societies in the world are organized around this idea of patriarchal domination of women to a great extent, there are some societies where the line of descent is traced through the mother, rather than the father. These are known as matrilineal societies. In such a system men rule the women and children who are related to them through their mother’s line; women however are not thought of as the bearers of men’s children, they are a source of connection: “people are not men’s children coming through the bodies of women but the children of women” (Rothman 16). Matrilineal cultures are also a part of the diversity of Indian social life but they are a minor presence in the overall social structure, which remains highly patriarchal in its composition.

The cultural devaluation of women is effected through a variety of rituals that metaphorically view women as powerful representatives of the feminine principle but in reality it works by reinscribing patriarchal values through a subtle manipulation of imagery. The practice of Goddess worship is one such instance. In fact motherhood and mother worship is a phenomenon that can be found in almost every culture. The image of the mother makes for fascinating study. Since early times, the image of the mother has engaged the imagination of cultures throughout the world and has appeared as a central theme in art, mythology, literature and dramatic performance. Artists, poets, novelists, psychologists, historians of religion and anthropologists and many others have studied mothers and the meaning of mother worship. One of the reasons for the abiding interest in mothers may have

been derived partially from the deep early bond that infants develop with an adult, usually the mother, since in most cultures mothers are the primary caregivers. The emotional content of the bond may vary depending upon the cultural background and the individual personality of the mother herself. What is significant is that many of the scholarly works on mothers and mother-child bond point out the ambivalent nature of maternity that is seen to have the power of both absolute creation and destruction.

James M Freemans discusses some of the common themes on mother worship that is found to be present in almost all the cultures across the world. One of these is the ambivalent character of the mother as nurturer and destroyer and the other is the mother as goddess, which is a central cultural symbol that both contains multiple meanings in different contexts and serves as a unifying principle. In the Hindu mythology goddess worship is an accepted practice that has been known from earlier times. Elaborating on the roles and significance of the goddess within Hinduism, David Kinsley argues,

Goddesses in Hindu mythology are generally portrayed as dangerous, violent, and aggressive if they are unmarried and as docile, obedient, and calm if they are married. This reinforces social norms by suggesting that it is necessary for women to marry and express their sexuality in “safe” ways and under male supervision and authority. In the human realm marriage is assumed not only to complete a woman but also to tame her, channeling her dangerous sexual energy in acceptable ways. The god or the male is seen as a civilizing, calming, ordering presence. Alone, goddesses and women are perceived as powerful and dangerous. (202)

The seeming liberality of the dominant tradition therefore becomes a mere instrument to depoliticize the language of male domination. Women are to be adored and venerated only in the prescribed role of submissive wife and mother. Sudhir Kakar has pointed out that the myth of the Devi or the goddess is mainly a hegemonic narrative of the dominant culture and the worship of the powerful feminine principle does not in any way translate into possession of active agency for many women in real life situation as women continue to be treated as objects by families and communities (“Mothers and Infants” 84). The image of the Devi is constructed through the denial of sexuality, choice and freedom of relationship and the relinquishing of power to male authority (Jain). The rhetoric of selflessness and power of denial is eulogized in women, while it subtly transfers power and control to the masculine subject.

Women’s oppression thus is not so much the result of their inferior status, but because of the presumed possession of power that had to be contained in order to maintain patriarchal arrangements (Mazumdar). Religion becomes one such way to validate the disempowering of women. The devaluation of women is deeply ingrained in the patriarchal culture where the general subordination of women both within and outside the household is a common practice. The birth of a son is still more welcome than the birth of a daughter. Barbara Katz Rothman says that the ideology of patriarchy is defined by “what mothers and babies signify to men” (Rothman 14). Motherhood becomes an instrument of controlling women’s sexuality. The preference for a male child together with the general cultural subordination of women makes the mother-daughter relationship a complex one. The mother-daughter bond can be positively affirmative of women’s core identity: at other times

it can be very complicated and troubled and is particularly important for female development.

## VI . The Missing Girl Syndrome

In an important article published in the *New York Review of Books* in 1990, entitled, “More than 100 million Women are Missing”, Amartya Sen has argued that worldwide, and particularly in Asia, the population of women is dwindling or ‘missing’ in millions as shown by demographic records. Demographer Ansley Coale has also drawn attention to the high female mortality rates during childhood and adolescence and confirmed “the enormity of the social problem brought to wide public attention by Professor Sen” (522). This is corroborated by ethnographic evidence and demographic records from many South Asian countries including India that show extensive prevalence of discrimination against daughters. These include some of the more economically-developed societies as well. Studies on the differential treatment given to boys and girls within family and kinship groups suggest that discrimination against the girl child goes much deeper than the earlier assumption about female education and empowerment. It was felt that women’s education would be able to overcome the problem of gender bias (Ramanamma and Bambawale). Recent research has however suggested that there is no direct correlation between “a rise in women’s education and employment status and reductions in son preference” (Croll 18). In fact discrimination against the girl child is deeply rooted in the patriarchal economy of son preference. Although the education of girls helps them to gain access to meaningful employment, research findings suggest that the problem of gender discrimination is too deeply embedded in the cultural matrix to carry any real advantage to women. Studies have shown that this does not translate into balanced sex ratios for women. The empowerment of

girls through education has only been partially successful in controlling the problem of discrimination against the girl child. The fact remains that discrimination is deeply rooted in the patriarchal economy of son preference. This is because girls are associated with the double-loss caused by the social practice of dowry that would have to be given by the bride's family at the time of marriage to the groom in addition to the expenses of education that the upbringing of the girl will require. In contrast, the birth of a boy is considered fortunate as boys are considered to be assets to the family in an economic sense.

As pointed out by Croll, the gender of the child is a matter of great importance before, during and after birth with the male child being the preferred choice over the girl child. Wedding rituals indicate this clearly by blessing the couple with the customary saying "may you be the mother of a hundred sons", in the expectation that they will give birth to sons and even though the giving birth of children, especially the birth of a son was attributed to the will of god, it is a recurring prayer and hope that the child born will be a boy (96-97). The usual response to the birth of a daughter is a muted welcome as compared to the birth of a boy. A girl child may be welcomed only if there were already one or two boys in the family. The differential treatment between boys and girls starts from the time of birth itself in the way the birth of a son is welcomed with celebration whereas the reactions to the birth of a girl child are usually subdued, ranging from "muted welcome after several sons, to open indifference, disappointment or despair" (96). The gendered secondariness is usually experienced by girls from a young age in terms of fewer entitlements and restricted access to scarce resources within the family as compared to boys. The gendered perceptions affect the development of girls who harbour feelings of inferiority, unhappiness and alienation. Even in the circumstances where daughters contribute to the flow of resources in the family, it has

been found that gendered perception about the secondariness of daughters and their inability to substitute for their brothers continue to influence societal attitude towards women which limit women's role to reproductive labour. Although women's education and economic emancipation has been associated with fertility decline, research investigation shows that these developmental efforts are unable to change gendered perceptions, which still rule cultural attitudes about sons and daughters (Dyson and Moore 35-60; Gupta et al 157-187; Chamarbaghwala and Ranger 1-37; Nasir and Kalla 275-281).

## VII. Gender and Reproductive Politics in India

Motherhood plays a crucial role in the social identity of Indian women. The lack of a child, whether it is due to biological reasons or a matter of personal choice, is still viewed as an aberration. The stigma associated with childlessness forces many women to undergo repeated pregnancies. This poses serious risks to women's reproductive health as reproductive health care services in India are very poor. This is especially true in rural areas where women do not have access to even basic health care services. The situation is further aggravated by the reluctance to talk openly about sexual health problems. In fact, when it comes to issues of reproduction and sexual health of women, the general attitude is one of a resigned acceptance of the inevitability of pain in women's lives (Rao). Reports on maternal mortality suggest that apathy to women's health care services and silence and secrecy about women's reproductive health cause many of these untimely deaths (Radhkar and Parasuraman 3259-63).<sup>5</sup> To accept pain uncomplainingly is very much a culturally endorsed feminine trait that women are trained from childhood onwards. This may be characterized as part of the systematic repression of patriarchal culture that still views women's reproductive

role as intrinsic to femininity and womanhood. The notion of a voluntarily childfree feminine identity or alternate forms of parenthood is still rare to find among the general populace. Even when women choose motherhood, the question of how far the decision to become a mother is an act of 'agency' not influenced by family and social expectations is worth looking into. Studies conducted on the use of Assisted Reproductive Technologies in India, for instance, show the overwhelming social pressure on women to conceive. Even women who "willingly" undergo repeated treatments do so out of a fear of the stigma of childlessness ("Assisted Reproductive Technologies in India").<sup>6</sup>

The patriarchal beliefs aided by technology have led to the creation of new patriarchies that subtly disempower women and girls. The male child is still the desired offspring; the girl child is most likely to be aborted because of social pressure. Sociological studies done on the girl child show that, despite laws against sex selection and female infanticide, these are still actively practised. The active complicity of the medical system with social discourse has had an adverse impact on the girl child. Recent works on the girl child brings out an adverse link between education and female infanticide. Gita Aravamudan in her study on female infanticide titled *Disappearing Daughters* suggests that female infanticide does not occur only among the poor but also among the rich, the powerful and the educated. Some of these findings suggest that factors like education, wealth, and access to medical services actually work against women; instead of benefiting women, access to reproductive health care meant "women were forced to undergo abortion after abortion" (Aravamudan qtd. in Sengupta). Social and filial pressure and the fear of domestic violence are some of the reasons that make educated women too chose to have a boy if they had to have one child. At the same time common assumptions about gender and family that link

working mothers with only marginal economic productivity, mothers as the sole caretakers of children, and the family as an altruistic and democratic unit, are in a process of transition (Vencatesan 40).<sup>7</sup> Studies on the behaviour of men in family contexts suggest that irrespective of their class, caste, religious backgrounds women do not have any say in reproductive decision-making. Men clearly do not favour giving women equal rights in reproductive decision making and the scope for consent, choice or refusal simply did not exist for women as far as men were concerned. Gender inequalities are perpetuated and reinforced through gender roles. The process of pregnancy and child bearing is socially and culturally mediated and reproduction clearly takes place in a socio-cultural context rather than a religious one and it is “shaped by traditional gender roles and gender relations within the larger social structure through which patriarchy operates” (Hussain 71).<sup>8</sup> The question of women’s reproductive choices is non-existent.

Barbara Katz Rothman has identified three competing ideologies that define mothering practices. These are the ideology of patriarchy, the ideology of capitalism, and the ideology of technology. The ideology of patriarchy is defined by “what mothers and babies signify to men” (14). This can mean multiple pregnancies for women or too few; the desire for a male issue causing repeated pregnancies, covering up of male infertility, the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children causing social stigma; not having access to abortion or being pressured into forced abortion. The ideology of capitalism, where products are produced for profit and consumption in the market put children at par with commodities, “accompanying the change in the family from its role as a unit of production to its new role as a unit of consumption” (14). The ideology of technology is the latest orthodoxy that encourages a mechanized view of women’s reproductive labour. Although

Rothman locates these ideologies in the context of contemporary developments in American society, these issues are relevant to a discussion of mothers in post-colonial contexts where the gradual entry of women in the labour market has necessitated a change in women's perceptions of themselves in the light of changing social formations. Since then and now feminism in the west has advanced the debates on the conceptual meanings of 'motherhood' and 'mothering' to include new concerns ranging from the effects of reproductive technologies on women's bodies to the legal, social and cultural implications of surrogate mothers and mothers on welfare, to issues of medicalized childbirth.

### VIII . Mother-Daughter Relationship and Women's Autobiographical Writing

Writing about her difficult relationship with her mother, *Of Woman Born* is Adrienne Rich's classic study of motherhood under patriarchal conditions and is about her feelings of guilt and anger for her mother who she felt had abandoned her for her father: "I felt my mother had chosen my father over me" (222). Rich has made a distinction between 'motherhood' and 'mothering'. Motherhood, according to Rich, is the patriarchal institution where the subordination of the woman as mother in compulsory heterosexual relationships is the pre-condition to the fulfillment of the mother role. Mothering, on the other hand, refers to those experiences of mothers that are female defined and can be a source of power. It comes from the mother's own understanding of the best possible integration of psychic, emotional and physical care that takes care of the requirements of the child but it does not call for the effacement of the mother herself. Mothering is not to be identified simply with the act of birthing but an intelligent perception of the mutual reciprocity of the mother-child

bond. It implies the recognition that the ‘mother’ lives not merely as a person who exists to only fulfill the needs of her child, but is a subject in her own right, who undertakes the ‘work’ of bringing up a human infant, whether biological or adopted and the value of the “motherwork”, a term Andrea O Reilly uses in her book *From Motherhood to Mothering* (2004) to describe the activities of mothers in relation to child rearing, is self-affirming of her identity as a woman and a mother. Rich agrees with Jane Flax’s arguments about the ambivalence of mothering and its impact on the mother-daughter bond that results in “mother-blame” and “matrophobia”. Both mother-blame and matrophobia are patriarchal constructs; one holds the mother solely responsible for children without any authority of control whereas matrophobia can be seen as “a womanly splitting of the self” (Rich 236).

This division within the female self creates conflict in the mother-daughter bond and points out that “institutional motherhood makes no provision for the wage earning mother” (225) and urges the need for a woman defined motherhood:

we want courageous mothering. The most notable fact that culture imprints on women is the sense of our limits. The most important thing one woman can do for another is to illuminate and expand her sense of actual possibilities. It means that the mother herself is trying to expand the limits of her life. *To refuse to be a victim...* and then to go on from there. (emphasis in original, 246)

The psychoanalytic accounts and autobiographical writing by women on the mother-daughter bond support the asymmetrical arrangements in the sexual division of labour within the family as a contributory factor to the estrangement and ambivalence that represent mothering and also affect the mother-daughter bond.

## IX . Mother-Daughter Relationship in Indian Women's Fiction in English

Given these frames from a variety of disciplines, the study of mother-daughter bond in a patriarchal culture can give important insight into women's relation with each other unhindered by marriage. The long suffering, silent sacrificing mother who will give up everything for the well being of son and family is a popular representation of the mother-figure in Indian culture and society. Incidentally the intensity of the mother-son relationship, which is repeatedly portrayed in Bollywood cinema, is one of the most important elements in the plot of popular cinema in India (Viridi 87-120). The identity of motherhood is the predominant way in which women are viewed and defined in India to the extent that it overshadows any other aspect and is crucial to the structural organization of the family. The earlier feminist movements both decried motherhood as a means of controlling women and capitulation to patriarchal culture as well as a source of women's authentic subjectivity. In Indian society however, it becomes the most essentializing symbol of women's femininity. Traditional Hindu beliefs worship mothers as goddess or a form of energy, known as 'shakti' while actually disempowering them.<sup>9</sup> Writing about the socialization process of girls in India, Sudhir Kakar and Katharina Kakar argue that the role training for girls in Indian society begins after the onset of puberty (*The Indians* 52). This is the time when girls are trained in the 'virtues' of docility and submission. Mothers and grandmothers in the family customarily do the administration of this disciplining treatment. At this stage mothers act as the filter through which the girl learns correct social norms. This may help to understand why adolescence is the most difficult time for the mother-daughter bond. Many girls accept this authority for fear of disapprobation but the inner dissatisfaction leads to feelings of

anger and ambivalence as the emotional support they seek in order to develop an independent identity and come to terms with the changes around and inside their mind and bodies is not easily forthcoming from their mothers. The ensuing guilt and anger is refracted in their relationship with the mother. Ethnographic literature, folksongs and women's autobiographical writings point to this as a close and intimate bond that is a source of both conflict and comfort which does exist in a hierarchy of sorts (Upadhyaya 217-221).<sup>10</sup> While social locations such as class and caste affiliation intervene gender ideology, the intrinsic worth of a girl still lies in her conformism to culturally designated feminine roles. This is a basic cultural expectation and is invariably the same for most women irrespective of class and caste.

Themes related to the mother-daughter bond have been treated differently in diverse cultures. Indian Women's fiction in English in the nineties has increasingly accommodated a maternal perspective and the mother-daughter relationship in the light of changing social realities for women (Raja). These representations present the mother and daughter bond as complex and beset with conflict and antagonism and its importance lies in the examination of the impact of culturally constructed images of motherhood on the lived identities of women and the consequences it has for the mother-daughter relationship. The objective of the present study is related to the constitution of women's subjectivity and agency under patriarchy and the way women negotiate their roles as mothers against the pressure of cultural definitions of womanhood vis-à-vis motherhood. The examination of these issues are crucial to our understanding of the extent to which representations of mothers and the mother-daughter bond subvert patriarchal discourse or collaborate with the dominant discourse in shaping gendered subjectivities. This can provide a useful model to

look for alternative understanding of the ideology of mothering and its effects on the mother-daughter bond and a creative way of dislodging hegemonic constructs which rule political, social and gender discourse (Jain). A related problem for analysis will be to see whether social stratification also affects the representation of the mother-daughter bond in women's writing. The processes of modernization affect different groups of women differently and the stories of mothers and daughters in the selected texts represent urban middle class women who have benefited most from the women's movement. These narratives are informed by a feminist sensibility in so far as they try to give a realistic understanding of the mother-daughter bond in a society mainly dominated by men. As Ira Raja states:

the thematic manifestation of a feminist sensibility in women authored texts in India in contrast takes the form of mother-quest much more than matrophobia. The feminist daughter in these stories is an enabling presence who attempts to retrieve the sense of her mother's marginal life as she enters her perspective in order to reveal her dreams, her forbidden desires, and her frustrated ambitions, registering emotions ranging from difference and dissent to anger and resentment, but rarely rejection. (862-63)

Women authored texts represent the dominant tradition of realism in Indian Writing in English and the selected texts will look at the complex representations of womanhood in the context of the contemporary social and cultural conditions. They look at the everyday lives of women in India giving importance to the woman's perspective and their anxious efforts to walk the tightrope of tradition and modernity as they try to balance the spaces within and outside the home. Autobiographical accounts by women that focus on motherhood

experientially discuss experiences of mothering in a realistic model.<sup>11</sup> While these accounts do not claim to be more authentic because women have written them, they are about a process of realistic engagement with mothering in a gamut of myriad forms that includes narratives of adoptive motherhood, step-motherhood, single parenting and even the loss of a child. Some of these writers are daughters looking back and reminiscing about their mothers and some others have made the transition to being mothers themselves and have arrived at a vantage point where they can discuss the mother-daughter bond in a dispassionate manner. Almost all agree on the complex and ambivalent nature of this association. What these writings achieve is to bring the figure of the 'mother' out of oblivion to recover a sense of self for mothers so to speak.

Given the sociological findings and the cultural attitude towards women and the girl child, the experience of mothers and the mother-daughter bond and its representation in women authored literary texts seem to be a potential field of study for a subtler and nuanced understanding of the interplay between discourse and experience in order to unmask the hidden relations of power embedded in such discourses that pattern women's lives. Personal narratives of women on mothers and motherhood focus on the romanticized figure of the mother and discuss their experiences of mothering in order to bring out the myth and reality of motherhood (Gulati and Bagchi). In spite of the fact that family is a major site of women's oppression women attach a great deal of importance to family. Issues related to women's agency and resistance are also intertwined with the hegemonic claims of the dominant religious group that appropriate women's bodies as a mark of cultural purity. While the prevalence of goddess worship is a common enough phenomenon, it does not in any way translate into a higher social status for women. Myths are employed to obscure

gender hierarchy and it becomes a tool to secure the ritualized patriarchal subordination of women as mothers. The idealization of the maternal is largely a male construct. As Sudhir Kakar and Katharina Kakar point out, “Virtually every popular depiction of mothers and sons – in art, popular fiction in various Indian languages, the autobiographies of famous Indian men, mainstream cinema, folk tales and legends and proverbs – corroborates the mother’s sentimental prevalence” (*The Indians* 96). Unlike sons, daughters do not share sentimental feelings about their mothers: “Indian women do not sentimentalize their mothers in this way. For daughters, the mother is not an adored and adoring figure on a pedestal: she is a more earthy presence, not always benign but always there” (96). Mother-daughter stories are absent in myths as well: “in a patriarchal culture myths are inevitably man-made and man-oriented. Addressing as they do the unconscious wishes and fears of men, it is the parent-son rather than the parent-daughter relationships which become charged with symbolic significance” (Kakar *The Inner World* 57). While there is a profusion of material on mother-son bond in a variety of cultural fields, the mother-daughter association has received little attention in scholarly study. Mother-daughter bond is a conflicted and complex association that is not easily explained and in India women have been studied in relation to men and in the context of the nation; studies of female relations have remained a neglected area. Even though socially structured hierarchy of gender in India limits the expression of individual agency for women, the mother-daughter relationship provides essential material for feminist responses to women’s lives and lived experiences.

The subsequent chapters will study some of these themes related to the mother-daughter relationship with reference to its representation in Indian Women’s Fiction in English through a selection of texts that seem to attend to this theme in a significant way.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Radhika Mohanram, “The Problems of Reading Mother-daughter Relationship in Indian Postcoloniality.” Ed. Elizabeth Guillroy *Women Of Colour: Mother- Daughter Relationship in Twentieth Century Literature*. University of Texas Press, 1996. 20. Mohanram’s article discusses the relative silence surrounding the mother-daughter bond in Indian society, “the most significant difficulty is not interpretation of texts but location of material”.

<sup>2</sup> Leela Gulati and Jasodhara Bagchi, ed. *A Space of her Own*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005. Focusing on women’s relation with each other rather than their position in relation to men, these personal narratives examines intergenerational connectedness between mothers and daughters and their struggle to establish self-identity through their engagement with a wider kin group.

<sup>3</sup> Cinematic representations of the mother-daughter bond have been not too many as most Bollywood films affirm the mother-son dyad. In the past decade some regional films have treated it sensitively. Rituparno Ghosh’s *Unishe April* (1994) sensitively portrayed the dilemma of an artist mother and her daughter who resents her mother’s success and holds her responsible for her father’s death. The film features Aparna Sen and Debashree Roy as the mother – daughter duo and won the national award for the best film. In contrast the mother-son bond appears repeatedly in Bollywood cinema. Jyotika Virdi (*The Cinematic Imagination: Indian Popular Films as Social History*, Rutgers University Press, 2003) has pointed to the unique way in masculinity is constructed in these films: “the hero is typically also motivated by a consuming desire to avenge the sins against his mother, which drives the narrative forward” (91). Films such as *Mother India* (1957), *Aradhana* (1969), *Deewar* (1975) and *Trishul* (1978) “resonate with the son’s desire to redeem his mother’s suffering and to fuse with the maternal figure” (91). Interestingly “the mother-son relationship appears to resonate as powerfully with women in the audience as they do with men, erasing gender divisions in spectator genre preferences” (92). Recent times have witnessed mainstream Bollywood cinema experimenting with the mother-daughter theme in films such as *Tehzeeb, Dus Kahaniyaan* (2007) where one of the stories (“Pooranmashi” Cast: Amrita Singh, Minisha Lamba and Parmeet Sethi Dir: Meghna Gulzar) is about the mother-daughter bond.

<sup>4</sup> Kandiyoti’s “patriarchal bargain” explores women’s response to autonomy and protest in the context of patriarchy in sub-Saharan regions. In contrast, women under classic patriarchy have limited options and will try to adhere as long as possible to the rules which ultimately lead to a devaluation of their labour: “The cyclical fluctuations of their power position, combined with status considerations, result in their active collusion in the reproduction of their own subordination. They would rather adopt interpersonal

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strategies that maximize their security through manipulation of the affections of their sons and husband” (280).

<sup>5</sup> Anjali Radhkar and Sulabha Parasuraman, “Maternal Deaths in India: An Exploration.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 4, 2007. Their study identifies some of the major challenges in providing reproductive health care services to rural women in India where maternal mortality rates are highest: It has become clear that women residing in rural areas, belonging to backward castes and having a low standard of living are the most vulnerable in terms of maternal mortality.

<sup>6</sup> ART’s or Assisted Reproductive Technologies and their use have revealed a lot of implications for millions of women in India. This study conducted by the *Sama Resource Group for Women*, Delhi brought to light some trends in relation to the prevalence of ART’s in India. It has been found that the social stigma associated with childlessness and the family pressure to conceive a male child force women to undergo multiple treatments. Interviews with health care providers and women undergoing such fertility treatments have shown that often they are not told of the side effects of the treatment. The low rate of success in most cases does not prevent women from undergoing repeated treatments, which puts their health at great risk. Most of the women interviewed spoke about the procedure as “a trial and error method”, a “gamble” that is mostly dependent on individual luck and god’s will (2188). Surprisingly women do not seem to think of adoption as an option and most wanted to have their “own” babies. An important point that emerges is the way the issue of adoption is linked to issues of fertility and adoption. Since motherhood is considered crucial to the identity of women in India, most women were reluctant to go for adoption and wanted to have a biological child. The few who would like to consider it as an option did not have the family support to do so.

<sup>7</sup> Jayashree Vencatesan, “Women’s Multiple Roles and Coping Strategies: Myths and Realities” argues that the impact of women’s increased participation in work has led to a gradual shift in the structure of family relations, especially the life of women in low income families. Contrary to the idea that women are mainly housewives who only marginally contribute to the family expenses, studies in India among low income families suggest a more active role played by women in family situations, which include female headed households. To quote her findings, the author states “the primacy of the mother role, in the context of poverty, the woman does not have the option to assign priorities to any of her various roles. Survival is the goal she is obliged to meet on a day-to-day basis, and each of her activities is tailored to this end. The reality therefore is that childcare, defined in conventional terms, and cannot be accorded primacy. It is also becoming apparent that the extended families do not necessarily offer good childcare. In low-income families, everyone (especially the woman) has to earn. If an older woman is at home, it is most often because of ill health or old age, which prevents her from working. The possibility of such a person being a

'satisfactory' caregiver is limited. Further, it is also taken for granted that an older woman or other women in the family look forward to being caregivers. During the intensive interviews, however, many older women expressed their dislike for being tied down to a chore that was both time-consuming and restrictive of mobility. Thus, another time-honoured myth was challenged by the facts. In the process of balancing multiple roles, childcare is often relegated to a secondary slot, while the mother's own well being slides down to a still lower priority" (55).

<sup>8</sup> Sabiha. Hussain, "Gender and Reproductive Behaviour: The Role of Men". *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 10, No.1, 2003: 45-76. According to Hussain, the attitudes toward gender and reproductive behaviour are influenced more by cultures of male dominance and social norms rather than religious beliefs. Even though state policies and contraceptive technologies mostly target women, reality is that women do not have a say in reproductive decision-making and men clearly prefer to keep it that way. Theoretical and empirical studies of new reproductive technologies analyses some of the problems related only the women who undergo treatment but indirectly effects society at large as they give to these technologies, their impact on women's health and the issues of women's reproductive autonomy.

<sup>9</sup> Alan G. Hefner. "Shakti." *Encyclopedia Mythica*. *Encyclopedia Mythica Online*. <<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/s/shakti.html>> Accessed June 27, 2008. Hindu philosophy interprets the goddess as "shakti" or "cosmic force". In Hindu Mythology "Shakti" is translated as creative energy, the feminine principle of creation. It implies "power, ability, capacity, strength prowess; regal power; power of composition, poetic power, genius; the power or signification of a word or term; the power inherent in cause to produce its necessary effect"[S] hakti is the female organ; shakti is the active power of a deity and is regarded, spiritually and mythologically, as his goddess-consort and queen." According to tantric philosophy, "the female principle antedates and includes the male principle, and "this female principle is the supreme Divinity."

<sup>10</sup> Hari S. Upadhyaya. "Mother-Daughter Relationship Patterns in the Hindu Joint family: A Study Based upon the Analysis of the Bhojpuri Folksongs of India." *Folklore* Vol. 79, No. 3. (Autumn 1968): 217-226. Folklore and oral traditions are some sources of information on women's cultures in India. The mother-daughter relationship pattern in Bhojpuri folksongs foregrounds the socio-cultural matrix (patriarchal, hierarchal and family dominated) in which they occur. According to the author, although the daughter has no formal responsibility towards the mother and vice-versa with regard to the daughter's conduct, the mother's role is that of "supervisor" and disciplinarian"(217). The mother supervises the daughter's movements and conduct, as any lapse would be viewed as the mother's fault. This is mainly done as preparation for the future role of the daughter as a good wife and mother. The daughter, on her part, complies with her mother's authority, as the mother is also her sole support in times of distress. Even

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though women have limited power to influence family decisions, mothers attempt to secure the interests of their daughters, at times giving rise to jealousy and favouritism between the family members. Once the daughter has married and left for her in-law's house, the mother's strict vigilance is relaxed and is replaced by a sense of loss and despair, loss at the separation from the daughter, and despair because of what the daughter might have to face in her new home. But the bond between the mother and daughter is not in all circumstances a happy one, as the author would have us believe. Mother-daughter relationships are also characterized by conflicted feelings of affection and resentment, but the author does not discuss this aspect.

<sup>11</sup> Rinki Bhattacharya, ed. *Jananai: Mothers, Daughters and Motherhood*. New Delhi: Sage India, 2006. Based on autobiographical elements drawn from the lives of some well known feminists, women activists and contemporary women writers who write on their experiences of being mothers and daughters, the author suggests that these women while not being unhappy with their parts, almost all of them agree how easy it is for women to lose their individuality in their mother-role. In an interesting way these writers seem to suggest mothering as a kind of "work" women usually do without any concomitant recognition. This is similar to what Andrea O Reilley in *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born* (2004) describes as "motherwork" where she argues for mothering to be viewed as work.

## Chapter 3

### Feminist Mothers

This chapter will look at the mother-daughter relationship with reference to its representation in two of Shashi Deshpande's novels, *Small Remedies* (2000) and *Moving On* (2004). This chapter will examine the disjuncture between the dominant views of motherhood and the actual experience. While it has been suggested in feminist theorizing on mothers and daughters that the mother-daughter relationship reveals a world in which woman want to be like their mothers, the mother-daughter relationship is one of profound intimacy that daughters want to recreate by becoming mothers themselves (Chodorow), the portrayal of mother-daughter relationship in these two novels is considerably more diverse than what this theory seems to suggest. Rather than identifying with their mothers, the daughters in these stories recall their mothers as demanding and unresponsive. Even when the desire for personal connectedness is emphasized, it is often found to be problematic and identification of the kind that Chodorow suggests is fraught with problems because such identification hardly guarantees closeness. These two novels represent mother-figures who wish to carve an identity for themselves in the male public world and perhaps sacrifice their role as mothers. This is reflected in the lives of the two maternal figures, Bai and Mai in *Small Remedies* and in *Moving On*. Shashi Deshpande's texts are a critique of narrow patriarchal overtures that limit creative possibilities for women. Motherhood is one of her main preoccupations that she explores very often in her novels. Shashi Deshpande once wrote in an article:

I believe that women are neither inferior nor subordinate human beings but one half of the human race. I believe that women (and men as well) should not be straitjacketed into roles that wrap their personalities, but should have options available to them.... I believe that motherhood does not bar everything else, but is a bonus, an extra that women are privileged to have. (“No Woman is an Island” 1992)

While other women in India have also written about motherhood, Shashi Deshpande is perhaps the only writer in Indian Women’s Fiction in English who most consistently deals with mothers and daughters in her work. Deshpande feels that women in India have to struggle against the mythicized images of the mother they internalize and which become a part of their psyche. Myths have a way of depoliticizing the culture of male dominance to make it appear neutral. As she says in her article on Indian women,

How we see ourselves collectively or individually depends greatly on myths. They are part of the human psyche, part of our cultural histories. The myths present role models and images that women are expected to adhere to: to be as pure as Sita, as loyal as Draupadi, as beautiful as Laxmi, as bountiful a provider as Annapoorna, as dogged in devotion as Savitri, as strong as Durga—these are all the ultimate role models we cannot entirely dismiss...the examples are it seems held out only to women. It seems odd that it took us women so long to realize this truth, to understand why this is so. (“The Indian Woman” 85-95)

Deshpande’s novels explore this concept of Indian womanhood specific to the social, cultural and religious practices in India and give voice to women protagonists who step out

of their stereotypical roles to explore and discover their own sense of independent identity. Her novels offer a contextualized understanding of middle-class professional urban women who find themselves torn between the demands of playing the ideal woman as wife and mother and their desire to find fulfillment in the outside world.

*Small Remedies* (2000) and *Moving On* (2004) record the dramatization of the growing consciousness of their protagonists who finally come to make sense of their own lives. Deshpande's understanding of feminism is rooted to the reality of Indian society:

Feminism, I read somewhere, is a movement that has grown out of prevailing social needs. I can see how true this is in India, where it has grown out of our own society, out of local and specific issues and has addressed them directly. (qtd. in Bhalla 22)

It has been pointed out that “the central trope in Deshpande's novels is the construction of gender and patriarchy in a society within which she places the conflict of her women protagonists” (Bhalla 3). Patriarchy has been variously defined by feminists but the most consistent point to emerge from the discussions that all feminists agree is that patriarchy is the systematic privileging of men and their greater access to resources and authority structures as compared to women both inside and outside the home. As pointed out by feminist scholars the family is one of the prime sites of oppression that perpetuates gender-based control of women from within (Bhasin). Feminists have also pointed out the interlinking of gender with caste hierarchies (Chakravarti). Since the norms of womanhood in India have been defined and established through recourse to religion, mythology, oral and written histories, Indian culture codifies society in a way that privileges men. Shashi Deshpande places her protagonists against this backdrop. The following sections contain

textual analysis of two novels by Shashi Deshpande. Section I is an analysis of *Small Remedies* while Section II is an analysis of *Moving On* that examines the relationship between creativity and motherhood for women through a portrayal of troubled mother-daughter relationship.

## I

*Small Remedies* presents two different facets of the mother-daughter relationship. One of them is the mother-daughter relationship between Bai and Munni. Bai as she is called is a famous musician and singer and Munni is her daughter from her relationship with Ghulam Saab. Madhu, the narrator protagonist, acts as a filter to Bai's inner world. Despite the realistic mode, the novel is a looping retrospective narrative, which weaves the present events with sharply evoked past incidents. Trying to cope with her own grief over the loss of her son, Madhu takes up an assignment to write the biography of Bai. Madhu takes an interest in writing the biography of Bai partly because of Bai's stature as "the doyenne of Hindustani music" but it is also precipitated by the childhood memories she has of Bai as the absent mother of Munni, her childhood friend. The antagonism between the mother and daughter is what captures Madhu's attention as she tries to reconnect with her own childhood. Madhu's friendship with Munni did not last for long; it fell apart after Munni insinuated that her father was involved with another woman. Nevertheless the two were fast friends for the short period of time they were together and the mysterious circumstances surrounding Munni as the daughter of Bai, the famous singer, make Madhu sufficiently curious to revisit her childhood friendship and to put the pieces of the puzzle together surrounding Bai and Munni.

The other mother-daughter relationship concerns Madhu herself and her relationship with Leela who acts as a surrogate mother to her. Madhu is a mother-less child: her mother dies soon after her birth and her father brings her up. After her father's sudden demise, Leela assumes the role of mother to Madhu. Leela and Bai present two different perspectives on conjugality and maternity embodied through their lives.

Bai leaves her marital home and determinedly pursues her music. She takes a Muslim partner as her lover. Munni is apparently their child but Munni refuses to accept Ghulam Saab as her father. The Bai-Munni relationship forms a subtext in the novel. Bai maintains a studied silence on her lover and daughter throughout the narration of her life to Madhu. While Bai is a rebel, Munni wishes to conform. In a sense both Munni and Madhu are products of an incomplete childhood; they seek relationship that can give them a sense of safety and intimacy.

Though Bai seems to be somewhat of a rebel who breaks away from patriarchal structures, in her self-absorption as an artist, Bai fails to see the need to nurture. This creates alienation in the Bai-Munni relationship. Bai manages to create a different life for herself, but this success demands relinquishing her maternal identity. Bai erases the memory of Munni as shown by her silence. Munni also creates a different identity for herself, one that is in opposition to that of her mother. She begins to hate everything that Bai stands for and reminds her about Bai. Since Bai created her new life by giving up her identity as a wife and mother, Munni converts herself by accepting that very role her mother had rejected. In other words she chooses respectability over achievement and recognition.

Leela, on the other hand, despite not conforming to the conventional image of maternity as a self-sacrificing woman, is a nurturer at heart. She maintains warm relations with her husband's children from a former marriage; she is deeply involved with her trade union work; she even maintains good relations with her first husband's family. While Leela is responsible and nurturing, Bai quite obviously is not. Thus the lack of reciprocal care and nurturing becomes a source of dissatisfaction within the Bai-Munni relationship.

This theme can be seen explored in *Moving On* as well. In *Moving On* Jiji and Mai are shown to have a difficult mother-daughter relationship. Just like the character of Bai in *Small Remedies*, Mai is represented as cold towards their closest relatives. Mai is an artist who writes short stories for magazines. Outwardly she does not relinquish the traditional feminine role; she is a good wife and an efficient housekeeper. But when it comes to her relations with her daughter and husband, Mai is emotionally inaccessible and uncommunicative. Both her daughter and husband find it difficult to draw attention and affection from her.

The Bai-Munni relationship is characterized by conflict and antagonism. But the conflict in the relationship does not occur because of any repression by the mother; nor from the daughter's feelings of being unsupported by her mother in her move towards independence. Rather it originates from the daughter's expectations for her mother to conform to the picture of the good mother; it is the daughter's inability to accept her mother's independent self that exists separately from her roles of wife and mother.

In *Small Remedies*, Munni rejects her mother Savitribai because her mother has chosen a life very different for a woman of her times and she is not a mother in a conventional sense. Munni's inability to reconcile herself to her mother's public persona as a famed music singer causes estrangement between them. Bai finds herself thrust into the role of a nurturer but is unable to cope with the demands of it. She refuses to nurture. On the other hand, Munni expects her mother to be like other mothers, properly married in their family roles. But Bai finds the claustrophobic life of an upper-caste Brahmin woman unendurable. Born into a wealthy upper caste Brahmin family, Bai develops a love of music as a young child. Her mother tutors her to sing devotional songs "aarti songs, ritual songs, stotras" (27). As a child when she sings for the first time in a family gathering she is silenced as it is considered inappropriate for girls and young women from upper caste families to sing in public. Bai's life follows the scripted pattern of life in upper caste families for women. She is married at an early age. As the daughter-in-law, Bai cannot attend musical recitals. Unable to resist the promptings of her desire to learn music, she successfully pleads with her father-in-law to allow her to take music lessons. With this act she stages her first crossing of the threshold. After some time she leaves her husband and marital home in search of her destiny as a singer. She determinedly pursues her guru Pandit Kashinath Buwa who refuses to take her as his student because she is a woman. He tells her that music is not a respectable profession for a young woman: "it became a curse, my being a Brahmin woman. My belonging to a respectable family" (130). Bai's story is a tale of commitment and dedication of an artist to her art and it speaks of Bai's courage in breaking out of the restrictions of upper-caste patriarchal society to pursue her own ambitions. In doing so Bai had to face the hostility and contempt of society. The contempt and ridicule Bai

may have had to face is evident in many autobiographical writings by women in similar situation who courageously followed their own course in life, who had “crossed the threshold” (Lal) so to speak. Rassundari Devi’s autobiography *Amar Jiban* narrates her attempts to educate herself in secrecy for fear of ridicule. By putting her life on record Bai expects to live on after death: “it is through her music that she is reaching out to immortality, it is by putting her life on record that she hopes to live on, it is through the book that she hopes to satisfy her longing for eternal life... to make up...for the blanking out that is a woman’s destiny after her death” (168).

Madhu however wants to know more about Bai, the mother. Deshpande’s rendering of the Bai-Ghulam Saab relationship suggests a story of love outside the conjugal bond. In narrating her life to Madhu, Bai maintains a studied silence about her lover Ghulam Saab and her daughter from him, Munni, whom she names Meenakshi Indorekar: “there is no Munni in her life, no illegitimate child, no abandoned husband, no lover” (78). Madhu recalls an incident from her childhood where Bai and Munni’s relationship is presented. She remembers Bai “walking on without a backward look at the child hovering in the shadows, the child who was waiting...for a word from her mother, a glance. Any kind of recognition of her presence. A recognition, which is still being denied” (169). Bai’s action cannot be read as a consciously feminist gesture. Indeed, as Deshpande points out, Bai is not consciously feminist. Her silences about her personal life, about her abandoned husband, her lover and Munni may be viewed as her way of resisting the inevitable pain that her successful life as a professional singer demanded. Bai’s strength and determination in making a concession to this pain uncomplainingly speaks about her quiet resistance and strength of purpose. Bai and Munni occupy two opposite positions in their respective

ambitions. If Bai strove for success as a singer, Munni wanted its opposite – a life of relative anonymity and ordinariness: “she yearned for the conventional life Bai had found so stultifying” (169). By naming her daughter Munni as Meenakshi Indorekar, Bai delinks her daughter from both her lover Ghulam Saab and her husband. It is as if she is reclaiming Munni as a part of herself, as only her daughter. And yet as Deshpande points out Bai does all of this without any sense of being a feminist, a woman who was “as unaware of trendy feminism as she was of political correctness” (167). Even while both her protagonists make independent choices equal to any standard of feminism, Deshpande is careful to present a picture of women making choices that are no shallow imitations of what she calls trendy feminism, but a more culturally nuanced response to patriarchal society contrived by the protagonists themselves out of their own experience of knowing what it can be like living in constrictive patriarchal society.

Feminist scholarship about mothers and daughters has pointed to the uniqueness of each mother-daughter relationship. The Leela and Madhu relationship exemplifies the positive and empowering aspects of the mother-daughter bond. Leela is not the biological mother of Madhu but she nurtures the adolescent girl once she is put in her care. After the death of Madhu’s father, her sole parent, Leela acts as a surrogate mother to Madhu. Leela takes Madhu under her care and encourages her to develop and express her independence. It is Leela who encourages Madhu to take up employment outside the home. When Madhu gives up her job as the editor of a local magazine after the birth of her son, Leela warns her that her absorption in motherhood will stagnate her personality as a person. What Leela criticizes in Madhu is her compliance with the conventional narrative of the “good mother” by submerging her own individuality. The “good mother” role stereotype demands a woman

to be a stay-at-home mother and caretaker of her children and husband. It assumes women's nurturing capacities as an innate part of their psychological make-up. Feminist scholars and psychoanalytic studies only partially accept this theory. Shari Thurer, for instance, writes that the concept of the good mother is reinvented from time to time. While each age and society has its own parameters, restrictions and expectations of good mothering, it has been pointed out by feminists that biological mother need not be the one to provide good mothering. Most feminist works on mothers and motherhood from a wide range of disciplines have critiqued the social constructionist aspect of good and bad mothers and the idea that some mothering practices are "good" and others are "bad". Feminist philosopher Elizabeth Badinter has critiqued the patriarchal bias of this notion as it puts undue stress on women while requiring the father from any care taking responsibilities. Nancy Chodorow and Susan Contratto have pointed out the split in terms of a cultural coding, those that privilege the child's perspective of the mother while obscuring the mother's point of view. D Winnicott's model of the good enough mother, who adapts herself to the needs of the child while gradually moving away to help develop the child towards independence indicates the way mothers suffer objectification to function as a conduit for the child's transition to the social world. Between the two of them Bai and Leela, it may be said that Leela's is a more subversive form of mothering as it reveals a critical consciousness of the restrictions of motherhood that support patriarchy. Bai's self-absorption as an artist and her reclaiming of respectability by wearing the mangalsutra after she becomes a successful singer may be seen as a capitulation to patriarchy that somewhat dilutes her earlier relentless resistance to patriarchal subordination.

Feminists have also critiqued an unproblematic “valorization of maternity and female relatedness within contemporary feminist discourses” (Flax 60). Sheila Ernst has pointed out that involvement of fathers and other key figures in the girl’s development may be overlooked in the exclusive importance placed on the girl’s attachment to her mother (81). According to her, the father has an important role in facilitating re-negotiation between mothers and daughters and as someone for the daughter to identify with (Ernst 86). While previous thinking on mothers and daughters have emphasized object relations theory with its focus on separation, new scholarship has indicated a paradigm shift that emphasizes relational aspect in mothering, not just with the mother but also with the father in the development process for girls. Gilligan and Rogers have argued that “a psychology premised on a view of human life as lived ultimately in separation has given way to a psychology that rests on a view of human life as lived essentially in relationship” (125). Rendering reciprocal care, empathy and nurturing therefore becomes important as women forge ties with their mothers and live in relationships that significantly affect their identities. Since relationships are vital to the quest for self the absence of mutually caring relationship results in estrangement between mothers and daughters.

Both Bai and Leela reject the conventional scripted roles for women and exercise their rights as individuals to pursue their dreams. They look for fulfillment by stepping outside of their family roles and try to achieve their potential in the world outside the home and show a subtle handling of anger and resistance. Bai and Leela resist patriarchy by stepping out of their narrow constrictive roles. Bai elopes with her Muslim lover Ghulam Saab to pursue a career in music; Leela, a widow, marries a Christian doctor and is an active participant in the socialist movement. After the death of her husband Leela refuses to return

to her parental home. Instead she joins the communist party. In reconstructing Bai's life, Madhu is able to piece together the obliterated self of Leela as well: "I've been thinking that in writing about Bai, I am writing about Leela as well... women who reached beyond their grasp. Leela, moving out of her class breaking out of the conventions of widowhood, reaching out from her small room to the world looking for justice for the weak" (284).

Madhu becomes a mother whose love for her son engulfs every aspect of her personality. After the birth of her son Madhu leaves her job and gives herself completely to taking care of her infant son. Madhu's idea of motherhood duplicates what Sharon Hays describes as "intensive mothering".<sup>1</sup> Motherhood takes over her life; it becomes her only identity. Unlike Leela who knows how to balance the demands of individuality with her role as a mother, Madhu chooses to relinquish her individuality in order to become a mother whose sole identity revolves around her role as a mother. Whether this is because of a result of an incomplete childhood or due to a need to conform to the demands of a culturally valid form of self expression, the fact remains that Madhu chooses to follow a different set of values to live by when it comes to fulfilling her maternal role.

It is interesting to note the intensity of feelings Madhu as a mother has about her son. She is so focused on her role as a mother that the news of her son's death leaves a void in her life. It is only after his death that Madhu realizes that she needs to build a life for herself that doesn't revolve around her roles of wife and mother. But there is perhaps something more complicated at work here. Had Madhu been the mother of a daughter, would she have been as intensely attached as she is to her son? The mother-son relationship between Madhu and Aditya is far different from anything daughters experience with either

their mothers or fathers. The troubled mother-daughter relationship between Bai and Munni and her own relationship with Leela leads one to believe that mother-daughter relationships are less symbiotic in the sense that a mother can look for protection from a grown up son which she cannot from a daughter. Unconsciously Madhu therefore lives out the fear of a patriarchal mother who looks towards her son to concretize her identity through her maternal role. Madhu chooses to live through an ideal of motherhood that both Bai and Leela had rejected. Bai rejects it because it clashed with her ambition to be a professional singer. Leela rejects it perhaps because she realizes that it may be too restrictive to accommodate her individuality. Madhu however accepts motherhood and is happy to be able to live entirely for her child.

Shashi Deshpande is perhaps making an indirect statement about feminism by portraying the two mother figures Bai and Leela as strong and assertive. They can balance their individuality along with their nurturing roles, at least Leela does it more successfully than Bai. In contrast the daughters Madhu and Munni are more conservative and do not mind having to sacrifice their individuality to societal expectations. The construction of motherhood as divine and its subsequent glorification is only to be accessed imaginatively as real life mothers are viewed as strong and dominant. As Madhu states at one point of the novel maternal assertiveness can be more commonly observed in real life:

... real life shows me something entirely different. Munni's mother who ignored her daughter; Ketaki's mother, stern, dictatorial and so partial to her sons; Sunanda, sweetly devious and manipulating; Som's mother, so demanding—none of them conform to the white-clad, sacrificing, sobbing mother of the movies. (183)

Madhu and Munni initially do not follow the path that Leela and Bai had opted for but instead they choose more conventional lives. After having lost Aditya, Madhu tries to reconcile herself to the loss and realizes that the emptiness in her life after her son's death is compounded because she had given up every other aspect of herself to being a mother refusing to see herself as a subject with her own needs. It is then that she tries to find her own identity as a person separate from her ties with the other people in her life. Madhu wanted to find fulfillment and satisfaction by living the role of wife and mother only to be disappointed.

## II

In *Moving On* the narrative unfolds through Manjari's eyes. The title *Moving On* suggests a sense of physical movement, of being on the move. On another level it is suggestive of Jiji's journey of inner growth and understanding that enables her to develop a sense of self. The title of the novel also involves a sense of letting go of the past. As Jiji evolves into a mature person, some of her earlier attitudes and experiences in relation to her various relationships are up for review. She must let go of the past and move towards the future with confidence and hope.

Jiji treads the path of this journey of empowerment and awareness. She is a widowed woman who comes back home to look after her ailing father. After his death she discovers her father's diary and the revelations contained in it throw new light on past events. She sets out to reconstruct her past with the help of the diary and searches for clues to understand her own relationship with her mother Mai. While her past appears to be a happy time, Jiji's present is riddled with uncertainty and loneliness. With both her

adolescent children away at school, she lives alone in the large family home that her father had bequeathed to her own daughter Sachi. On the one hand she is threatened with mysterious phone calls, which threaten her to sell the house, while on the other she receives a proposal for marriage from her childhood friend.

The unraveling of her life takes place amid these circumstances. One of the interesting points in the novel is the focus on Jiji's mother, the reserved and formidable Mai, who had been a writer. Jiji's retrospective journey back to her childhood through the revelations of her father's diary helps her to understand her mother's dilemma. As a child she had resented her mother's writing. Mai wrote short stories for local magazines. She remembers times when her mother would be so absorbed in her work that she seemed to forget her children. It frightened her to think that her mother could be so involved in her work as to be a different person altogether. She would mostly write in the afternoon when she had finished her household chores and at night after everyone had gone to sleep. She would do this in order not to draw attention to her work and to avoid continuous interruptions. Even though Mai never actively tried to find work outside, it becomes evident to Jiji from the number of stories she had written how seriously she took her work. Mai's family had never objected to her writing; it was perceived indulgently as work done to fill up the leisure hours.

Seen in this light Mai's effort at writing are remarkable, as she never had the long, uninterrupted spaces of time and quiet needed for writing. Feminist scholars writing on motherhood have written about the apparent difficulty of combining mothering with paid work or with the impulses of the artist and this can be clearly seen in the circumstances

surrounding Mai's life. She would sit in the sitting room or dining table trying to write only to be interrupted a number of times, reminiscent of what Virginia Woolf stated in *A Room of One's Own* about lack of space and solitude in women's lives for creative writing:

If a woman wrote, she would have to write in the common sitting-room... she was always interrupted... Then again all the literary training that a woman had in the early nineteenth century was training in the observation of character, in the analysis of emotion. Her sensibility had been educated for centuries by the influences of the common sitting-room. People's feelings were impressed on her, personal relations were always before her eyes. (73-74).

Jiji shows a remarkable ability to grow through close relationships with the various people in her life. It is out of the various facets of her relationships with the people in her life that she comes to terms with life itself. This infuses her with the strength and determination to carry on, to move on in another sense, to an awareness of her own personhood; that she is something more than the sum total of all the roles she plays, a person herself. When Sachi complains about her not acting like a typical mother – “Why can't you be like other mothers?” – Jiji muses that “Sachi has always wanted me to be what I'm not, not to be what I am” (209). This shows Jiji's awareness of both her role as Sachi's mother and her expectation from her own mother as a daughter herself. She does not give in to the demand of her daughter but quietly does what feels right for her. She does this not by rejecting her earlier experiences of playing the parts of wife and mother but by learning to integrate these aspects of her life to evolve her own sense of who she is, a woman and a mother. She does not allow these parts of her life to dominate and diminish her but to

assimilate them to add to her awareness of who she is as a person in her own right. By doing this she redefines the meaning these relationships hold for her. These relationships become for Jiji a way of tracing the passage of time and the corresponding development of her inner journey. They do not hold any absolute, unchangeable meaning for her. That is why Jiji says: “we never get what we’re seeking in other humans. We will continue to be incomplete, ampersands, all of us, each one of us. Yet, the search is what its all about, don’t you see, Baba, the search is the thing” (343). It shows her final acceptance of her identity as partial, not because she is a woman but as any human being going through the different motions of life and responding to the changes and being changed in the process. Armed with this knowledge, Jiji can now enter her father’s perspective and question it.

This can in a sense be read as a symbolic instance of dismantling patriarchal authority. It is replaced by a more compassionate and perceptive awareness arrived at experientially. In a departure from tradition, in Deshpande’s text, it is the daughter who ascends to the position of authority. Baba does not leave the house to Jiji’s son Anand but to Sachi who inherits the family property after Jiji’s father dies. Deshpande’s *Moving On* represents this process through Jiji who grows from a young girl to a mature selfaware person which enables her to take control of her life.

One of the recurring themes in *Moving On* is that of female sexuality. In the Indian context, the notion of sexual purity has ruled the lives of women. Jasodhara Bagchi’s introduction to *Indian Women: Myth and Reality* (1995) states:

Myths of Indian womanhood act on the reality of the lives of the women of India are, in their turn, acted upon by the same reality. Systems of

knowledge, belief, institutions, socio-economic formations born of historical encounters have contributed to this complex process. The easy emancipatory formula of “modernity”, positivistically conceived, is as prone to this mystifying process as rhetoric of constantly re-invented traditionalism that ideologically signals the end of history... Thus Indian womanhood is transfixed on an essentialist notion of “purity” that was used in a particular historical juncture to define Indianness.” (1-2)

Baba’s perception of Jiji’s growing attraction for Shyam makes him aware of Jiji’s adulthood:

‘My daughter, I thought my child, I told myself. Did that give me the right to take over her life? We come to life as individuals, to be a parent is to be an instrument, the means of letting another human enter the world and have the experience of living. But I thought my daughter’s life was mine to shape. In my worst moments, I think Jiji’s actions were an act of rebellion against this, against me.’ (241)

What is contained in this confession is a loosening of hold, of relinquishing control: it also indicates a discomfort at being exposed to Jiji’s sexuality as a grown up woman in her passion for Shyam: “ I think I realized the futility of saying ‘my daughter’ when I saw Jiji’s passion for Shyam. This woman has nothing to do with the child I had loved and cared for, nothing to do with the girl I called ‘my daughter’” (241). Her father’s attitude to Jiji’s sexuality brings out the culture’s fear and disapproval of female sexuality. When Raja learns about Jiji’s association with Raman he finds it difficult to accept that Jiji was an active participant in it. At one point in the narrative Jiji muses to herself: “marriage for security...if

I can keep my body safe...but the body needs not just safety, not only survival, there's more" (215). It indicates a subtle critique of marriage and sexuality. Since ideologies about sexuality are deeply embedded in patriarchy, Jiji's words show an awareness of the demands of sexuality. By stating her desire, she makes a conscious choice of reclaiming her body. Jiji defies sexual norms that allow the expression of sexuality only within the bounds of marriage. Her motherhood becomes secondary as her own needs take precedence over her role as a mother. Vrinda Nabar's discussion of marriage and maternity norms in India express a similar point when she says that within existing marriage norms "a woman's feelings are seen as dispensable" whose only function within the family is to serve and satisfy family members in her role as wife and mother (169).

### III

Bai, Leela, Mai and Jiji are women in search of their own selves who do not accept other's definition of themselves and break out of the stereotypical mould of wife and mother to participate in the outside world in order to arrive at a self-determined identity. Deshpande places her protagonists within the context of social and cultural conditions in India and their negotiations with patriarchy. They move outside the ambit of family relations to embark on their journey of self-discovery. When we read the lives of Bai, Leela, Mai and Jiji from this context they appear to be feminist mothers because they challenge patriarchal assumptions about parenting. They are strong and resilient women and are assertive in their own way. In comparison their daughters have less individuality and they more easily accommodate patriarchal norms. The conflict in the mother-daughter relationship arises because the daughters do not easily accept their mother's individuality and creativity. In contrast the

daughters choose to live by a different set of values where conformism and acceptance of patriarchal role playing carries a certain value and esteem. Thus we see both Madhu and Munni eagerly accept the parts that their mothers Leela and Bai discarded without much fuss.

Another problem that Shashi Deshpande raises in these two novels is the question of the woman artist and fulfillment through artistic means. She does this through the figures of Bai and Mai. Both of them find it extremely difficult to play a nurturing role towards their family. Bai and Mai nurture their creativity instead through a relentless search for perfection. They are better artists than mothers. Through the conflict in the mother-daughter relationship Deshpande is perhaps trying to problematize the question of whether creativity and motherhood are compatible goals for women or not.

The other protagonist Leela appears to have found a middle ground. She is a mother without letting the demands of the ideal of motherhood overpower her life. Leela makes a subtle but powerful statement about motherhood and mothering in the sense that she is a nurturer without being a biological mother. This does not make her any less loving. In fact she is the one who loves the most selflessly, not just her own family members but whoever she forms a relation with without losing her own self. Leela makes the most powerful statement about what being a mother could mean: the ability to love unselfishly and live authentically in a male dominated world without losing her sense of individuality and making a positive contribution to society. She extends her nurturing to the outside world as well.

This is not to say that these women resent being mothers. Rather they do not allow social expectations placed on them to conform to particular behaviours overwhelm them and they do not replicate the conventional standard of self-sacrificing motherhood. Driven by their consciousness of their selfhood, they try to be true to themselves and choose a way of mothering that challenge the status quo. They may be said to be feminist mothers because they are courageous as mothers and refuse to relinquish their maternal authority to patriarchal script of motherhood; they resist restrictions placed on them by patriarchal motherhood and their mothering challenge conventional norms of motherhood which refuse to subsume the claims of their individuality to scripted roles. As mothers and as women they constantly negotiate the tension between the “institution” and the “experience” of motherhood, and as Fiona Joy Green contends, at times consciously use their socially sanctified role to subvert and challenge various forms of oppression (130).<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusion

Even though both *Small Remedies* and *Moving On* remain within the ambit of the home, they are not simply domestic novels nor can they be read simply as feminist fiction in the sense that their concerns are not limited to women’s issues only, but encompass and subtly weave together other issues of social and political importance. But they do offer a contemporary perspective on the status of women both within and outside the home. This makes it clear that she does not believe in stereotypical images of women. Even though almost all her protagonists are women from an upper caste/middle class background and all of them undergo some form of emotional deprivation, they are in no way presented as victims or helpless. They are also typically without the culturally valued attributes of femininity,

which perhaps places them in a context where they have to renegotiate their traditional roles from a more peripheral position (Lau). The presence of a living context extends the scope of both *Small Remedies* and *Moving On*; the outside world intrudes into the private lives of the protagonists and their responses to these influences define and shape their identities.

Deshpande's portrayals reflect the changes taking place in society where the traditional norms are being readjusted by the new middle class community which is much more tolerant of change and social progress. Even though Madhu and Jiji have to function in a society where observance of traditions and customs are important, it still gives them room for autonomy and individuality, a privilege which only men had in earlier times. Nor does Deshpande concur with the cliched assumption of women's oppression within families. While her writings and works of fiction do acknowledge the domination of dogmas and orthodox elements in relation to gender and family ideology, she is careful to indicate the cohesive nature of families. It is therefore not unusual to find protagonists in her fiction who rebel and leave the family at some point of time to return during a crisis and are then accepted back into the family. There are mothers who want their own freedom and no matter how difficult their circumstances they continue to struggle to create livable space around them demonstrating to their daughters that such conditions are possible. As Adrienne Rich pointed out, "The quality of the mother's life- however, embattled and unprotected- is her primary bequest to her daughter, because a woman who can believe in herself, who is a fighter, and who continues to struggle to create livable space around her, is demonstrating to her daughter that these possibilities exist" (247). Their mothering may be viewed as empowering as it shows diversity in women's experiencing of mothering.

Unlike Deshpande's earlier novels *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980), *The Binding Vine* (1993) and *A Matter of Time* (1996) where the movement of the narrative is dominated by the daughter's voice who reflects on her mother, the narratives in *Small Remedies* and *Moving On* accommodate a maternal perspective. Given the devaluation of women that is intrinsic to patriarchy, it is in a way inevitable that the mother-daughter bond will tend to conflict at times.

Shashi Deshpande's representation of marriage and motherhood in her novels signals a new consciousness among urban women who are clearly asserting their needs within marriage and motherhood. An examination of women's writing in India reveals that women are not unaware of the disjuncture between the myths and reality of motherhood. Mrinal Pande writes that "a close reading of women's writing from the Therigatha (The Songs of Bhuddist Nuns), to Mahasweta Devi's and Ambai's fiction reveals that motherhood as women truly experienced it and motherhood as a much glorified institution are as separate and distinct from each other as Gandhiji is from Gandhism...." (133). Writing about her own experience of motherhood, Deshpande says that one has to learn to be a mother. According to her motherhood is:

just one facet of humaneness...a very special and important part maybe, nevertheless one part of a whole...The idea of the 'special-ness of mothers, of motherhood is something we have been toting for so long, it is difficult to give up...each time I ask myself ' Have I been a good mother? I need to add-to be a mother does not rule out everything else in life. I'm a human being first, a mother next... (137)

Shashi Deshpande's novels critique this social construction of motherhood that denies women both sexuality and personhood. Through her novels she examines both the positive and the darker aspects of the mother-daughter bond and questions the institution of marriage as it frames women's lives and deconstructs the stereotypical images of wifehood and motherhood.



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sharon Hay uses the term “intensive mothering” to outline a view of motherhood as a site of contradiction and tension for women. It refers to the cultural perception that the welfare of children is the mother’s responsibility. As such mothers are expected to unconditionally give of themselves and their resources in terms of time, energy, care and even money whether or not the father is present. In many ways it reflects the concern of earlier feminists like Chodorow and Dinnerstein who critiqued the ideology of exclusive mothering by women. While these feminists viewed it as a middle-class phenomenon, Hay’s study however indicates that the ideology of intensive mothering transcends class boundaries.

<sup>2</sup> The title of this chapter is the same as an article by the author in *From Motherhood to Mothering* edited by Andrea O’ Reilly (2004). This was much before I came across the article during the process of locating material for my thesis. I have retained the title of the chapter as “Feminist Mothers” as many of the issues discussed in the article by Green about maternal power and subversiveness also form the main focus of this chapter although in a very different context.

## Chapter 4

### Difficult Mothers

Feminist theory is divided in opinion on the issue of how discourses of femininity affect women in society who live under the weight of these constructs. Since the time Michel Foucault first enunciated the term discourse, feminist theory has significantly altered our understanding of the notion of discourse by locating it clearly in its social context and by enlarging the scope of negotiation within the seemingly constraining structure of discourse. One of the ways in which feminists use the term discourse is “as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 49).<sup>1</sup> This perspective requires having to think about ‘discourse’ as having effect in a social context. Inevitably therefore power and power relations that are a part of social relations become an important element in the discussion of discourse. Foucault’s analysis of power, for instance, imbricates power with knowledge. According to Foucault, power relations play a key role in shaping certain forms of subjectivity and forms of behaviour instead of simply repressing them (Foucault *History of Sexuality* 32). Foucault’s notion of power and his explanation of the power hypothesis is based on a relational model of power which takes into account the different ways in which people negotiate power relations rather than assuming power as a given that is forcefully imposed by a powerful agency on a powerless subject.

Feminists and social psychologists have drawn on this hypothesis to examine the ways in which discourses of femininity are subject to continual revision and negotiation

within the limits of the discursive positions. They have used Foucault's notion of power to firmly locate the effects of discourse in the social world. Susan Bordo, for instance, argues that the female body operates as a metaphor for culture: "The body is not only a text of culture. It is also ... a *practical*, direct locus of social control" (2362).<sup>2</sup> According to her, prevailing cultural notions of gender difference are inscribed on the body. This includes proper appearance, deportment and physical activity. She further argues that this mechanism of control is achieved through a complex process where a variety of social forces combine to produce the gendered body. In other words, the norms of cultural life that are expressed through forms of ritualized living contribute toward the production of gendered body. As Bordo states,

Not chiefly through ideology, but through the organization and regulation of the time, space, and movements of our daily lives, our bodies are trained, shaped and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, masculinity and femininity. (2363)

While not disagreeing with Bordo's position, feminists like Dorothy Smith work with a more progressive model of femininity that restores a degree of agency to women by viewing them as actively working out their subject position while negotiating the discursive constraints of the discourse of femininity. This is an improvement on the earlier works on femininity, which considered femininity as a social construct that was imposed on women. Smith's notion of femininity however allows the possibility of change. While much of the earlier feminist theorizing tended to see women as passive victims of oppression, Smith's work focuses on the changes in discourse structures over time and how women respond to them because of changes in social structure. Discourses of femininity thus need to be seen as

“an interactional relation of power rather than an imposition of power” and its meaning, “depends on a wide range of factors such as perceived power relations for its interpretation and effect” (Mills 88).<sup>3</sup> Smith’s theory therefore requires thinking about femininity not simply as a “normative order reproduced through socialization, to which women are somehow subordinated” but to address the problem of femininity “as a complex of actual relations rested in texts” (163). Smith thus expresses skepticism at accepting discourses of femininity at face value. In fact her analysis of the effects of such discourses in real lives of women persuades one to believe that women often engage with such discourses in order to manipulate them to their advantage. In other words, it indicates the construction of subject positions by negotiating with the constraints of the discursive system. It thus becomes clear that “oppression” of women cannot be said to produce a uniform category, as women are not a homogenous group. Smith suggests that while some women negotiate for powerful positions within the discursive system by choosing an oppositional stance, others may choose to accrue power to themselves by collaborating with the dominant ideology. Whatever may be the nature of their resistance, it is clearly untenable to assume that women are the passive recipients of discourses. Feminist analyses therefore focuses on the multiplicity of discourses, which can exist at a particular time producing a variety of responses from those whose lives are directly affected by such discourses.

Postcolonial feminist critiques have now asserted the need to address feminist concerns keeping in mind the complex, social, cultural, political conditions that have influenced the emergence of feminism in third world contexts. Feminists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty has argued for a historically nuanced understanding of feminist struggles in third world contexts that explore the intersections between race and gender:

Above all, gender and race are relational terms: they foreground a relationship (and often a hierarchy) between races and genders... It is the intersections of the various systematic networks of class, race, (hetero) sexuality, and nation, then, that position as “women”. Herein lies a fundamental challenge for feminist analysis once it takes seriously the location and struggles of third world women, and this challenge has implications for the rewriting of all hegemonic history.... The relations of power I am referring to are not reducible to binary oppositions or oppressor/oppressed relations. I want to suggest that it is possible to retain the idea of multiple, fluid structures of domination which intersect to locate women differently at particular historical conjunctures, while at the same time insisting on the dynamic oppositional agency of individuals and collectives and their engagement in “daily life”.... It is also by understanding these intersections that we can attempt to explore questions of consciousness and agency without naturalizing either individuals or structures. (12-13).

Mohanty’s argument reiterates some of the assumptions as outlined by Dorothy Smith and Sara Mills in their focus on the multiplicity of discourses and the need to understand the concept of oppression in a manner that takes into consideration the different structures of domination. It also highlights the earlier assertion made by Smith that women do not passively live out the patriarchal script of femininity. Rather they consciously choose to give new meanings to existing structures, which inevitably requires engagement with the effects of such discourses on a regular basis. The important point contained in the argument is

recognition of the differences in the constitution of social and political orientations within feminism itself. Its main concern is thus to explore the differences between feminism conceived in the west and the realities of the socio-political world of women in the postcolonial world, which are not the same and hence the importance of the location and the systematic movements of women in postcolonial societies which are the result of a complex of historical, political and cultural factors. It is therefore the particular projections of gender and sexual economies in such patriarchal settings and the collusion of the nation state in perpetuating these hegemonic discourses that form the primary focus of feminism in postcolonial societies.

Mohanty's argument underlines another important point, which is that women do not necessarily accept these discourses as true for all times; there is potential for conflict and resistance to such discourses. These discourses in effect are a potential site for reconfiguration of individual and collective identities and form an important part of the discussion on postcolonial feminism. The proposed aim for this chapter is to examine the implications of the hegemonic narratives on gender and sexuality in postcolonial Indian society through a reading of Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) and Anjana Appachana's *Listening Now* (1998).

The title "Difficult Mothers" tries to draw attention to one of the sources of woman's unconscious conflicts: woman's conflicted relationship to sexuality and maternity. While feminist psychoanalysts recognize the importance of the mother-daughter relationship to a woman's personality, it can also result in antagonism when the conditions for the necessary closeness and identification are not present. Societal and cultural beliefs about

ideals for motherhood and sexuality often interfere in the way the mother-daughter relationship is affected in real life. This chapter will examine why daughters see mothers, who have allowed themselves sexual fulfillment outside marriage, as difficult mothers.

In an insightful analysis of cultural reality of Indian society, Sudhir Kakar and Katharina Kakar identifies “the profoundly hierarchal nature of Indian society” as a cultural trait, which is deeply ingrained in the individual psyche of its people: “The deeply internalized hierarchal principle, the lens through which men and women in India view their social world, has its origin in the earliest years of a child’s life in the family” (*The Indians* 8). Their comment indicates the preponderance of family, community and caste in shaping everyday lives and identities and the overall attitude to marriage and sexuality in Indian society. As they observe, despite the rapid urbanization in the last few decades, Indian society continues to thrive on a “hierarchally ordered” stable network of relationships (15). Their observations on the role of the family in the formation of identity may be used as an entry point for a discussion of how girls and women in general fare in the patriarchal society of India.

Even though gender differences are socially constructed, they are almost invariably viewed as a consequence of biology. That is why it is generally accepted as the natural order of things. In Indian society, traditional gender roles emphasize the relative importance of the masculine principle or the father’s role in the process of procreation. The man provides the seeds and the woman acts as the receptacle, which receives and nourishes the seed. Once a child is born he naturally shares a father’s bloodline. This is true for sons, as sons are seen to be bearers of the family name. For a daughter however the situation is more ambiguous. A

daughter occupies a marginal position within her natal family. The reason for this inequality between sons and daughters can be understood from the social arrangement of gender role requirements, which clearly give unequal positions and roles for men and women. Since girls are to be given in marriage, their presence in the natal family is likened to that of a guest who will soon leave the family. Girls therefore do not belong to the natal family; they are not the permanent members of the family of their birth. This is evident from the way a woman's natal family emphasizes the girl's transferability upon marriage in relation to the continuity of the family name whereas the husband's family emphasizes her instrumentality as a vehicle for carrying on the family name (Dube 11).

Gender roles are thus conceived, enacted and played out within a complex set of relationships both within and in relation to the family as a social unit. Studies on the socialization of girls in patrilineal India show that

kinship is not merely a moral code but provides the organizing principles which govern the recruitment to and placement of individuals in social groups, formation of the family and household, residence at marriage, resource distribution, including inheritance, and obligation and responsibilities in the business of living of individual members of the group. (Dube 11).

Besides the family and the kinship system, the social practice of caste plays a crucial role in the process of identity formation. Since the membership of caste group is defined by birth, caste purity can only be maintained through the regulation of marriage and sexual relations. Because of women's role in biological reproduction, the control of female sexuality and by extension the reproductive body becomes imperative if caste purity is to be maintained.

Thus the “phenomenon of boundary maintenance is a crucial element in the definition of the cultural apprehension of the vulnerability of young girls and the emphasis on their purity and restraint on behaviour” (Dube 15). The stage of early adolescence and puberty is the time when the pressure to conform to notions of proper feminine conduct is at the highest.

Psychosocial analysis of the socialization of girls indicates a whole gamut of attendant factors such as popular myths, rituals, ceremonies, the use of language and the practices of gender differentiation within and in relation to the family all of which contribute to those processes through which women acquire the cultural values of patriarchy and those images which produce gendered subjectivities in women in the patrilineal, patrilocal milieu of Indian society (Dube 11). Feminist anthropology has explored the way young girls learn to emulate gender specific role-playing by observing elder female members such as their mothers and grandmothers. Susan Seymour’s study of women’s role in family management discusses two aspects of the patrilocal family system. One of them is the presence of support networks that women form with their friends and kin within the family and the other is that women seemed to have a clear sense of their spheres of responsibility and influence, which was mainly the management of family matters. Seymour’s observations are drawn from within the context of the joint family system in small town India with respect to the social relationships of women in such communities. Although Seymour does not deal with issues of resistance and agency, she projects a positive and sympathetic view of the way women seemed to feel about their roles and situations (100). Clearly then family relations and interpersonal relations play an important role in shaping lives of women. This is one of the processes by which women acquire the cultural values of the social world they inhabit. There is another way we may try to understand the effects of

discourses on the lives of women. It also involves looking at the role of the nation state in producing and sustaining the hegemonic discourses of gender and sexuality. Feminists have questioned the role of the nation-state in perpetuating hegemonic discourses of gender and sexuality and the “larger questions about the imbrication of discourses of nation-state, gender and sexuality in contemporary post-colonial India” (Puri 26).<sup>4</sup>

Yet it may be somewhat insufficient to say that women blindly internalize discourses of gender and sexuality. Within feminist studies, victim narratives have long since given way to narratives of resistance, where resistance assumes a subtle, personal form, which can be expressed overtly or covertly. Feminist studies have thus started seriously probing the question of resistance in women’s writing. It has been observed that the purposes of feminist reading is not just to praise or blame but to “assess how the text invites its readers, as members of a specific culture, to understand what it means to be a woman or a man, and to encourage them to reaffirm or to challenge existing cultural norms” (Belsey and Moore 1). As such the novels that will be discussed in the following sections, namely Section I Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* and Section II Anjana Appachana’s *Listening Now*, will try to illustrate in a fundamental way many of the aspects of women’s lives in society which may help us to shed light on some of the more private aspects of cultural conditioning in women as portrayed in Indian Women’s Fiction through the representation of the mother-daughter bond.

## I

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) explores the mother-daughter relationship through three generations of women. *Difficult Daughters* gives dense presentations of the social world of the early twentieth century when discourses of gender and the 'women's question' was a highly debated subject in both the public and private spheres. The debates around the question of the construction of gender norms and what role women could play in public life affected women in a number of ways. This is evident from the number of autobiographies written by women during the times that record the dilemmas of their personal lives. Upper caste Hindu women in the nineteenth century were caught between the intersection of two social worlds; one was the social world of tradition and conservatism which they were familiar with and the other was the new order of colonial modernity with its new set of assumptions and the ensuing contradictory pulls of tradition and modernity. The challenges to the social order from colonial rule was partially successful in bringing awareness to the oppression of women although it failed to immediately bring any effective changes to social expectations for women in terms of gender roles. Women were primarily meant to be wives and mothers. It was a long time before women could step outside the home to create a space for themselves in the public world. The new changes in attitude under the influence of British rule made it possible for some women to have access to education, which slowly opened up and enlarged the space for women's activities. As Maithreyi Krishnaraj argues, "women gained both from colonial rule and the movement against it. The first made female education possible and the second effectively enlarged the space for women's activities" (21).

Women's education was in fact a complicated and controversial issue that generated endless debates on the question of what was the proper sphere of women. In fact as feminist historians have pointed out, education of women became the tool with which to create a new notion of Indian womanhood, which were then sustained by disciplinary mechanisms (Sangari and Vaid). Under the disguise of liberal reform colonial modernity tried to control women's bodies and sexualities and to realign their gender roles to suit the purposes of an emergent anti-colonial elitist nationalism (Puri). The impact of imperialism and the liberal reform movement for the education of girls had far reaching consequences on the personal, familial, social and daily lives of the colonized people, especially women. An example of this is the use of didactic materials such as instruction manual for girls on proper conduct in the nineteenth century, which formed an essential part of the construction and naturalizing of gender relations within the context of the marital bond (Walsh).<sup>5</sup> This was an integral part of the mechanism to create a new national ideal of femininity and a discourse of home that was essential to regulating and controlling middle-class, upper caste mainly Hindu women. As Puri's analysis points out "... in the context of the colonial state and anti-colonial hegemonic nationalisms, education had to serve a dual role – to elaborate and specify changing politically charged definitions of womanhood and sexuality as well as make them appear normal and natural to the audience" (28). Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* dramatizes the conflicting discourses of gender and sexuality in relation to emerging ideas of colonial modernity and the nationalist movement through the protagonist Virmati's life and her struggle for autonomy.

Virmati is the eldest in a family of eleven children. Repeated pregnancies take their toll on her mother Kasturi's health. Virmati as the eldest in the family has to run the house

and look after all the children as she acts as a second mother to them all. The narrative firmly establishes Virmati's authority over her siblings:

To her younger siblings she was second mother as well. She was impatient and intolerant of fuss. If they didn't eat their meals, on her return home from school she would hunt out the offending brother or sister and shove the cold food down their throats...sometimes she tried to be gentle, but it was weary work and she was almost always tired and harassed. (6) <sup>6</sup>

Virmati is just like any girl of her age, except perhaps in her desire to study. Her relatives and siblings recount her desire to study as remarkable for a girl in her times: "She was so keen to study...First FA, then BA, and BT on top of that. Even after her marriage, she went for an MA to Government College, Lahore...She studied more than any other girl in the family..." (5). Her desire to study sets her apart from other girls in the family. By the time Virmati is sixteen, her parents arrange her marriage with a boy of their choice. Virmati feels happy to be engaged to a person her parents choose for her. But deaths in both the families delay the engagement. In the waiting period that ensues, Virmati joins a college near her home where she meets Professor Harish Chandra. He is married and has a family of his own. Having lived in England for some time, he has the tastes and temperament of an Englishman and on his return to India finds it difficult to adjust to the Indian environment. The professor's influence fuels Virmati with ambition and desire. Under his tutelage, life assumes a new significance for Virmati. She no longer wants to follow the course planned for her. Unable to bear the pressure of her situation, Virmati tries to commit suicide. This incident precipitates a series of events that finally propel Virmati to leave home and go to Lahore to pursue her dreams of education and freedom.

Although the nationalist movement does not directly intervene in Virmati's life, some of the ideas of the nationalist movement such as women's emancipation through education and the role of women in the process of nation building touch the lives of many people, especially women. The promise of freedom through education inspires Virmati to dream of a life different from the one that her mother has lead. In the fervour and enthusiasm that surrounded the historic struggle for freedom, Virmati finds an opportunity to build a more satisfying life. She therefore rejects the marriage arranged by her parents to a boy of their choice.

The collective struggle of the people mirrors Virmati's own desire for a change in her personal circumstances and she naively assumes that education will enable her to do so. Vasanth Kannabiran and K. Lalitha in their study of women's participation in mass movements find that altered social and historical circumstances produce an awareness in women who view such events as "an opportunity" to change their own inconsequential existence (183).<sup>7</sup> In the novel, this situation is represented by the younger generation of women like Virmati, Shakuntala and Swarna Lata. Although the latter two do not occupy a pivotal role in the overall plot of the novel, they represent aspects of the new woman of the time, strong and with a clear sense of vision about their goals. Shakuntala, Virmati's cousin, has successfully withstood family pressure to marry and has been able to carve out an identity for herself. Swarna Lata has many political concerns and is associated with many women's organization. Swarna Lata advises Virmati to stay away from the professor and to begin a life for herself. She voices the revolutionary spirit of the times: "Marriage is not the only thing in life... The war—the satyagraha movement—because of these things, women

are coming out of their homes. Taking jobs, fighting, going to jail. Wake up from your stale dream” (151).

In contrast to Swarna Lata and Shakuntala, Virmati seems to hold on to her romantic illusions about the professor. Unlike Shakuntala or Swarna Lata who have clear ideas about their own needs and desires Virmati’s desire for romantic love and her need for independence leaves her feeling conflicted about her choices: “Swarna’s words gave her some comfort but that meant thinking of a life for herself without marriage, which was strange and not quite right. It meant she would be alone, and she wasn’t sure she was capable of it” (152). The novel thus seems to question the nineteenth century popular notion of women’s empowerment and education, for while it did give women the right to education, the highly patriarchal orientation of its purpose and intent denied women the right to make meaningful choices. Virmati’s own life mirrors some of the contradictions between the stated goal of education and actual opportunities that women could take advantage of. While she admires the courage and conviction of her friend Swarna Lata who could find a meaning to her life beyond that of marriage and domesticity, Virmati is conscious that she does not have such an option, as the professor would not like her to be like Swarna:

Virmati stared at Swarna. What a girl! Her opinions seemed to come from inside herself, her thoughts, ideas, and feelings blended without any horrible sense of dislocation. She was committed, articulate. Would the Professor want her to be like Swarna? ...Maybe she could be like Swarna from the inside, secretly. (135)

Virmati's contact with Swarna and her involvement with the women's movement lead her to examine her own life with the professor. Virmati begins to feel that unlike her friend Swarna, she has no choices of her own to make: "Am I free, thought Virmati. I came here to be free, but I am not like these women. They are using their minds, organizing, participating in conferences, politically active, while my time is being spent in love" (142). While Swarna exercises such options in almost everything, the professor mainly decides for Virmati what choices she should make including her education. It is the professor's decision that Virmati should do her MA to distract her from depression after her miscarriage.

In fact the problem of home and the world is a common theme in many literary works of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> One of the outgrowths of the reform movement and the woman's question was a notion that love or marriage needed to be companionate. An emerging body of history writing dealing with this period of colonial modernity explores the idea of the 'companionate marriage'.<sup>9</sup> The literature on domesticity in colonial India shows how the relation between the sexes in middle class was affected under the influence of the "new patriarchy" which transformed gender relations both within and outside the home.<sup>10</sup> There were contradictory expectations from women. On the one hand women were still expected to follow their husband's wishes, on the other hand they were also expected to play the role of the apparently modern, good-looking, well-dressed companion.<sup>11</sup> This is evident in the way Virmati's life is controlled by the professor. He seduces her and manages to convince her that she can have a better life if only she could free herself from the demands of an unwanted marriage. Under the influence of the professor, Virmati refuses to have an arranged marriage. Her family finally agrees to send her to Lahore for further education after she tries to commit suicide. Virmati is relieved of the pressure of having to live in her own

house once in Lahore and excited at the prospect of independence. She however continues to see the professor at his insistence. Throughout the time she is in Lahore, the professor persists in continuing his affair with Virmati. Virmati herself is not sure about how much choice had gone into her relationship with the professor: “Virmati briefly wondered how much actual choosing had gone into her relationship with the professor...” (151). As their relationship grows Virmati increasingly finds herself coming under his influence: “The Professor pinned Virmati to him with his low voice, telling her just what to look for, what to admire, what to criticize. Virmati listened, looked, wondered. Of course all that the Professor was saying must be true, he was older and so much more refined and civilized. He knew” (130). He stops her from going to Shantiniketan saying: “Imagine going to Shantineketan! What will she learn there compared to what I can teach her?” (201).

The professor’s attitude to Virmati’s sexuality augments his patriarchal domination and authoritarian influence over her: “She would drape the sari over her head, because he said it framed her face like a Madonna’s. He would look at her with that look in his eyes. She blushed now, thinking of it, and then she blushed at her thoughts” (129). The metaphor of Madonna suggests a model of patriarchal submission where Virmati must accept her own servitude and inadequacy thus reinforcing women’s childlike compliance and submission. The professor’s influence on Virmati thus extends to controlling her both mentally and physically. The professor’s dominance and control over Virmati’s life distances her from her family and increases her isolation. After her abortion, Virmati feels even her body is marked by the professor: “She tucked those pages of love inside the front of her kameez, and thought now he hardly needed letters to attach her to him. She was his for life, whether he

ever married her or not. Her body was marked by him, she could never look elsewhere, never entertain another choice” (177).

The empowerment promised by education is thus undercut by the nationalist ideology of producing educated women who would aid the process of nation building by being compliant wives and mothers and a helpmate to the husband. The contradiction between the aim of education for women that reformist discourse had propagated and the actual opportunities women may have had to live a more satisfying life is reflected in the way Virmati’s mother and Virmati think about the benefits of education:

What had come over the girl? She had always been so good and sensible. How could she not see that her happiness lay in marrying a decent boy, who had waited patiently all these years... What kind of learning was this, that deprived her of her reason? She too knew the value of education; it had got her husband, and filled her hours with the pleasure of reading. In her time, going to school had been a privilege, not to be abused by going against one’s parents. How had girls changed so much in just a generation? (60)

The fear that education would lead to disruption of the social order and loose morals, led many mothers to severely oppose the education of daughters. This was a fear that haunted everyone, even those who believed in reform. But it was not forcefully articulated in public. In fact, the popularity ideal of the domestic woman was valued precisely because it was believed that such a model would have the power to prevent the outbreak of social depravity among women. Many families resisted educating their daughters for fear that it would make girls immoral: “This was the very thing the men were afraid of, even the mothers. Education led to independence and loose conduct” (155). The novel thus represents contemporary

patriarchal views that question women's education for while it gave women the right to education, it still did not give them the freedom to think for themselves and make meaningful choices in their lives.

Virmati's family prides itself on the fact that it is among the handful of families who educate their girls. Virmati's mother, Kasturi, had been educated in an Arya Samaj School. She was taken out of the missionary school because her parents saw her praying to a picture of Christ. Kasturi's uncle then starts an Arya Samaj school for girls and Kasturi is the first girl in her family "to postpone the arrival of the wedding guests by a tentative assault on learning" (62). Through the entire period of her schooling "it was never forgotten that marriage was her destiny" (62). After she completes her graduation from school, her education continues in her home under her mother's instruction who "tried to ensure her future happiness by the impeccable nature of her daughter's qualification. She was going to please her in-laws" (62). Thus the education of girls became not only a way to ensure perpetuation of cultural values of patriarchy but also an effective tool to combat the onslaught of the British, which threatened to disrupt the Hindu social world: "He understood his sister-in-law was upset – praying to a picture of Christ was no small matter, he agreed, it was exactly in this way that the British sought dominion over their minds..." (61). It was not conceived that the women's education could have a purpose beyond that of national interest and the perpetuation of patriarchal values. Kasturi therefore hides it from her family for fear that it would make her conduct appear unfeminine: "Her clandestine activity was reading, which she protected from comments about self-absorption by gratifying it at night" (63).

Shakuntala and Virmati who follow their own paths therefore draw criticism from the family. Shakuntala's unmarried state is a concern for the family especially her mother Lajwanti, who considers her independent ways as unfeminine. Except for Virmati, who secretly admires her, all the other female relations in the family do not think well of Shakuntala who they think has failed to conform to the social roles of wife and mother. In their eyes, Shakuntala's achievements outside the home do not have any value. The novel thus juxtaposes the vexed question of education and autonomy in the outside world and the desire for love and marriage as incompatible goals for women in the early twentieth century.

It also succeeds in subtly showing the continuation of inequalities of gender relations in the context of the marital bond through the life of Ida, Virmati's daughter. Ida is a part of contemporary social arrangements and has to face the same pressure to live up to the roles of wife, mother and daughter just as her own mother and grandmother did. The confusion surrounding the creation of a distinct feminine self as opposed to the roles of wife and mother continues to persist as a theme right from the early twentieth century to the present times. That is why Ida tries to reconstruct her mother's life that she had rejected as a young girl. After having gone through the trauma of a disastrous marriage, Ida comes to appreciate what her mother's life with her father may have been like and she desperately looks for ways to connect: "I look for ways to connect... I try and ask about my mother, the way she was before I knew her" (4).

Ida represents the third generation of women in postcolonial India. In fact the novel is a reconstruction of her mother's life by the daughter. Ida remembers her girlhood as a less than pleasant time when she felt the pressure to be a model daughter and to please her father.

Although the father's authority reigns in their home, Ida is resentful of her mother Virmati who she feels is a difficult mother to deal with. As a result, she grows up with feelings of resentment against her mother Virmati whom she blames for the troubles in her life. Feminist psychologists identify 'mother blame' as one of the factors negatively affecting the mother-daughter bond.<sup>12</sup> Ida's attempts to reconstruct her mother's life through the perspectives of what others had to say about her is her way of reconciling with her memories of her dead mother.

Ida marries a professor, like her father, but the marriage proves to be a difficult one with little fulfillment. When she is pregnant, her husband forces her to undergo an abortion, as he does not want a child. The loss of her child and her growing alienation from her husband leads to the breakdown of her marriage. After her divorce Ida lives with her mother. The relationship between both mother and daughter is far from easy and each feels a lack of sympathy and communication. But after Virmati's death, Ida becomes obsessed with a desire to know her mother as she was before her marriage. Ida's attempts to make sense of her life leads her to piece together those parts of her mother's life that were a source of embarrassment to her family. Even Virmati prefers to keep silent about this part of her life: "She never talked much about herself" (223). Ida's repeated questions about Virmati's past are met with silence. Virmati's reticence in discussing her life increases Ida's desire to know about her mother's life in the years before she was married. For Ida, Virmati has been a difficult mother. She has known Virmati as a mother, but she must know that part of Virmati's life that would make possible a connection between mother and daughter in their common identity as women.

Ida's compulsion to know the woman who was her mother may be understood in the context of her guilt and sadness over her own failed marriage which fills her with a need to make a deeper connection to her mother:

For long periods I was engulfed by melancholy, depression and despair. I would lie in bed for hours, unable to sleep, pitying myself for all I didn't have, blaming my mother, myself. Now her shadow no longer threatens me. Without the hindrance of her presence, I can sink into her past and make it mine. In *searching for a woman I could know*, I have pieced together material from memories that were muddled, partial and contradictory. (280; *emphasis added*)

Ida's confession sums up the resistance and conflict in the mother-daughter bond that involves a distorted intimacy between women in patriarchal context. The daughter rebels against the choking love of her tyrannical mother. The mother is also shown to have ambivalence and resistance for the daughter when the daughter shows signs of independence. That is why Ida speaks of her mother's presence as 'hindrance'. As long as Virmati is present, Ida assumes a careless and casual attitude towards her and does not care to understand her sufficiently. On one occasion when Virmati expresses her desire for a quiet funeral after her death, Ida deliberately misunderstands her and by saying why bother having a funeral at all if no one is to be informed. In his analysis of the cultural construction of motherhood, Sudhir Kakar contends that the glorification of motherhood projects motherhood as the desired goal of a woman's life and the only way for a woman to gain power in a patriarchal culture that privileges males and discriminates against women ("Mothers and Infants" 79-87). Kakar's analysis includes instances from traditional Hindu

mythology and cultural practices such as the worship of motherhood. Kakar insists that male worship of motherhood reveals the Indian men' anxiety and fear of adult female sexuality rather than any real empowerment for women. As such the political and cultural implications of motherhood only serve to deeply secure the subordination of women; the mother's sexuality must be erased for her to be acceptable as a mother. Ida's attitude towards her mother's sexuality offers an alternate perspective on the elision between the maternal and the feminine in patriarchal cultures in which women are silenced as mothers.

After her mother's death Ida becomes obsessed with 'knowing' her mother as she was before she was married: "I try and ask about my mother, the way she was before I knew her" (4). In other words Ida wants to know the 'woman' behind the mother, those years of Virmati's life that has been silenced because of her involvement with the professor. Virmati herself does not speak about it. As a young girl, her family and relatives considered Virmati as a rebel who went against the wishes of her family to marry a man of her choice. Kasturi breaks off all ties with Virmati after her marriage to the professor. The five years Virmati spends in Lahore are the most difficult and tumultuous times of her life. Virmati secretly maintains her relationship with the professor and finds herself pregnant. With the help of her friend Swarna Lata, Virmati has an abortion but the incident leaves its marks both on her body and mind: "A great depression settled upon her. She felt more alone than ever... her body was marked by him, she would never look elsewhere, never entertain another choice" (177). Ida had to accommodate a mother who had broken certain stereotypes both as a daughter and as a woman and the retrieval and reconstruction of her mother's life may be read as a reconciliatory gesture towards her mother, when she herself is at the crossroad of her life as a "childless, husbandless woman" after the death of her mother. By looking back

upon her mother's life Ida is also forced to deal with her mother's sexuality. Feminists have pointed to "the elision between mother and woman which works to keep women tied, not merely to motherhood, but to specific ideologies of motherhood which foregrounds the institution of motherhood as the only site of power for women" (Ramanathan 18).

In India, femininity has long since been conflated with maternity. As noted earlier, analyses of cultural construction of maternity in India contends that the mother who is worshipped as a goddess reveals male fear of adult female sexuality rather than any real articulation of maternal power (Kakar "Mothers and Infants" 84). It perpetuates a total denial of the mother's sexuality and only then the woman becomes acceptable as mother. Nancy Friday argues that the one of the problems in the mother-daughter bond consists in accepting the mother's sexual identity as a woman. By digging into the silenced parts of her mother's life, Ida begins to understand her mother as woman and this understanding flows over to her own life where she learns to see herself as a woman. Thus the knowledge of her mother's life enables Ida to see much of how her mother coped with her life and how she herself is to deal with her own life. The knowledge of this understanding helps Ida to appreciate her mother's strength and it works to show her the way to move forward at the crossroads of her own life. As long as Virmati's relationship with Ida reduplicates old patterns of control, shame and dependence, Ida experiences her mother as a restrictive educator who is demanding of her. Ida's yearning to know about her mother's past thus forces apart the elision of mother's sexual identity and femininity without leading to a splitting of the mother-daughter bond. This coincides and completes Ida's maturation where she can find a connection with her mother as woman without disrupting her own identity as a daughter.

Feminist studies have indicated that even though women have entered the professional world, and Indian society itself may at times be seen as moving from a caste based society to a class structure, the hierarchies of gender and sexuality continue to constrain women in contemporary India (Liddle and Joshi). As it appears, the class structure is no more egalitarian than the caste structure, as oppression simply takes other forms. Kapur's novel captures this difficult predicament of the daughters of India as they negotiate through a maze of social, cultural and family arrangements to carve out an identity of their own from the colonial times through the postcolonial Indian society.

## II

If *Difficult Daughters* critiques the nationalist construction of femininity and domesticity that shaped the public and private spheres for middle class lives in the early twentieth century, *Listening Now* is an exploration of the inner lives of women in the contemporary milieu. Written in the romance format, *Listening Now* is an exploration of the way the lives of middle class women are shaped under pressure from the social expectations of womanhood. It tells the story of Padma, narrated through the eyes of her daughter Mallika who tries to reconstruct the life of her mother through the stories she hears from her. It has as many as six narrators; all of them have only a partial knowledge of Padma's life, thus each brings a different perspective to a love story blighted by parental disapproval. In the process, it reveals the extent to which the lives of these women are dominated by the structures of thought in the patriarchal milieu of their societies, their struggle to find a place for themselves and the deprivations suffered as a consequence are movingly told through the life stories of the women – Padma, Shanta, Madhu, Anuradha, Rukmini and Mallika – who

live, love and quietly struggle with the burden of their lives. All the narrators are women—mothers, daughters, sisters and friends – who listen to each other’s stories and bond with a sense of shared joy and sadness. The novel spans over a period of sixteen years. As each narrator tries to come to terms with Padma’s life story, it reveals a complex world of their own “permeated with desires, adjustments and a quiet despair” (Mukherjee <http://www.indiastar.com>).

Explaining about why she chooses to write about the quotidian lives of women, Appachana states that a majority of fiction written in English has mainly addressed the political landscape during and after independence, which leaves little room for telling stories about the ordinary lives of women. “In most such novels, even those with a broad canvas, external factors determine the way the story takes shape”. Contrary to this trend, in *Listening Now* “...the political landscape lies in the fabric of daily life, which is as valid and vibrant as the other political landscape” (“*Listening Now: Themes*”). It thus gives voice “to the ordinary by showing in the ordinary all the turbulence of passion and pain, happiness and sorrow, guilt and anger, which is normally assumed to belong only to the extraordinary. The suffering and silence so implicit in gender politics, is often intimated and emphasized in the novel by comedy and humour” (“*Listening Now: Themes*”). Thus the political underpinnings of the novel go beyond the area of the nation state to examine the gendered politics of personal lives. In fact, the credo of ‘the personal is political’ was one of the most influential rallying calls of the second wave feminist movement and continues to have a relevance for a discussion of the question of women’s agency where the modes of resistance may often be of a personal nature. As Meenakshi Mukherjee points out, the novel is a “nuanced reflection

on gender relations and the high price of non-conformity for women” (<http://www.indiastar.com>).

Unlike the novels discussed so far, *Listening Now* is less about conflicted relationships. Rather it represents an inner world of affirmative relations through its protagonists' lives with themes of female bonding, female sexuality and mother-daughter relationship that spans three generations. Ostensibly the novel is about the love story of Padma and Karan that unfolds through the narratives of the main protagonists. As the story of Padma's life unfolds, we have a glimpse of the inner world of these women, each having its own story to tell. As the narrative progresses, we find that their life stories possess as much intensity as the love story of Padma. But unlike Padma's love story, their stories of suffering and guilt, anger and happiness which are no less turbulent, spring from apparently what is perceived as the mundane, repetitive, domestic world.

The novel begins with Padma's high-strung adolescent daughter Mallika who tries to reconstruct her mother's past by investing it with an aura of romantic fantasy even though in her calmer moments she knows it is not true. This is followed by the version of Padma's neighbours, Madhu and Anuradha, who lead mundane lives, yet their accounts of the mundane lives they live with all their longings and resentments, desires and frustrations, the isolation and deprivation which are deep rooted in their lives, are perhaps among the most moving and vivid sections of the novel. Madhu is a middleclass housewife. As a young girl Madhu remembers her mother telling her to be a good daughter: “Beti listen, you have to learn to do without. One day your marriage will require you to do it without thinking...” (89). Madhu's memories reflect some of the ambivalences of growing up female in a

patriarchal milieu, which tells girls that their future happiness depends on their ability to please their husbands and in-laws. The theme of isolation and deprivation runs through almost all the narratives. Anuradha is a talented singer who has to give up singing after her marriage because her mother-in-law did not like her singing after marriage. She tries her best to please her cruel and demanding mother-in-law. Looking back on her own girlhood, Anuradha muses on how life changes after marriage:

...In this life there was no forgetting the Life Before. Now she understood why mothers wept so much when their daughters got married; it has less to do with sentiment and more to do with knowledge.... (111)

This knowledge of the changes marriage brings for a woman is carried over in the relation between Anuradha and her daughter Prabha whom she tries to teach to be docile and submissive. Prabha resents her mother's attempts to mould her into the kind of daughter that will please her family. She resents her mother's partiality to her brother Anirudh, for whom she keeps a fast but not for her and wants to know why girls are different from boys. She wants the acceptance and approval of her mother, even defends her mother from her grandmother's cruelty. But this causes more frustration to her mother whom her mother-in-law blames for not properly disciplining her daughter. This is a source of much tension in the mother-daughter relationship, as both Anuradha and Prabha feel isolated and alone with her problems. Anuradha's husband is supportive of his daughter, but he is completely indifferent to his wife. The tension between the mother and daughter further alienates Anuradha from her husband who tells her she is needlessly harsh with Prabha. Anuradha's own experiences have taught her that happiness lay in finding a perspective to life:

Perspective. That was what happiness was... happiness was not the absence of unhappiness not its opposite. If unhappiness meant being plunged into the depths, then happiness had its reign not in the heights, but in the plains. Its nature was not blissful but calm; it did not heighten one's senses but dulled them. It was that middle ground one had to seek in order to live. (155).

An aspect that dominates the narratives of these women's lives is a need for communication and empathy. Shanta thus longs to have a daughter who would want to know her mother., something that is absent in her relation with her mother and husband. Her relation with her mother Rukmimi is ambivalent. It is almost as if she expects self-affirmation through her daughter:

It would be different with her next child, she had thought ...she was sure it was a girl growing within her. It was not just the fact of kissing which you could do so much more of with a daughter. It was more than that. Her daughter, like her dream lover, would want to know her mother. Through her daughter as through her dream lover, she would discover herself, give words to all that lay within her. (162)

Simon de Beauvoir has argued that the mother-daughter relationship is much more dramatic than the mother-son bond because the mothers expect difference from her son, but from her daughter she expects to see an image of her own fragmented self. According to Beauvoir, the mother sees in her daughter her own double: "...in her she seeks a double. She projects upon her daughter all the ambiguity of her relations with herself; and when the otherness of this alter ego manifests itself, the mother feels herself betrayed" (qtd. in Wood 233).

Emphasizing the contradictory and ambivalent nature of the relationship, Melanie Klein also suggests that “identification with the father is less charged with anxiety than that with the mother; moreover, the sense of guilt towards her impels to over-compensation through a fresh love relation with her” (qtd. in Wood 233). The affective ties Shanta assumes she will have with her daughter can therefore be read as an ideal that has little correspondence to reality thus causing ‘transference of emotions’, a term used by Jane Flax to indicate the substitution of emotion (Flax “Mother-Daughter Relationships”). Shanta who does not find the acceptance and affection she craves from her mother wants to live out that bond with a daughter. Shanta finds such a bond in Mallika to whom she plays a surrogate mother:

All her life she had sought it...It was the completeness of Mallika’s love had sought all her life...Her sons would always love her, they would always be there for her, but they would never know her. Unlike Mallika. Already Mallika knew her in that fundamental, essential way, already Mallika was asking questions about her childhood and her dreams and her experience...Only Mallika loved her the way she wanted to be loved, only Mallika adored her. (222)

Feminists have indicated how women’s silence can be read as a kind of resistance. In her article “Feminism and the Politics of Resistance”, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan argues that women’s silence is no longer the silence of the weak, “silence became an instrument to counter patriarchal ideology” (158). It becomes a mode of women’s resistance, which is different from protest or revolt as women do not generally take to collective activism. Rather it is the small, everyday acts of resistance that goes unnoticed but when analyzed they become important ways to disempower patriarchal control. Given the unequal

entitlements and expectations within the institution of marriage, Padma and Shanta are thus advised by their mother Rukmini, who states:

No amount of education could teach you what she had known from the beginning—that if there was a rightful place in marriage for anything, that if there was anything a woman could legitimately bring into marriage besides her children, that thing was her silence. (340)

Rukmini's observation not only indicates a resistant consciousness but also the subtle ways women achieve power through "manipulations within the domestic sphere, the subversions of religious and cultural resources and the deployment of sexuality" (Rajan 161). Padma realizes the truth of her mother's assertion years later when Karan, her lover in college and Mallika's father, returns to ask for forgiveness. She rejects his offer of marriage because it would have been "more debilitating being a wife and daughter-in-law" (462). By the end of the narrative, Padma's transformation is complete. What she was when she had first met Karan is no longer relevant to who she is. Padma's story ends with her transformation from a passive, acquiescing young girl to a woman who successfully makes a life of her own without male patronage.

The mother-daughter relationship between Padma and Mallika has an ambivalent quality. While Padma is persuaded to hide her transgressive past from her daughter Mallika because of her fear that it may alienate her from her daughter, Mallika is inexplicably protective of her mother's vulnerability. This silence and repression of the mother's sexuality is important in the way it creates an ambivalent position about whether the mother can be viewed as a potential transgressor or as a victim. By representing the anxiety between concealment and expression the narrative points to the complex inner lives of the

protagonists as well as the subtle interplay between the text and the subtext. By exploring the hidden world of the women protagonists and their repressed feelings, through the mother-daughter relation between Padma and Mallika, the narrative suggests a restrained subversion of patriarchy in the way the mother's sexuality is acknowledged in the end when Mallika rejects her father; there is no condemnation of the mother for having fulfilled her sexual desires. In this sense, *Listening Now* may be said to represent the conflict between the social self and the inner world of repressed feeling of the protagonist, which generates an aesthetically intricate tension between constraint and desire.

## Conclusion

It may therefore be concluded from the above discussion that the representation of resistance in women's fiction shows the power of hegemonic discourses in shaping their lives. Yet it disavows the typical narrative of disempowerment and victimization that is generally attributed to women in third world contexts. In a sense, the delineation of resistance and women's awareness of their own power becomes a medium through which feminist dilemmas about agency, subjectivity and the recovery of a distinct female voice are effectively addressed. It shows the multivalent and complex nature of women's engagement with and their resistance to hegemonic discourses, which allows the possibility to assume that women show rebellion both at the socio-cultural level and literary levels. As Malashri Lal observes, "the female destiny and its expression through *women positioned in a real situation* is complicit with the community consensus on women's 'proper place' " (28, emphasis in original). Feminists have tried to explain why "women accede to their own oppression" in terms of socialization theory whereby individuals adapt to social structures

(Crowley and Himmelvert 18). Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid's discussion on the construction of gender in India has pointed out that women have a "consensual and contractual relationship" with men which elicits from them both their consent and resistance (867-82). This may help explain women's problematic relationship to patriarchy where they are positioned as both its victims and its beneficiary.

This chapter has tried to problematize the pervasive ideology of asexual motherhood in the context of the mother-daughter relationship. While the theme of maternal sexuality has raised considerable interest among feminists, it has rarely been considered an appropriate and pressing topic of enquiry within feminist studies. The uneasy relationship between sexuality and motherhood is in a large measure due to the belief that good mothers do not have sexual feelings and aspire to the notion of an asexual motherhood. Feminist writes like Susan Contratto have drawn attention to the widespread prevalence of this assumption at least in the middle classes (768-69). The unresolved dilemma between maternity and sexuality is a source of psychological tension to women who have internalized this ideology. One of the consequences of the internalization of this vision of asexual motherhood is that many women are uncomfortable with their own sexuality consciously or unconsciously. Within the context of the mother-daughter relationship, as represented in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* and Anjana Appachana's *Listening Now*, the daughter comes to view the mother's sexual identity as part of a 'difficult' condition that clashes with the ideal of the domestic asexual mother. These two novels typically embody mothers who refuse to deny their sexuality. While these narratives present the mother as an interesting figure because of her censored sexual life, they also seem to suggest that the protective

function of maternal silence is the very condition that generates conflict and unease because it prevents the daughter from viewing her mother as a woman with desires like her own.

Both Virmati and Padma are problematic models for their daughters as they refuse to sacrifice themselves in order to preserve the social order. Virmati refuses to have an arranged marriage and has a sexual relationship with the professor before marrying him. Padma's relationship with Karan results in pregnancy before marriage. Both Virmati and Padma rebel against the renunciation of female desire, but once they return to their families they are forced to preserve silence about their past. The reticence surrounding maternal sexuality leads to anxiety and conflict in the mother-daughter relationship. Virmati and Padma find it difficult, if not impossible, to openly tell the story of their sexual histories to their daughters. Once Ida and Mallika acknowledge the sexual identity of their mothers they are able to view their mothers as women just like them. This enables them to not only express their own desires but also to connect with their mothers in a meaningful way, as it allows them to see their mothers as women who had desires like their own.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Feminism's relationship to Foucault has been an ambivalent one. Feminists have cautioned against using Foucault's theory in no uncertain terms. Toril Moi, for instance, has argued that using Foucault's discourses may have serious consequences for feminism which may lead to the "depoliticisation of feminism" (Toril Moi. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist literary Theory*. London: Routledge, 1985. 95). Some others like Nancy Hartsock assert that poststructuralist theories of Foucault fail to provide a theory of power for women (Nancy Hartsock. "Foucault on Power." *Feminism and Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1990). Still others criticize Foucault's notion of subjectivity that does not allow for agency and resistance. Recent feminist works have indicated how Foucault's ideas can provide important theoretical resources for feminism, especially his theory of subjectivity as embodied and historically constituted (Margaret A. McLaren. *Feminism, Foucault and Embodied Subjectivity*. Suny Press, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Susan Bordo's work is part of a larger field of studies, generally designated as "body studies". Her analyses focus on the practical consequences for women's life in the context of feminist analyses of contemporary culture. While psychoanalytic feminists have discussed the importance of the family in the shaping of the girl's body and her relation to it, Bordo moves away from this focus on the family to contend that a number of social forces together combine in the shaping of bodies. She further argues that these forces shift over time from one society to another and that bodies are not fixed in nature, rather they respond to the demands placed on it by social forces. One of the primary ideas of Bordo is that femininity, as ideology, is inscribed on the body through a variety of social mechanisms. For Bordo, feminism therefore begins through an analysis of how cultural coding exercise power over the construction of gendered bodies and subjectivities of women.

<sup>3</sup> Sara Mills explains Dorothy Smith's concept of 'femininity as discourse', which does not view femininity as a normative order that is somehow reproduced through socialization where women are subordinated to it. According to Smith femininity is a complex of actual relations rested in texts. Certain forms of knowing are the basis for ruling in social life. Because of women's history of exclusion and oppression, it is easier to subordinate their knowing by imposing dominant perspectives. Smith points out that understanding how this knowledge of their local knowing is undermined and replaced is a preliminary step for empowering people, especially women. Smith's method of enquiry involves investigating social relations and the organization of consciousness. It reveals that women's standpoint comes from their everyday world of experiences; as such Smith believes that such forms of knowing can offer a challenge to ruling perspectives.

<sup>4</sup> Jyoti Puri draws attention to the processes of collaboration by the nation state in propagating hegemonic narratives on gender and sexuality. An example of this is the state sponsored sex education materials

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analyzed by Puri, which reveal the kind of strategies used to regulate the prescription of sexed bodies, heterosexuality and aspects of sexual identity in young girls. These narratives provide clues about how these discourses are normalized, regulated and enforced through state sponsored apparatuses and institutions in postcolonial Indian society.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Walsh's *Domesticity in Colonial India* discusses how the ideas of colonial modernity affected the lives of women in the everyday spaces of home and domesticity. According to Walsh, British colonialism gave an opportunity for Indian women to create a new ideal of femininity. Walsh problematizes the idea of "new patriarchy" by asserting that women contested rather than simply accepted this emergent ideology.

<sup>6</sup> Page numbers will refer to all subsequent references to the text.

<sup>7</sup> Kannabiran and Lalitha's analyses discuss how periods of revolutionary struggles see women's participation in such movements. Such periods are generally characterized by a loosening of patriarchal control where women are urged to come out and participate in it: "Suddenly, the four walls of the household seemed to fall apart and structures of feudal oppression, so unchanging and permanent in the past, were not only being questioned but were also challenged in practice. A new society, a socialist society was on the horizon. Women were being exhorted and required to come out and share the responsibility... Paradoxically enough, although women are perceived as the guardians and preservers of traditional culture and although the very stability of any given society is perceived as resting on the purity and orthodoxy of its women, in practice women have achieved major gains during periods of war or revolution" (183).

<sup>8</sup> *Ghaire-Baire*, loosely translated as *Home and the World*, is a famous novel by Rabindranath Tagore written in 1916. Satyajit Ray later made it into a film with the same title in 1984. Its plot typically deals with the romantic and marital life of a young Bengali couple set against the backdrop of the new colonial modernity in Bengal. The novel dramatizes the pressures the irreconcilable pressures of home and the outside world for women through the protagonist Bimala. It became instantly popular when it was published because of the controversial nature of the subject matter in which Tagore takes the opportunity to criticize the ideology of nationalism contrary to its rising popularity in India and in the West.

<sup>9</sup> The idea of the companionate marriage is a modified version of the Victorian model of love and marriage where love between couples was regarded as a worthy reason for marriage rather than the old Hindu view of arranged marriages where marriages were decided by the families of the bride and the groom. This concept was quite popular in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries especially among men of the upper classes. One of the reasons attributed to the popularity of this ideal of love and marriage was the growth of a new English educated class. Under the new reformed education system the young educated class of Indian society was influenced by Victorian values, especially in relation to the idea of marriage that eagerly embraced the new model of marriage as a romantic partnership that transferred the authority of the

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mother-in-law to that of the husband. Judith Walsh has noted that this new model of romantic partnership also found acceptance among young wives who were only too glad to be able to escape the powerful influence of the mother-in-law.

<sup>10</sup> Dipesh Chakraborthy uses the concept of 'new patriarchy' to explain the new set of gender relations that developed in Bengal under British Rule. He however opposes the conventional understanding of the development of new patterns of domestic arrangement in Bengal as a simple improvisation of the domestic ideals of European thought. In his book *Provincializing Europe* he argues that, "...Bengali modernity may have imagined life-worlds in ways that never aimed to replicate either the political or the domestic ideals of modern European thought" (217).

<sup>11</sup> This theme is treated in many novels written by women. Well known examples include Ashapura Devi's novels whose works are known for their strong women characters. Her famous trilogy *Pratham Pratishuti* (1964), *Swarnalatha* (1967), and *Bukul Katha* (1974) traces the life histories of three generations of women. Set against the backdrop of the nineteenth century, the novels dramatize the contradictory expectations from women in nineteenth century Bengal that wanted women to be traditional followers of their husband's wishes, yet appear as a modern, good looking, well-dressed companion. These novels explore the tensions and aspirations of these women as they wrestle with the expectations of their husbands, families, and the society. The second novel in the trilogy *Swarnalata* is about a young girl who is married off by her grandmother. She dreams of education for herself and her daughters and fights throughout her life with her husband and family and later on with her own sons and her daughter who cannot understand her dissatisfaction with life and her desire for greater personal freedom. In the end Swarnalata dies, alone and misunderstood in her own house. One of the metaphors used to describe the protagonist's incarceration, is her dream of a terrace from where she will be able to see the outside world.

<sup>12</sup> Feminist and psychoanalysts identify 'mother blame' as a pervasive and powerful aspect of patriarchal society, especially with reference to the mother-daughter bond. It refers to feelings of resentment towards mothers that daughters assume as an outcome of emotional distress of growing up during adolescence years. It can however extend longer than that and may at times be used to explain a tendency, an influence of the patriarchal institute of motherhood, to hold mothers responsible for any difficulty or trouble that children and young adolescents experience in adult years as a consequence of inadequate or inappropriate care by mothers.

## Chapter 5

### Mothers as Matriarchs

The previous chapter discusses some of the themes in the psycho-social development of women and girls under patriarchy. This chapter will look at how age inequalities and hierarchy in relationships among women play themselves out in a wide range of settings. In the context of patriarchal culture, the matriarch may be identified as “a representative of patriarchy who in order to sustain the dominant discourse exercises control over the value-system” (Bande 86). In their role as the matriarch, women have access to authority within the family, which is used to maintain the traditional power structures in the family. Under patriarchy, women and girls occupy a marginal status and are subservient to the authority and control not only of the father, but also of the elderly female or the matriarch of the family (Kandiyoti 279-80).<sup>1</sup> The position and status of women under conditions of patriarchy are dependent on the ability to produce sons who will then carry on the family genealogy. It thus follows that the matriarch status is one that affords women some amount of authority and control within the family. The exclusivity of the situation is indicated by the fact that it is not any young female member of the family who may be the matriarch. It can only come to women after having accommodated the socially accepted roles of wife and mother. This can be a double-edged position for women. While it indicates the devaluation of women in cultures of patriarchy, it also shows ways in which women may have a chance to see themselves as active participants in community and social life.

Studies on age and gender hierarchies have shown the complex ways in which the lives of younger and older women are closely connected (Putman and Brown).<sup>2</sup> In their mature age, older women can enjoy many privileges and garner power, which are denied to younger women. Cross-cultural evidence suggests that women's status change for the better with age because it brings in its wake, role discontinuity to women which allows them to become dominant and powerful (Putmen and Brown xi-xvii; Kerns and Brown 2-3).<sup>3</sup> With age women participate in extra domestic roles. These changes in the lives of older women form the basis for age hierarchies. Yet as in any hierarchy, age inequalities and hierarchy in relationship are also potential sites of coalition and conflict (Foner ix).<sup>4</sup> Within the family, women develop affectionate ties of mutual interdependence and identification despite the differences of age and relationship hierarchies. At the same time these hierarchies are also the cause of much conflict and suppressed antagonism among women. Nancy Foner's study of relationship dynamics between mothers and daughters, among mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law and that among senior and junior wives concludes that "old women are sometimes active agents in upholding and reinforcing social practices that keep young women subordinate to men" and that "deep strains and cleavages" may divide younger and older women (qtd. in Putmen and Brown xiv). This shows that the nature of relations among women is multifaceted and can frequently provide a basis for cooperation as well as conflict. It also indicates that age and gender hierarchies among women are based upon and intersect with social and cultural beliefs about role expectations for women. Social change also influences the balance of power in relations between younger and older women.

While most theoretical studies of the mother-daughter bond have focused on psychological factors, little attention has been given to the ways social changes can affect

the balance of power between younger and older women and thus the very nature of these relationships. This can be seen in situations where expanded opportunity structures encourage young women to step out of their traditional roles and adopt a lifestyle of their choice. Mothers can be encouraging and supportive of their daughter's choices. In other situations, elderly women are also known to actively suppress younger women, especially in matters of controlling the younger women's sexuality.

Feminist theories have focused on the psychological factors that influence the mother-daughter bond. Feminist scholarship has also pointed to the ways issues of race, class and ethnicity impact the construction of maternal subjectivity in women from diverse social locations (Collins 56-74).<sup>5</sup> Women's writing in genres such as black women's autobiographies and works of fiction represent mothers and daughters in positive terms and the work mothers do is viewed in terms of their participation in social and communal life (Porter; O'Reilly). Andrea O'Reilly and Sharon Abbey in their analysis of Afro-American women's writing, for instance, have asserted that the mother-daughter bond is experienced as one of connection, empowerment through transformation where the mother passes on to the daughter her attitudes of strength, power and survival (O'Reilly and Abbey). In their scholarly work on women's writing in India, Susie Tharu and K Lalita have shown that women's responses to ideologies of gender are shaped by class and caste positions (Tharu and Lalita).<sup>6</sup> Feminist historians have pointed out how structures of patriarchy are integrated into the caste system and the subtle ways by which such a system encourages collaboration by women through a process of ideological self-regulation in women (Chakravarti 285).<sup>7</sup> Theorizations on gender issues in India have pointed to the impossibility of separating gender and caste (Geetha).<sup>8</sup> Class and caste intervene in

shaping women's subjectivity and the degree of agency available depending on social circumstances. The intersection of caste and class may have implications for the mother-daughter relationship. Sharmila Rege's analysis of autobiographies by Dalit women suggests the powerful presence of mothers even when constrained by practices of social exclusion and exploitation (Rege 23-31).<sup>9</sup>

The matriarch, however, is not always a benign presence. This can be seen in mother-daughter relationships, but the antagonism is perhaps best manifested in the mother-in-law/ daughter-in-law relationship. Mothers try to hold on to their sons to retain their control over the family members. The bride whose submissive presence in the household confirms the power and authority of the matriarch is also positioned as a potential usurper of that very power and authority. This leads to inevitable conflict because both women claim the loyalty and protection of the man on whom they have a major claim—one as mother, the other as wife. Christiana Vlahoutsikou has elaborately discussed the nature of the competitive ties between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law as one perpetuated by the dependent position of women in virilocal communities where “a woman's ability to realize her projects hinges on her ability to secure a sympathetic male ear. It is therefore particularly important for both of the married women in the household to capitalize on their bond with this central male in the constellation of household relations” (285). Women's folksongs and stories describe the mother-in-law as cruel and harsh who often tortures young brides and makes their lives miserable (Raheja and Gold). Many of the songs sung by women describe the anxiety and fear young brides have at the time of marriage which is mainly inspired by fear and anxiety about what kind of treatment she will receive at the hands of her mother-in-law. As the content of these songs illustrate, antagonism and conflict is intrinsic to the

relationships women form with other women in their conjugal homes and it will perhaps not be overstating the point to say that the relationship between young wives and the matriarch who is the mother-in-law is frequently antagonistic.

Folk representations of relations between mothers and daughters however generally portray warm affectionate mother-daughter ties. In such representations the mother is usually depicted as a friend and ally to the daughter who turns to her mother in times of trouble. These ties of affection and concern continue to grow even after the daughter's marriage. The mother then assumes the role of a confidante to the daughter (Upadhyaya 217-226).<sup>10</sup> In this connection Sudhir Kakar and Katharina Kakar comment that the nature of the emphatic bond between mothers and daughters arises from the mother's own experience of suffering and discrimination and her identification with the future plight of her daughter in her conjugal home (*The Indians* 49). The yearning for the natal home is a common theme in popular songs and ballads as illustrated by the ethnographic work on women's expressive traditions in North India where women's oral traditions provide a counter discourse to the cultural authority of patriarchy (Raheja and Gold). This yearning for the natal home is generally explained as arising from "the special maternal affection reserved for daughters, contrary to expectations derived from social and cultural prescriptions, which is partly to be explained by the fact that a mother's unconscious identification with her daughter is normally stronger than with her son" (Kakar and Kakar 60).

This popular representation of the mother-daughter bond is differently presented in Indian Women's Fiction in English. The mother-daughter bond here is often represented as a conflicted relationship, which plays a pivotal role in the way women imagine their identities

as perceived by themselves and others in the context of a patriarchal society divided along the axis of class, caste and gender issues. Within this framework the mother-daughter bond becomes the context to deal with issues concerned with the everyday lives of women, the generational divide between women and their attempts to trace connection and empathy by looking back at the life stories of their mothers. While the idea of the matriarch exists in patrilineal families, this role is viewed primarily in relation to brides or the daughters-in-law but not in relation to daughters. Mother-daughter bonds are assumed to thrive on relations of mutual reciprocal warmth and understanding. While this is not a misrepresentation of the existence of warm, mutually supporting bonds of attachment between mothers and daughters, very often, this assumption can obscure the stressful aspects that characterize mother-daughter interactions. The focus of this chapter will be to see whether there does exist the possibility of viewing the mother-daughter relationship as a difficult and less than satisfactory bond. In the context of Indian Women's writing in English the mother-daughter relationship may be read as a "power relationship" where the mother uses her influence to train the daughter to fit the cultural script of femininity (Bande 89). As Jasbir Jain points out, "Motherhood is egocentric, it gives a sense of power, power that women may not necessarily wield in the wider, social world" (59-60). In the novels that will be discussed in this chapter, the ambivalence and ambiguity of the maternal role seriously undermines the daughter's agency. This aspect of the mother-daughter bond will be examined with reference to Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Kavery Nambisan's *Mango-Coloured Fish* (1998). These novels represent difficult relations which are a departure from the popular theme of the mother-daughter bond as a loving relationship; through these novels it is possible to imagine the mother-daughter bond as a more fraught

and complicated relationship than its current understanding. While the two earlier chapters also dealt with difficult relations between the mother and daughter, they looked at the problem of reconciling with the mother's sexuality and creativity from the daughter's perspective. This chapter however considers the possibility of viewing the mother as a matriarch who wields power over her daughter. This has to be seen in connection with the discussion in the previous chapter about the socialization of girls where the contradictions and ambiguities between the discourse and experience of motherhood and the unique and often problematic ways of relating in the mother-daughter. The present chapter will thus focus on the problematic aspect of the mother-daughter bond, which is the mother's role as a matriarch in relation to the daughter. The representation of the mother as the matriarch, who assumes this role in relation to her daughter, is contrary to the popular consideration of the maternal role as is the resistance offered to the complicity of the matriarch in perpetuating ideological hegemonies. Section I is a discussion of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* while Section II discusses Kavery Nambisan's *Mango-Coloured Fish* in the context of the mother-daughter relationship and its representation in Indian Women's Fiction in English.

## I

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* critiques the continuation of caste and gender inequalities in post independence India. The novel features a number of asymmetrical and exploitative relationships, which form the core identities of groups and individuals and are elaborately defined and supported as social hierarchy, as a set of social rules that characteristically determine the social and occupational spaces in the given milieu. Psychosocial studies and ethnographic data reveal the level of hierarchal ideology that is

embedded in Indian society. Roy's novel shows the intersection of caste and gender prejudices that have come to influence the Syrian Christian community in India. Although situated in the 1960's, the narrative moves from the past to the present times in order to show the corroding socio-political realities of caste and gender in post independence India. In their work, *A Double Colonisation: Colonial and Postcolonial Women's Writing* (1985) Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford conceptualized the term 'double colonization' to refer to the dual oppression of women under patriarchy and colonial rule.<sup>11</sup> Arundhati Roy takes great care not to lose sight of the cultural specificity in representing the "double colonization" of Indian women under colonial rule and native patriarchies. It is this double colonization of women that forms the cultural and historical background of *The God of Small Things*. The multilayered narrative uses a unique point of view where childhood memories are recounted from a girl child's point of view, which are then narrated from the vantage point of a third-person narrator. This is done in order to show how childhood experiences of girls remain crucial to the formation of women's adult psyche in social and political locations that are underscored by gendered norms. Cultures of gender in repressive societies negatively impact women and girls and *The God of Small Things* is driven by the need to bear witness to the routine atrocities on women by patriarchal culture (Tickell 30).

*The God of Small Things* deals with postcolonial society in the southern Indian state of Kerala. The narrative self-consciously addresses issues related to history and patterns of collective identity, which are engaged with the redefinition of local cultural references. Postcolonial theory has increasingly become an interdisciplinary field of study. Much of the earlier influence of language oriented approaches such as poststructuralism has now been replaced by a sensitivity to the processes of history that becomes an important

reference in understanding the transition in postcolonial societies as they undergo fundamental changes and grapple with the problem of local redefinition of collective identity. Critics like Aijaz Ahmad and Arif Dirlik have claimed that postcolonial studies cannot be disconnected from a study of the national liberation struggles of the mid-twentieth century. The novel takes cognizance of the collective forms of resistance alongside the more subjective forms of postcolonial resistance to which critics like Aijaz Ahmad and Arif Dirlik have pointed. In *The God of Small Things* we see the juxtaposition of Naxalite protests alongside the lonely struggle of Ammu who fights the hostility of local society. The moral and political import of *The God of Small Things* is conveyed obliquely through the process of subtle interconnectedness that continually challenge the boundaries set up between the powerful and the powerless (Tickell 10-12). In fact Roy's focus on 'small things' and their place in the larger political frameworks show a different kind of prioritizing, one that questions the accepted world views about social formations. It reflects Roy's views about the authorial role as someone who "asks uncomfortable questions" (177). The privileging of small things instead of the usual order of public politics shows that Roy's aim is to look for alternative ways of seeing and understanding that can transcend the dehumanizing and exploitative relations of caste, class and gender to make way for a more humane response grounded in local concerns.

*The God of Small Things* is unusual in comparison to other works in Indian Writing in English because of its focus on one of India's religious minorities, the Syrian Christian community. Through the novel, Roy looks critically at the postcolonial society of Kerala by pointing out some of the sources of conflict and tension in contemporary times. The novel embodies the powerful role of postcolonial literature as an interventionist discourse in its

function as social criticism. Postcolonial literatures have now moved beyond the initial moment of assertion, of “writing back” to the colonies. Although the dialogue with the erstwhile colonies and an assessment of the damages and after-effects of colonialism is still relevant to a discussion of postcolonial literatures, they have ceased to be the central concern for the new generation of writers. In its place, now we see a new self-conscious engagement with the internal problems of post independence society that has become the main preoccupation of the new generation of postcolonial writers. Such social critique is usually directed at particular location keeping in mind its past history and the current socio-political issues, the main aim being to provide key ideas, concepts and figurations that have a critical perspective on some of the internal problems that plague these societies. In *The God of Small Things* Arundhati Roy examines a set of social taboos around caste/class barriers in the Syrian Christian community, which is a serious political issue in the context of the society represented in the novel.

Although the caste system is a part of Hindu society, it has made inroads into other ethnic groups. The Syrian Christian community has a high social standing and practices endogamy and strictly observes ritual caste practices (Tickell 19). Many lower caste groups consider Syrian Christians together with the matrilineal Nair families, as one of the high caste groups. As shown in the novel, the caste/class divide separating the Syrian Christians from people with a ‘lower’ social status are as severe and racist as in the case of other castes and communities. Roy has tried to explain the sense of caste inferiority felt by untouchables like Velutha and Vellya Paapen as a consequence of Kerala’s age old caste proscriptions which did not allow ‘untouchables’ to walk on public roads, to cover their upper bodies or to carry umbrellas. Earlier works on caste and untouchability had defined caste in terms of the

concepts of purity and pollution. Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchus* (1967) states that the opposition between the ideas of purity and pollution are central to the organization of caste hierarchies. New sociological analyses have, however, criticized this view of caste system as a static and fixed system. The new theorizing on caste and untouchables views caste

in terms of a system of action [...] To look at caste as something which people 'do' rather than something which they 'are' appears to go against the grain of modern interest in identity, but the two perspectives are complementary if we regard identity as something which emerges in certain situations. (Searle-Chatterjee and Sharma 9)

This new line of thinking on caste likens it to a racial identity, which is more a result of social interactions rather than a fixed, static model. In *The God of Small Things*, Velutha's unwillingness to submit to caste regulations is evident in "the quiet way he offered suggestions without being asked and disregarded suggestions without appearing to rebel" (76). In this sense, the novel critiques the failure of the state and civil society in removing social inequalities, which are still practiced in covert forms in postcolonial society of Kerala. The critique of communism also comes from a similar failure to live up to its ideals of equality and social justice. The police murder Velutha who is rumoured to have joined the Naxalites during his absence from Ayemenem after Comrade Pillai refuses to help him and is betrayed. Roy thus exposes how the State, political ideology and caste prejudice work in collusion with upper caste and class male hegemony to erase any instances of resistance. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham in her article " 'The Small Voice of History' in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*" states: "what makes Velutha dangerous so far as touchables and untouchables are concerned is his refusal to be interpellated or addressed as a Paravan

[...] within the governing logic of Roy's novel; it is precisely this out-of-placedness[...] that makes Velutha a likely agent of the possibility of social change" (374). Velutha may be seen as a fictional representation of the subaltern who is allowed to speak in limited ways. By staging the Ammu-Velutha affair as central to the plot of *The God of Small Things*, Roy seems to suggest the commonality of their differently experienced subalterneity. They figuratively represent the historically sanctioned forms of oppression of caste and gender that theoretically make up the category of the subaltern (Tickell 81).

Roy draws on past traditions of Indian Women's fiction that go back to colonial times. Roy's awareness of social injustice and oppression of women in religious communities as typified by the sexism Ammu faces as a divorcee in *The God of Small Things* are issues that some of the earlier women writers in the nineteenth century such as Krupabai Sathianadhan, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Cornelia Sorabji have voiced concern over in their writings. In the post independence period of the 1970's and 80's, women novelists like Anita Desai, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, Shashi Deshpande and Nayantara Sehgal tried to gain visibility for Indian women by foregrounding the predicament of urban middle class women who often find themselves at the receiving end of conflicting discourses of sexuality, gender, caste and citizenship (Mullaney 25). Although these novelists have not in any way influenced the stylistic aspect of Roy's novel, some of the common feminist concerns of these novelists find a place in Roy's text. For example, the novels of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande highlight the lives of middle-class urban Indian women trapped in the domesticity of unfulfilled home life. In her discussion of the representation of home in Indian Women's fiction, Rosemary George argues that a common pattern in these novels is the protagonist's encounter with a distressing domestic situation such as, "a

divorce, an extramarital affair, an unpleasant encounter with suffering, or a cross-class confrontation” (132). As she writes,

Whatever its scale the event develops into the central event or crisis of the narrative, whose reverberations force the protagonist to confront the parameters of herself, her life and her worth. The period of self-examination is followed by a return (often with relief) to her life of domestic boredom [...] or by a rejection of the entire enterprise of domesticity. (132)

We can find parallels in the plot variants of these novels and the representation of Ammu in *The God of Small Things*. Ammu defies the community rules by having an inter-caste marriage. Having witnessed the repeated cruelty of her father who beats up his wife regularly, Ammu tries to escape from her oppressive home by marrying a Hindu whom she meets while on a visit to her relatives. She leaves home for good only to be disappointed, when she finds her husband to be an alcoholic. When the marriage fails, Ammu is forced to return to her maternal home in Ayemenem with her two children. As a divorcee in an orthodox Syrian Christian family, Ammu has to face the hostility of local disapproval. Ammu is dismayed at her own limited opportunities: “she was twenty seven that year, and in the pit of her stomach she carried the knowledge that for her life had been lived. She had had one chance. She made a mistake. She married the wrong man”(38). The metaphor used to describe Ammu is that of a terrorist: “What is it that gave Ammu this unsafe edge [...]. It was what she was battling inside her. An unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber” (44).

At one level, the metaphor implies the potentially taboo breaking force of Ammu's sexuality. At another level it lays bare the ambiguity between discourse of motherhood and sexuality where women's sexuality is valued only to the extent it can fit in with patriarchal expectations of biological reproduction. Ammu's situation represents what Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford describe as 'double colonization' where women's experience of oppression is linked to the colonial past, and any attempt at resistance or rebellion has to be seen in the context of politics of caste and sexuality of particular religions and regional communities. As a divorcee and a mother Ammu is easily vulnerable to social control. Mamachi, Baby Kochamma and Chaco make it evident that any claim she may have had on the family wealth has been forfeited because of her marriage outside the community. She no longer has any position in the family, much less have a voice of her own. Chaco's claims of his rights over Ayemenem House signals the economic and legal implications of gender inequalities which perpetrate patriarchal power: "What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine" (57).

By drawing attention to the legal inequalities between Ammu and Chaco, Arundhati Roy draws attention to the lack of women's rights in orthodox religious communities, which is one of the main reasons for women's oppression. Although Ammu's status as a divorced mother make her an easy subject of social control, her involvement with Velutha destabilizes not only the caste laws but also the oppressive gender stereotypes, which desexualizes motherhood and treats women's bodies as sites of social control. The "unsafe edge" that characterizes Ammu is thus a challenge to sexual taboos of the Syrian Christian community with its strict notions of caste purity; it represents a threat to the social order that would keep gender, sexuality and caste practices separate. As Brinda Bose argues,

to read Arundhati Roy's novel politically, we may have to accept that "there are certain kinds of politics that have more to do with interpersonal relations than grand revolutions, that [...] personal dilemmas can also become public causes, that erotics can also be a politics" (68). The political relevance of the novel thus lies in the choices Ammu makes, "choices in which the momentary freedom of the fatal, transgressive sexual act outweighs any possible penalties" (Tickell 90).

Critics like Aijaz Ahmad have taken issue with the presentation of caste and sexuality in *The God of Small Things*. In a famous reading of Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Ahmad has criticized the sexual/romantic content of the novel (114).<sup>12</sup> Others like Brinda Bose have argued in favour of sexual politics of the novel and its valorization of female sexuality because it represents a willingness to cross boundaries of class and caste since these transgressions are conscious decisions (121). What Bose implies is that eroticism can also be a form of politics. Its realm lies in personal spaces and the power of such a politics lies in the choices of the protagonists:

[...] the politics of the novel is contained in the subversion of this shame and defeat through the valorization of erotic desire. To lounge knowingly and deliberately, for what one must not have—for what will result in shame and defeat- is to believe that the very process of the pursuit would render the ultimate penalty worthwhile [...]. (Bose 130)

Feminist readings have also pointed to the collusion of female characters in perpetrating patriarchal domination (Chanda 38-44). In *The God of Small Things* Mammachi acts as an agent of patriarchy "by facilitating the sexual exploitation of women by her son

[...] accepts the tenets of a male dominated society where women are the marginalized Other, the eternal victims of an unfavourable rapport de force” (Chanda 40; qtd. in Tickell). Mammachi is quick to condone Chaco’s sexually predatory acts with ‘low caste women’ as ‘men’s needs, but her reaction to Ammu’s affair with Velutha reveals a colonial, supremacist attitude who openly expresses her disgust and rage at her daughter:

Mamachi’s rage at the old one-eyed Paravan standing in the rain, drunk, dribbling and covered in mud was redirected into a cold contempt for her daughter and what she had done. She thought of her naked, coupling in the mud with a man who was nothing but a filthy coolie [...] Mammachi thought and nearly vomited. Like a dog and bitch on heat... she had defiled generations of breeding and brought the family to its knees. For generations to come, forever now, people would point at them at them at weddings and funerals. At baptisms and birthday parties. They’d nudge and whisper. It was all finished now. (257-58)

Even though Mammachi is the ruling matriarch in the Ayemenem house, her presence is unremarkable, except perhaps in the incident following the revelations about Ammu and Velutha, where her passionate hate for Ammu equals her fear of losing respectability in the community. Seen through the eyes of Rahel, Ammu’s daughter and through whose perspective the novel is narrated, Mammachi appears pathetic in her isolated existence full of petty viciousness. As a grandmother Mammachi shows no tenderness and affection for Rahel and Estha. She hates Chaco’s wife Margaret, who she fears may distance her from Chaco but she is sly enough to hide her contempt in Chaco’s presence. Whereas Mammachi treats Estha and Rahel with indifference, she lavishes attention on Sophie Mol

and Margaret Kochamma. She tries to find favour with Chaco by lavishing attention on his daughter and wife. Mammachi thus practises the double standards of patriarchy by punishing Ammu for supposedly dishonouring her family by loving Velutha, a low caste man, while Chaco's sexually exploitative practices with low-caste women are overlooked as men's needs.

*The God of Small Things* also takes note of both the mutability and continuity of certain forms of oppression in the lives of the three-generation of Ipe women through an exploration of the relationship between the older and younger generation of women. For the women of the older generation like Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, education was seen as something that seriously interfered with the marriage prospects of a girl. Baby Kochamma was allowed to study ornamental gardening only after her father was convinced she had passed the marriageable age: "since she could not have a husband there was no harm in her having an education" (26). Mammachi's violin lessons were abruptly stopped when the tutor told Pappachi that his wife was exceptionally talented. From the patriarchal point of view, women are meant to be dutiful wives and mothers who "endure". While Mammachi and Baby Kochamma consented to play by the rules of the established social order, Ammu and Rahel refuse to accommodate the social order. Ammu's divorce is therefore interpreted as an indication of her failure to live up to these expectations and her presence in Ayemenem is a continuous source of embarrassment for her family. Baby Kochamma's hostility towards Ammu emphasizes the critical nature of Ammu's social entrapment:

She subscribed to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parent's home. As for a *divorced* daughter – according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a

divorced daughter from a *love* marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage. As for a divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage—Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject. (46)

Baby Kochamma remains unmarried; Ammu marries but refuses to live with an alcoholic husband. Baby Kochamma and Mammachi choose to secure their place within the patriarchal order through complicit behaviour perpetuating the social order and punishing those who dare to challenge it. Mammachi endures a violent marriage; Baby Kochamma becomes bitter and cruel who finds solace in the repression of other lives. Ammu however refuses to accommodate the social order; she dares to challenge the complacency of the social order first by divorcing her husband and then falling in love with Velutha. By the time Rahel comes back to live in Ayemenem from America in the early nineties, society has changed and it is perhaps no longer shocking to be a divorcee as it was in Ammu's time. This is evident in the way Rahel casually tells Comrade Pillai that she is divorced. Mammachi and Chaco are no longer present and Baby Kochamma is no longer influential in the Ayemenem family. This eases the situation for Rahel somewhat for she does not have to deal with the opposition of the family elders like Ammu. But by that time, the disintegration of the family is complete; Rahel and Estha are left without any moorings.

Some parts of the narrative in *The God of Small Things* is narrated through the eyes of the adult Rahel that shows her attempts to reconcile the past memories of violence and hatred. Commenting on the narrative structure of *The God of Small Things*, Emilienne Baneth–Nouailhatas has pointed to the way meaning is constructed by repeatedly going over

the same events. The stylistic effect of memory and recollection as used in the novel brings the past to bear on the future and shows how the present is connected to the traces of the past. The novel thus begins with the recollection of the past, all the things that have changed—the walls, the general aspect of the house—in contrast with those with those that have not changed—the position of the Plymouth and the presence of Baby Kochamma in the house. Thus Rahel’s memory of Baby Kochamma shows her as a changeless, cruel old woman, static and resentful: “In her mind she kept an organized, careful account of Things She’d done for People, and Things People Hadn’t Done For Her” (98).

The absence of loving relationships is keenly felt by Rahel who is shown to treasure the brief moments of togetherness between Ammu and Chaco or the brief anecdote in the cinema toilet where Rahel watches her great-aunt urinate: “Rahel liked all this. Holding the handbag. Everyone pissing in front of everyone. Like friends. She knew nothing then, of how precious a feeling this was. *Like Friends*. They would never be together like this again. Ammu, Baby Kochamma and she” (95, *italics in original*). Rahel’s desire for an ideal family is played out within the context of dysfunctional family. She preserves the memory of the moment without any awareness of its preciousness. But years later during a history lesson in school, when the memory of the scene comes to her in a flash, Rahel is unable to respond with any affection to it. The twins’ loss of innocence because of Baby Kochamma’s manipulation of the events following the discovery of the Ammu-Velutha affair colours Rahel’s remembrance of her aunt. This event following this episode changes Rahel’s affections for her aunt forever. This is suggested in the later recollection of Rahel where the same scene is pictured by the narrator but without the sense of familiar intimacy that had inspired her to hoard the memory earlier.

After Ammu's death, Rahel is left alone in Ayemenem while Estha is sent away to his father. Rahel's relationship with her mother is not easy to define mainly because Ammu dies when Rahel is very young. Much of the events leading to the deaths of Velutha and Ammu are narrated through the eyes of the child Rahel. Rahel's memories of childhood spent with Estha and her mother Ammu at Ayemenem portrays Ammu as a strong woman who fights hard to maintain her dignity in the stifling atmosphere of the family home. Ammu does her best to protect Estha and Rahel from the hypocrisies of Ayemenem: "To Ammu, her twins seemed like a pair of small bewildered frogs engrossed in each other's company...Ammu watched over them fiercely. Her watchfulness stretched her, made her taut and tense..." (43). Rahel has to deal with the memories of her mother but nowhere in the narrative does Rahel show any uncomfortable feeling about the fact of Ammu's affair with Velutha. She has ambivalent feelings about her grandmother and aunt who are remembered as cruel and calculating women; the memories associated with them recreate them as devious, cunning females as in the descriptions of Baby Kochamma whose caricatured idiosyncrasies are meant to show the stunted nature of her affections. In fact Rahel cannot help feeling a sense of deep aversion towards the narrow-minded conservatism of her grandmother and aunt. Even after the knowledge of Ammu's 'transgression', Rahel does not think any worse of her mother unlike the memories of Baby Kochamma and Mammachi who are ridiculed and repulsed for their high-minded self-righteousness. Her knowledge of their cruelty towards Velutha and Ammu shuts her off from having any sympathetic feelings for them, despite the fact that they too had led lives marked by patriarchal oppression and violence. Rahel describes with anguish the last rites of Ammu in the cemetery: "Then Rahel's Ammu was fed to it. Her hair, her skin, her smile. Her Voice.

...Her good night kiss...She was their Ammu and their Baba and she had loved them double” (163). It is as if Rahel tries to commit the last of her mother to memory, as also the sense of loss and abandonment, which is too great for the child Rahel to accept.

In a sense, both Baby Kochamma and Ammu are alienated from their natal family. Baby Kochamma as the unmarried daughter and Ammu as the married but divorced daughter from an intercaste marriage are peripheral figures in the family. But their respective outlook and manner in which they choose to negotiate and stretch the boundaries of their social worlds are different. Baby Kochamma, being spiteful and by far the most malicious character in the novel, ruthlessly conspires against Ammu’s removal from Ayemenem. It was her suggestion that Ammu should be sent away from Ayemenem. She falsely implicated Velutha as a rapist, which led to his murder. Baby Kochamma exploits the repressive social norms about caste hierarchy, which results in the deaths of both Ammu and Velutha, all the while seeking to increase her influence and power within the family by removing Ammu from Ayemenem. Ammu, on the other hand, chooses the path of open defiance of caste regulations by loving the untouchable Velutha. Unlike Baby Kochamma, Ammu does not collaborate in the patriarchal hierarchy. She chooses not to be a matriarch. This might be the reason why there is a loving acceptance of Ammu as a woman and as a mother, whereas Baby Kochamma and Mammachi are rejected. Although Ammu does the unthinkable and becomes an outcaste from her family, Rahel seems to find in her mother a courageous and resolute woman whom she can admire and love. For Rahel, her mother’s life signifies the integrity and vulnerability of human life just as Mammachi’s and Baby Kochamma’s signifies the other extreme of hypocrisy and dogma. As such, her mother’s ‘transgression’ does not repel Rahel whose own life replicates a transition similar to Ammu.

The narrative also underscores the social changes occurring in the local community. Ammu was not allowed to continue her education; Rahel has access to university education. Rahel also feels less stigmatized about her divorced status. She does not have to face the hostility of the local people as Ammu had to or it may be just that Rahel is in a better position to negotiate with the demands of local patriarchy. By all counts Rahel is in a more empowered situation than Ammu could ever have hoped for. She is also the only woman member in her family who has some freedom to make choices. But her position as a daughter from an intercaste marriage, a hybrid Hindu and a divorcee who does not have a proper place in the social hierarchy is perhaps what makes it possible for her to do so. It may lead one to suggest that women who have any freedom to make choices are those who do not fall or conform to the typical feminine roles. Such an assumption necessarily entails that such subjects have to remain on the fringes of society. Thus Rahel's unusual circumstances, while giving her some freedom to choose, also render her an outsider in her own home and within the family. The memories that connect Rahel with Ammu are the ones that heal the wounds of childhood.

## II

*Mango Coloured Fish*, Kavery Nambisan's third novel, examines the difficulties of growing up as a woman in urban India, and the everyday dilemmas between a well-ordered past full of ritual and role-playing and the demands of a new modernity in post colonial Indian society that is full of ambiguity and danger. The control of female sexuality has always been central to maintaining social hierarchies in India. Even though urbanization has made it necessary for metropolitan Indian society to move from a caste to a class structure to some extent, the general principle of the subordination of women has by and large remained

unchanged (Liddle and Joshi). *Mango-Coloured Fish* is a critique of the hegemonic codes that regulate the politics of gender and sexuality among middle and upper middle class women in India. Feminists have pointed to the control of female sexuality in middle and upper middle class homes, through a “class-based social regulation of women not through overt coercion but through the process of normalization” (Puri 201). Women’s responses to discourses of gender and sexuality suggest that although they challenge and negotiate the assumptions about what is conventionally regarded as sexually correct respectable behaviour, the evaluation of sexually respectable behaviour fails to interrogate the premise of sexual respectability itself (Puri 201). Jyoti Puri’s work demonstrates that although women have an awareness of the culturally sanctioned correct codes in relation to female sexuality, it falls short of questioning the hegemonic order, which normalizes and controls the discourse of sexuality. It however shows that women are critical of the social norms about marriage and motherhood and are eager to develop strategies that can help them to effectively deal with the discourse of marriage and motherhood. Women have now entered the workforce in large numbers. But when it comes to making decisions within the home, it is still men who decide what type of education they receive and what kind of employment they can take up. Studies on the status of gender and class in India show that class structure is no more egalitarian than the caste structure, as the oppression of women simply takes other forms (Liddle and Joshi). There are many contradictions in dealing with the issue of female sexuality and its place within the writing of Indian culture. The desire to subvert the status quo “usually goes only as far as the acknowledgment of diversity and at best a call to tolerance and understanding” (Basu 126).

The mother-daughter relationship in *Mango-Coloured Fish* is set against this backdrop of urban middle class life in India. Shari is the younger daughter in an upper middle class family. Shari's mother wants her to be suitably married. Shari's elder sister, Chitra, has made an advantageous marriage and their mother is anxious to see Shari married and settled. Shari's parents arrange her marriage with Gautam who comes from a wealthy family and has a lucrative job. Shari agrees to marry Gautam but later changes her mind. To avoid the pressure from her family, especially her mother, Shari flees to Vrindaban to her doctor brother and then to Delhi to stay with her old school friend Yash. Shari refuses to marry, as she does not want to be trapped in the type of lifestyle that marriage with Gautam will inevitably follow. Shari and her mother have different views on the subject of marriage and Shari's relationship with her mother is complicated by her need for freedom and her mother's desire to maintain the status quo by getting Shari properly married. Shari struggles under the weight of her individuality.

The generational divide between Shari and her mother is shown by the conflicting goals and values. While this indicates the coexistence of the old along with the new, this order is brought about largely through the changes affecting the middle class lives in India. For Shari's mother, being suitably married into a wealthy, cultured family is the mark of respectability and social success for a girl. Shari's lack of identification with the prevailing order is voiced at the time of Yash's marriage when Yash agrees to marry a boy of her parent's choice: "I hated her parents for belittling her, hated all parents for belittling their daughters" (82). Shari thus takes an oppositional position from what is conventionally understood to be the accepted model of feminine conduct. While living with Yash, Shari

realizes that Yash has allowed her society's expectations to shape her life and is unhappy and dissatisfied. Shari decides to escape the fate of Yash; she refuses to marry Gautam.

The narrative is centered around Shari's coming of age and it dramatizes the consciousness of Shari. Shari's dissatisfaction with life is caused by her mother's demands for conformity which opposes her feelings of release from having to live a life of narrow conventionality: "For a long time now, I have lived by rules; its easier. But inside my head, I live against them. It's a double life, like having two sets of parents, and cowardly...." (10). Shari's lack of guile is pitted against her mother's determination to control Shari and shape her choices according to the demands of social propriety. As the matriarch of the family, Shari's mother is a dominating presence in the family who shows the repressive values of patriarchal rigidity of an upper class woman. She does not value anything outside of herself and obsessed with doing things correctly on a social level. She represents the upper class middle-aged woman who strongly identifies with her social identity as wife and mother. To that extent, she is concerned with controlling the lives of her daughters, Shari and Chitra. She strongly desires social acceptability for them through the traditional route of marriage and motherhood.

In contrast to Shari's mother, her father and brother are supportive of Shari's goals and understand her to need to have an identity of her own. The apparent gloss and sophistication of Shari's mother hides a layer of conservatism that is concerned with maintaining the status quo whereas Shari's father and brother represent a liberal and progressive attitude that seem to believe that marriage and motherhood need not be the only way for a girl to fulfill her femininity. In Shari's case, her domineering mother is the one

who feels the need to play the appropriate feminine roles and expects the same for her daughters. Materialistic and class-conscious, Shari's mother forces her to marry Gautam, who she believes will bring social acceptance and the material benefits to her daughter.

Gautam represents the upwardly mobile Indian middle classes attitude where the possession of wealth and social status determines individual worth. Gautam does not hesitate to accept dowry. His high ideas and progressive views cannot change his inner conservatism when it comes to his personal life. In fact he justifies it as his just rewards: "You must not ever think that the money your parents offered me is in any way important. But as I said, it feels good to know that I am worth so much" (73). The possession of wealth or non-possession of it comes to represent personal worth in a social milieu that overvalues the material over any other consideration. In his article "The Reproduction of Inequality" Andre Beteille argues that it is the family rather than the problem of caste, which plays a crucial role in the reproduction of inequality in the upper levels of society (435-51).<sup>13</sup> Pavan K. Varma, in his book *The Great Indian Middle Class* (2007) writes that the pursuit of material gain and self advancement is followed by the middle classes with a fervour that preceeds considerations of social life that may effect society as a whole.<sup>14</sup> The resulting consequence is a new kind of isolation, "a soullessness of spirit" that is breaking down any remnants of community life. In its place is a neurosis, which has only widened the gulf between social inequalities.

This is suggested in Shari's alienation from her family which is contrasted with her loving attachment with Paru Uncle and his wife, whom Shari fondly addresses as aunty. Aunty, is a distant relative of her mother. Having married against the wishes of her family,

Aunty's family cuts off all ties with her. Shari has an affectionate relationship with them and has always considered them as her surrogate parents. She finds a sense of belonging and intimacy in their home, which is denied to her in her own home. As a result, Shari feels more close to them than her own parents. But her mother looks down upon them because of their lower class status. Much later Shari discovers the poverty and hardship in their lives, but throughout the time she lives with them she feels happy and accepted, unlike in her own home where the love and recognition she craves is withheld because she fails to act like a good daughter.

Shari's discontent thus in response to a situation of self-seeking conformism of narrow middle class life, and hence her desire to get away from her cocooned life at home. By leaving home Shari tries to break out of the individualistic insularity of her middle class life and to find for herself a sense of identity that is not exclusively defined by belonging to a class or group. Whether Shari can arrive at it or not is less significant than the fact of her journey itself where maturing of her consciousness will lead to the emergence of an empowered sense of identity.

Nambisan's novel also highlights the North-South divide of India in Shari's family. Shari's family is from Madras, but her mother decides that Delhi culture is more refined and hence goes about trying to erase their Tamilian origin and acquire the culture of Delhi. While her father acquiesces to the demands of her mother, Shari resists and flees her family. She also loves Naren, a blind and poor boy who does not want to marry her but who understands her and does not try to change her. Shari realizes that accepting support from her family and later on from Gautam will mean that she has to give up her individuality even

before she has had an opportunity to define herself. Nambisan's novel provides a good description of the confusing realities for middle and upper class women in India, even though the novel itself has received scant critical attention.

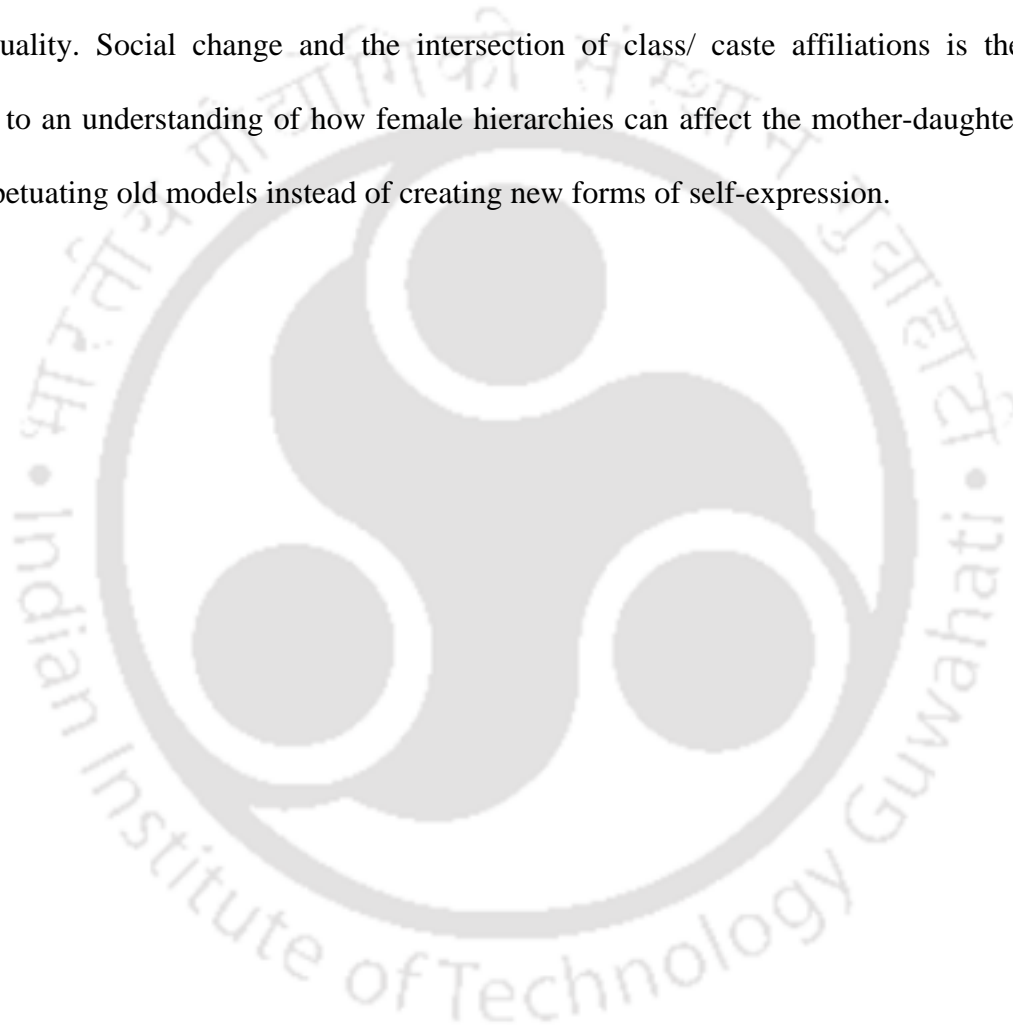
## Conclusion

It thus follows from the discussion that to gain power within the terms of a patriarchal system, women at times conform to its demands and become a willing accomplice in perpetuating male dominance. The novels discussed above represent some of the dilemmas and potential risks for women in carving out an individual identity in a community, which is highly prescriptive of each person's role and more so in the case of women. A large part of the identity crisis surrounding the protagonists in these novels arises due to the fact that the society's structure does not leave much room for self-definition. Lisa Lau's scholarly article on the similarities and differences in style and theme between diasporic South Asian women authors and those who write from within South Asia points out that no matter what geographical location the writer may be writing from, one of the many themes that many women writers consistently grapple with is that of identity. The location and environment of the writer however significantly alters the treatment of the subject in fictional representations. As Lau states: "Diasporic South Asian women writers, almost without exception, testify to a sense of dual or multiple identities [...] issues of identity for diasporic south Asian women are bound up with ideas of home, roots, and belonging, whereas issues of identity for home South Asian women are inclined to be concerned over individualism and realizing self-potential" (252).

The resistance offered to the matriarch may therefore be understood as symbolic resistance to patriarchy in so far as the matriarch symbolizes the oppressiveness associated with patriarchal culture rather than as an argument to validate the hostility among women. Both the novels discussed above project the matriarch as unloving and cruel. Patriarchy has been known to keep women divided over conflict in interest and out of a need for self-preservation. Indian women have to negotiate through an array of patriarchal structures for their survival. These include factors like ordinal status and relationship to men through family of origin as well as the attributes of kinship and caste and class affiliations. In fact, patriarchy is just one of the hierarchies. Relational hierarchies among women within the family tend to adversely affect the lives of women. An example of this is found in the conflictual relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. But how this dynamic plays out in the mother-daughter bond is less well known. Sudhir Kakar has pointed out that the “Indian mother... preconsciously experiences her new born infant, especially a son, as a means by which her motherly identity is crystallized...she tends to perceive a son as a kind of saviour and nurtures him with gratitude and even reverence as well as with affection and care (“Mothers and Infants” 89). However as Kakar has pointed out daughters do not share this idealization of the maternal figure. A daughter may crave affection and acceptance from her mother, yet it is not without the awareness of the stresses of the bond. The common interests and concerns provide women with a basis for cooperation yet antagonism, tension and divergence in interest work to keep them separate.

As the discussion of the two novels show, the multiple and varied contexts of meaning underlying psychological patterns in the mother-daughter bond are often very subtle, and the social categorizations of caste and class identities tend to intensify relational

hierarchies among women. This is evident from a reading of the two novels. In *The God of Small Things* Mammachi's overarching identification with caste affiliation overrides her maternal identity finally resulting in the destruction of Ammu. In *Mango-Coloured Fish*, Shari must remove herself from her family, mainly her mother whose overt identification with class position restricts Shari from finding developing and understanding her own individuality. Social change and the intersection of class/ caste affiliations is therefore crucial to an understanding of how female hierarchies can affect the mother-daughter bond by perpetuating old models instead of creating new forms of self-expression.



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti's concept of a patriarchal bargain represents the rational choices women make in order to maximize their life options. Kandiyoti describes the centrality of the household in the reproduction of classic patriarchy where the senior male has control over everyone in the household including young men. Women occupy a subordinate position not only to the males in the family but also to the female matriarch, usually the mother-in-law. In such a system, women's status depends on the ability to give birth to sons: "Women's life cycle in the patriarchally extended family is such that the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law" (279). As Kandiyoti points out, the logic of the bargain entails tacit acceptance of subordination. Women thus both accommodate and resist male dominated systems and although the individual concessions thus made do not severely alter the structure, women find a way of subversion and manipulation.

<sup>2</sup> An important contribution to the anthropology of aging, gerontological studies of women's relationship to their social world in relation to aging and the benefits it can bring in terms of hierarchies of power among women and opportunity structure in society that may be available to them. In a significant departure from current feminist scholarship that focuses on gender relations between men and women, the authors explore the relationship between gender and power, about how the process of aging influences relationships among women.

<sup>3</sup> There is limited research on women's ageing in anthropological literature. Judith K. Brown and Virginia Kern's *In Her Prime: A New View of Middle-Aged Women* (1985) is one of the works that address the subject. The authors comment, "the changes in a woman's life brought about by the onset of middle age appear to be somewhat positive in non-industrialized societies"(2). Their findings suggest that women have greater freedom and power in the middle years of their lives. Women may experience this time of their lives in specific ways when many of the restrictions of youth are lifted, when their authority over younger relatives increases and they begin to assume more social responsibility (2-3). This period in women's lives is characterized as a time when women have opportunities to be more influential and gain authority. Other anthropologists and Psychologists share Judith Brown's view that "there is no such thing as 'status of women' in any particular society" because "age modifies the position of women, just as gender modifies the position of the aged"(7).

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Foner argues that age and gender hierarchies between women do not exist in isolation. They are closely connected to the social world women inhabit. As such, the changes in status and responsibility because of aging affect women's lives positively as well as negatively. While such difference in age and

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gender hierarchies between younger and older women may result in conflict between the two groups both within the family and the wider community, they also provide important ways to understand how women form and maintain relationships of mutual interdependence.

<sup>5</sup> As noted by Patricia Hill Collins, for racially ethnic women the dichotomy between work and family, home and the outside world are interwoven rather than experienced as strictly separate spheres. Women from marginalized communities have to struggle within a particular social, political and economic context and have to maintain their identity as members of a subordinated group within a larger society.

<sup>6</sup> In their introduction to *Women's Writing in India*, Susie Tharu and K. Lalita comment that women's writing is not always informed by "allegories of gender oppression". Literature produced by women is also not always about women and neither are the concerns of women writers always feminist in orientation. They point out that women writers, which include critics and editors of anthologies, are imbricated in the ideologies of their time. As such women's opposition to dominant ideologies are also caste/class bound: "Even when the writing is specifically feminist ... opposition to the dominant ideologies of gender can be uncomfortably class or caste bound and draw on assumptions about race or religious persuasion that reinforce the hold of these ideologies and collaborate in extending their authority (38).

<sup>7</sup> Uma Chakravarti's article "Conceptualizing Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State" interrogates the structural framework of gender relations in India, "the nature and basis of the subordination of women and its extent and specific form in early Indian society" (271). While the author notes that the subordination of women is a common enough feature in many societies, what makes the nature of subordination of women in India severe is the legal and religious sanction it enjoys which shapes social practices. Women are socialized in various ways to internalize the patriarchal attitudes about women's inferior position in relation to men, and the innate disparity of women's nature which could only be controlled through the institution of marriage and legitimate motherhood under the influence of the husband: "In the case of the Hindu society the design of the patriarchal caste-class structure was mapped out by the brahmins; pativrata, the special dharma of the hindu wife then became the ideology by which women accepted, and even aspired to chastity and wifely fidelity as the highest expression of their selfhood" (285).

<sup>8</sup> V Geetha's discussion of patriarchy in the Indian context shows the way in which patriarchy impacts all aspects of women's lives. Even though the lived experiences of women challenge patriarchy, these do not have the power to dislodge it. While heterosexuality and procreative sex are the norm and are crucial to the construction of normative sexuality, the author notes the fact that a multiplicity of sexual practices do exist in actual practice.

<sup>9</sup> Dalit women's testimonios give a differentiated understanding of feminism in India. Dalit feminists argue that feminism in India have addressed issues related to upper caste women. It has ignored the presence of women from other marginalized social groups such as Dalits. They thus question the unmarked feminism of the women's movement in India as representative of the interests and concerns of upper-caste women only and argue that feminism in India may be divided into two schism – "Brahmini" and "Abrahmini" – the former being clearly upper caste in orientation while the latter is considered to be more secular and democratic expression of women's interests. Dalit feminism's articulation of difference challenges 'brahminical' feminism to review its theories and has led to a reorientation in focus in women's studies that are now looking at 'Indian feminism' itself as a contested terrain.

<sup>10</sup> The author carried out a series of studies on some folk genres of North Indian society with regard to the role and position of women in such societies. One of the studies focused on mother-daughter relationship as reflected in women's songs, which shows strong affective ties between mothers and daughters because in such societies women's lives are severely constrained by negative patriarchal attitudes towards the girl child.

<sup>11</sup> Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford first used this term to refer to ways women experienced discrimination and oppression under colonialism and patriarchy. Peterson and Rutherford assert that women were discriminated against not only because of their position as colonized people but also as women. As such, they note the different ways in which women experience oppression within native communities.

<sup>12</sup> According to Aijaz Ahmad, *The God of Small Things* is a 'flawed masterpiece', a work that he characterizes as "a curious mixture of matchless achievement and quite drastic failings." The three main reason he gives for the failure of the novel are: 1) Roy's lack of realism in portraying communist leaders (such as E.M.S. Namboodripad) which is viewed as defamatory; 2) the sentimentality of the prose; and 3) the theme of transgressive sexuality. This last point is the main issue of his critique. He takes issue with the theme of caste and sexuality that involves the upper caste woman Ammu and her untouchable lover Velutha and states that this plot constitutes a substitute for what is stated as "the actually constituted field of politics" which considerably weakens the political intent of the novel: "It is a very great pity that a tale so masterfully told should end with the author succumbing to the conventional idea of the erotic as that private transgression through which one transcends public injuries... The problem is that in order to construct eroticism as that transcendence which takes individuals beyond history and society, straight into the real truth of their beings, Arundhati Roy in fact reduces the human complexity of the characters she herself has created and whom she wishes to affirm and even celebrate, albeit in the tragic mode" (qtd. in Tickell 115-116). Ahmad finds the final ending of the novel where both Ammu and Velutha die problematic. While the death of Velutha seems "entirely credible and even ordained in the very scheme of

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things”, the question of why Ammu had to die is fraught with problems: “...If Ammu were to live on, she would have to face the fact that the erotic is very rarely a sufficient mode for overcoming real social oppressions; one has to make some other more complex choices in which the erotic may be an element but hardly the only one” (116).

<sup>13</sup> Andre Beteille’s article “The Family and the Reproduction of Inequality” discusses how social reproduction of inequality in Indian society occurs through the family. He argues that caste no longer plays an active agent in the reproduction of inequality in the upper levels of society. Rather it is the family that is mainly responsible in maintaining class/caste hierarchies.

<sup>14</sup> Pavan Kumar Verma’s *The Great Indian Middle Class* discusses the evolution of the Indian middle class during the twentieth century, mainly after independence. His argument is that the self-seeking tendencies of the middle class have made them increasingly insensitive to the plight of the underprivileged. Values of social justice and equality are sacrificed in the pursuit of materialistic advancement. As such the gap between the rich and the poor is increasing by the day and there seems to be no solution to bridge this growing divide in economic disparity, despite the political rhetoric of modernization and development. Liberalization of the Indian economy has only heightened the middle class tendencies to distance itself from anything that does not contribute to its material well being: “The middle class likes these rags to riches stories; it is appreciative of the hard work, determination and dedication of such people and covets the lifestyle of the rich; but it has little time for those who those who remain in rags. This, of course, connotes a serious limitation in its vision, given that in India almost one third of the population is still very much in rags. The propensity to not see anything beyond its own interest, except to eye the prerequisites of the very rich above...And not much, to my mind has changed since then (introduction xxv).

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

This study about mothers and daughters looks at embattled interactions between them in the context of Indian Fiction in English by women novelists. The mother-daughter relationship is one of the most important relationships for women from the point of view of female development. As discussed in chapter two of this study the earliest of feminist writers to comment on the mother-daughter relationship was Adrienne Rich, whose semi autobiographical work, *Of Woman Born* (1976) was the first to offer analysis of the patriarchal silencing of the mother-daughter relationship. Rich discusses the way the mother-daughter relationship has been treated in patriarchal culture and argued against this seeming effacement of the mother-daughter bond in its tendency to minimalize and trivialize it.

Feminist psychoanalysts such as Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein have drawn attention to the problem of splitting of the feminine self which patriarchal culture demands of them. This splitting of the feminine self is identified as having a detrimental effect on the mother-daughter relationship that inevitably leads to ambivalence within the relationship. In one sense, the patterns of relating between mothers and daughters, and the ambivalence and conflict that sometimes characterizes the interactions in the mother-daughter bond, serves to mirror patriarchal culture's anxiety about female power that would like to see women in subordinate roles; in a paradoxical way it seems to speak of the enormity of the task women face in actualizing a concrete identity for themselves. In the

mother-daughter relationship the patriarchal script is played out in many ways, most notably it involves the daughter's unconscious identification with the mother's powerlessness and the mother's inability to give meaningful support to the daughter's desire for autonomy in the public sphere. The daughter rejects the mother who sees in her mother's victimized status her own potential entrapment. This phenomenon has been described as "matrophobia" a term coined by Lynn Sukenick to describe what she views as the daughter's "fear not of one's own mother but of becoming one's mother". As Rich comments, "matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mother's bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the woman, the martyr" (235-36).

The result of this supposed self-hatred is a tendency to mother blame, which is symbolically related to notions about good and bad mother myths that assume the mother's own capacity to positively influence children irrespective of the social conditions under which mothering takes place. As such feminists critique the patriarchal bias behind the concept of mother-blame. In the literature on mothers and daughters, "mother-blame" signifies the daughter's fearful recognition of the mother's powerless situation and her inability to help the daughter to separate and individuate. The daughter responds with anger and rage at the mother's helplessness.

It needs to be pointed out that mother-daughter relationships are often more complex than what can be assumed from psychoanalytic perspective. Social factors and contexts of patriarchy, immigration and class locations can significantly alter our understanding of the mother-daughter bond. Marianne Hirsch argues that selfhood

Would have to balance the personal with the political, the subjective experience with the cognitive process of identification with various group identities. It would have to include a consciousness of oppression and political struggle. It would have to be both familial and extra familial. (qtd. in Huh)

Hirsch's statement, particularly her concern with both "familial and extra familial" experiences, is born out by narratives of mother-daughter relationships in Black feminist writing where the daughter's identification with her mother ultimately leads to her empowerment. In African-American culture mothers enjoy power and prominence. Because of the history of oppression and racism, Black feminist writing represents motherhood as "one that includes ongoing connection and recognition of the mother's social position, her strengths and her struggles on behalf of her family and community" (Basin 6). Adrienne Rich's analysis had earlier drawn attention to two interrelated themes in Afro-American motherhood that distinguish it from Western (white, middle class) patriarchal motherhood and had pointed out that mothers and motherhood are crucial to the construction of the Afro-American culture. The Afro-American culture recognizes the work mothers do by nurturing, preserving and protecting their children from racist practices that seek to harm them, so that they can grow up free from the repressive influences. Mothers thus occupy an important position in African-American culture and mothering likewise is valued and supported. In other words, maternal subjectivity in racially ethnic women is socially and politically informed. Mothers thus have a positive influence on their daughters and this empowerment comes from the knowledge of the struggles their mothers encountered to better their lives. Thus closeness and identification is intrinsic to the mother-daughter relationship as

demonstrated in Black feminist writing, and is empowering for the development of the daughter's sense of identity as it can only come through connection with the mother.

The context for closeness and identification between mothers and daughters found in Black feminist narratives can also be seen in Dalit women's autobiographies. Autobiographical writing is a significant genre in Dalit literature, especially Dalit women's testimonios that attest to the pain and trauma of social exclusion.<sup>1</sup> In the autobiographies by Dalit women, many of the writers describe the positive influence of mothers on the outcome of their personal lives. One of the significant aspects highlighted by these narratives from the standpoint of Dalit women's lives is an innate awareness of the empowerment that comes through work and education and its importance in establishing women's self respect and autonomy in society.<sup>2</sup> Many of these narratives recall the hardships and difficulties endured by mothers so that their daughter could get an education. In the context of the social deprivation and history of oppression of Dalits, it is important to note the importance given by Dalit mothers to the education of their children, especially daughters. Sharmila Rege's examination of life narratives by Dalit women suggests the important role played by mothers in educating their daughters in the hope that their daughters will be able to have a more comfortable and respectable position in life. This in itself can form an area of investigation for any future work. For this discussion, it may suffice to say that these narratives reveal strong ties between mothers and daughters, similar to what is witnessed in Black women's writing, possibly due to the histories of oppression and suffering common to both of these two marginalized groups.

The subject of the mother-daughter relationship and its representation in Indian Women's Fiction in English may be said to be a recurrent but hardly examined motif in contemporary writing by women. We can see this theme exploited with regular frequency in the works by many women authors writing in the nineties. In the fiction by these writers, the mother-daughter relationship is depicted as a fraught relationship that questions the ideal of motherhood. This is not to say that fiction written by the earlier generation of women authors did not raise questions about the status of the mother in family, in society and in cultural representations. For instance, novels like Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1955), Anita Desai's *Where Shall we go This Summer* (1975) and Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* (1988) questioned the material powerlessness of the mother even while motherhood is eulogized and venerated.<sup>3</sup> What is intriguing about the contemporary portrayal of motherhood in these novels is that they not only try to look for alternatives to the socially constructed roles of wife and mother but also create a feminist space where the ideological burden of such patriarchal constructs that impact women's lives can be reexamined.

Indian Women's Fiction in English in the nineties has increasingly questioned the ideal of motherhood and its cultural representations prevalent in Indian society. The selection of novels included in this study shows the scope of such influences on the identities of women. These novels in effect reveal the material powerlessness of the mother, while she is eulogized as life-giver and nurturer. In this way these novels expose the ideological burden, which the individual woman has to bear as it effectively captures the stirrings of female discontent against such role expectations (Dutta 84-94). The paradox of

this situation is evident in the fact that while a woman gives birth, she cannot give a social identity.

This study has tried to make a detailed analysis of the following novels: Shashi Deshpande's *Small Remedies* (2000) and *Moving On* (2004), Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998), Anjana Appachana's *Listening Now* (1998), Arundhati Roy's *The God Of Small Things* (1997) and Kavery Nambisan's *Mango-Coloured Fish* (1998). All of these novels were written and published during the nineties and in the first decade of this century. With the possible exception of Shashi Deshpande whose works spread across two decades, Manju Kapur, Kavery Nambisan, Anjana Appachana and Arundhati Roy are the more contemporary authors in the burgeoning area of Indian Women's fiction in English. Many of their works, and some other works by women novelists not included in this study, are informed by a feminist sensibility. These writers are not only aware of their location as women authors writing in the milieu of a postcolonial Indian society, but also exhibit a confident assertion of female identity and subjectivity in their writing.<sup>4</sup> These novels typically are about the everyday mundane lives of middle class women and the problems of negotiation and assertion in relation to both the domestic realm and the world outside, which is an important theme in women's writing and continues to be important in realizing a female sense of self. While the usual concern with female identity is still found to be a predominating theme in fiction by women, it also becomes apparent from an analysis of the above novels that quite a few of these writers have written about themes that would perhaps previously have been considered not a prerogative of a women writer to address. This is evident from their treatment of the subject of female sexuality, which the earlier generation of women writers were hesitant to address. This may be said to be one of the common

themes that can be found running through these novels whether this aspect is treated boldly as in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Anjana Appachana's *Listening Now* and Kavery Nambisan's *Mango-Coloured Fish* or a more complex questioning of motherhood and the problem of female self expression in Shashi Deshpande's novels *Small Remedies* and *Moving On*. The analysis of these novels is not exhaustive by any means; these novels bring together themes and issues that vary widely in style and treatment. For the purpose of this study I have chosen to focus on the theme of how the conventional understanding of motherhood and female sexuality is complicated through an analysis of the mother-daughter relation as is represented in these novels.

Each of the preceding chapters have been organized around a central theme and discussed in relation to its literary representation in the selected texts. Chapter one gives an overview of the thesis as a whole. Chapter two is a discussion of some of the most significant themes and contexts in feminist theory, which aims to locate this discussion about mothers and daughters in Indian contexts. It discusses the mother-daughter relationship from a literary standpoint and through discussions related to issues of gender and sexuality in order to suggest how the discourse of sexuality and motherhood is constructed, deployed and embedded in the social fabric. It also tries to give an idea of the status of the girl child, especially daughters in relation to the family since the family is the smallest unit of social organization. It may be noted in this context that the theoretical paradigms discussed are mainly feminist responses to psychoanalytic studies on the mother-daughter relationship and from Black feminist writing in contexts that are far from identical to issues we might deal with in Indian Women's Writing in English. While quite a few of the issues and contexts do not always relate in any easy sense to issues of gender and

patriarchy in India, they are nevertheless important in giving a psychological perspective of patriarchal bias inherent in the institution of motherhood. One may especially refer here to Nancy Chodorow's argument about how motherhood is socially reproduced. This chapter therefore looks at the social construction of motherhood in Indian patriarchy against a context of western feminist theory and the ways in which these ideas of motherhood determine the mother-daughter relationship.

Chapter three discusses the theme of feminist mothers in Shashi Deshpande's novels *Small Remedies* and *Moving On*. Feminists have pointed to the subversive potential of Shashi Deshpande's novels in terms of the representation of marriage and motherhood, which signals a new consciousness among urban women who are clearly asserting their needs within marriage, and motherhood. *Small Remedies* and *Moving On* perhaps best exemplify this effort. *Small Remedies* questions the social perception that motherhood is integral to womanhood. This is carried out through an examination of the mother-daughter relationship: Bai and her absent daughter Munni; the protagonist Madhu and through her association with her surrogate mother Leela; and Madhu's own relationship with her absent mother. The two novels discussed here dramatize the central problem for women – the either/or – choice that most women have to face who pursue self-fulfillment. While it is difficult to separate a woman's own conscious drive to have a child and the socialization that results in women feeling incomplete without a child, *Small Remedies* speculates the question whether the need for creative self-fulfillment in a woman is incompatible with the demands of motherhood. This theme is explored with greater detail in *Moving On*. In both these novels the mother figures Bai (*Small Remedies*) and Mai (*Moving On*) are represented as cold towards their closest relatives. While feminist literature has questioned the patriarchal

institution of motherhood, there is little or no discussion about mothers who fail to see the need to nurture. While this very statement goes against the grain of feminist articulation, it may in a sense, be better enabled to recognize and present complexities and nuances in the mother-daughter relationship.

Chapter four discusses Manju Kapur's novel *Difficult Daughters* and Anjana Appachana's *Listening Now*. These texts present the mother-daughter relationship in relation to the question whether women also participate in the creation of gendered subjectivities. Within the logic of patriarchy, the control of women's sexuality is of utmost importance. More often than not it is the mother who has to ensure the nurturing of appropriate feminine conduct. But what happens when the mother is a non-conformist who lives by a different set of values. This is explored through the mother-daughter theme in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* in which the problematic aspect of the mother's sexuality is dealt with through the intergenerational relationships of Virmati and her mother and her daughter Ida. One of the problems pertaining to the mother-daughter theme consists in the daughter's accepting her mother's sexuality. *Difficult Daughters* in effect shows how the construction of the maternal identity requires a deliberate erasure of the mother's sexuality. Whereas *Difficult Daughters* looks at the gendered subjectivities of women, *Listening Now* looks at the choices women make and whether the idea of a self-denying motherhood holds true in all circumstances. While maternal altruism is generally understood to be the norm rather than exception, an exploration of the mother-daughter theme in *Listening Now* presents an alternative perspective in which maternal altruism becomes a strategy, a way of dealing with patriarchal power. It thus shows that women's choices are not always conditioned and

sometimes when they accept limited roles, they are satisfying their own interests through the mask of conformity.

Chapter five titled, “Mothers as Matriarchs”, looks at the idea of the mother as the matriarch who acts as an agent of patriarchy through a discussion of Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and Kavery Nambisan’s *Mango-Coloured Fish*. The subject of the elision between mother and woman is once again focused in Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, but it is intensified and complicated by intertwining the problem of caste with that of sexuality. Ammu is an upper caste Syrian Christian woman who falls in love with the untouchable Velutha. The story is narrated by Ammu’s daughter Rahel and alternates between two perspectives seen through her eyes, once as a child and the other as an adult woman. The split consciousness of the narrator is the main contrivance through which much of the anguish in the novel ironically plays out. Themes of jealousy, rage and destruction inform the mother-daughter relationship in this novel. This is mainly seen in the relationship between Ammu and her mother Mammachi. Both Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, the two matriarchs of Ayemenem house conspire to destroy Ammu and Velutha when they discover Ammu’s transgression. The manipulation of events that follows this revelation not only leads to the murder of Velutha but it also alters the lives of Estha and Rahel who are drawn into the web of lies, deceit and betrayal through the malice of Baby Kochamma. On the other hand, we see Rahel affectionately remembering her mother, who unlike the others sees her mother in a realistic and empathetic light. Themes of domination and control are also present in Kavery Nambisan’s *Mango Coloured Fish*. Shari has to flee the domination and control of her mother to discover her own sense of self and what she wants out of her life. In this process she undergoes a transformation and a realignment of her priorities occurs.

At the same time it needs to be stated that these novels do not simply question the social construction of motherhood through the dramatization of mother-daughter conflict merely to denounce motherhood as an instrument of patriarchal control. They effect a subtle probing of female sexuality and desire, and what possible implications motherhood can have with regard to the need for creative fulfillment in women's lives. For example Shashi Deshpande's *Small Remedies* explores the difficulty of reconciling split selves, the problem of woman as woman or woman as mother that is linked to the problem of attaining a whole female self one that may include motherhood or may exclude it as a primary expression of feminine identity. In *Moving On*, the protagonist, a widowed mother, expresses her self-validation by embracing her sexuality. While the fear of censure and social disapproval plagues her solitary life, she nevertheless chooses to attend to her needs and desires. A similar theme is found in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* that focuses on the love affair between the mother figure Ammu and the untouchable Velutha; Anjana Appachana's *Listening Now* imaginatively explores the subject of shame and secrecy associated with unwed motherhood from the perspective of the mother; in *Mango-Coloured Fish* the protagonist Shari flees the controlling influence of her rich family, especially her mother, to escape an arranged marriage. Shari's family objects to her choice of friend, a poor, blind boy who loves her and whom she loves as well, because he does not have a respectable social standing; Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, set during the time of the early twentieth century, exposes the patriarchal values of a society that seemingly gives freedom to women even while it restricts them from making meaningful choices. It also deals with the problem of reconciling female desire with a need for autonomy in the outside world, which is

explored through the protagonist Virmati's marital relationship. All of these stories thus suggest a struggle to give women access to control over their lives and bodies.

The theme of closeness and identification discussed in the earlier paragraphs can be used as point of comparison in analyzing the mother-daughter relationship in Indian Women's Fiction in English. As mentioned earlier on in the discussion, the mother-daughter relationship in the novels discussed in this study is a fraught relationship. Unlike the theme of closeness and identification between mothers and daughters found in the narratives of Black women writers and in Dalit women's autobiographies, the portrayal of mothers and daughters in these novels is a reverse of how mothers and daughters are portrayed in the other two genres of writing. A reading of these novels shows some instances of intimacy and connection, for instance in the case of Rahel and Ammu, but generally these are difficult to establish. In these stories mothers and daughters labour under feelings of alienation and estrangement on the whole and attempts at establishing meaningful communication are difficult to come by. One way to explain this dilemma is perhaps to comprehend the ideas that inform the model of motherhood itself, as it cannot be isolated from the social realm. While much of the postcolonial literature on gender in relation to women's identity and sexuality discuss these subjects in the context of the issues of nation and nationalism, the novels chosen in this study take a critical look at the hegemonic ideal of motherhood and its effect on the lived identities of women through an examination of the mother-daughter relationship.

Feminist writers have time and again reiterated the silencing of the mother-daughter bond. Radhika Mohanram, writing about the mother-daughter relationship, comments that

there is a paucity of archival material on the mother-daughter relationship. As she points out in her discussion of the mother-daughter bond in Indian postcoloniality, the problem is not so much of interpretation as of locating information (20). While there do exist short stories by women authors in some of the regional languages about on women's mother role, by and large the mother-daughter relationship has remained obscure in literary discussions.<sup>5</sup> It may be useful to note in this context Meenakshi Mukherjee's observations on creative writers in India. According to her, English texts by Indian Women authors cannot be read in the same way as we may read texts by western women in English. This is because the choice of language, i.e. English, is a politically loaded medium of expression (Mukherjee 11-12). In other words, we cannot ignore the class bias of Indian Women's Writing in English. It may be noted in this context that women's writing in the regional languages have also been influenced by the feminist movement. These writers writing in the vernacular languages also exploit many of the themes that we see in women's writing in English. Whether the literature produced by women in the regional languages tends to view the mother-daughter relationship in the same way as women writers in English is a question that is open to speculation and can open up possibilities for future work in this direction. That however falls outside the scope of this thesis.

While patriarchy is one of the hierarchies, caste and class identities intensify other hierarchies and quite often these hierarchies and the patriarchal ideology keep women divided. Given the hierarchal nature of Indian society where class and caste affiliation are the determining factor of social privilege or exclusion, it may perhaps not be unjustified to suggest that the affiliation to such social grouping can have a self-limiting structure. In this case, the idea of a self-denying motherhood, which is an upper caste male social construct, is

the root of conflict in the mother-daughter relationship. This is not surprising as women often internalize the ideology of motherhood. It then becomes a self-perpetuating pattern through which the social reproduction of motherhood occurs. That is why perhaps Sudhir Kakar and Katharina Kakar suggests that while sons find it easy to idolize their mothers, daughters do not share this sentimental attachment to their mothers (96). The category of gender and 'woman' then clearly cannot be studied in isolation from contexts of class and caste which are important in constituting the subjectivities of women that function to keep intact and reproduce those very hierarchies which define the normative structures of patriarchy. This is one of the ways patriarchal culture co-opts women belonging to upper castes to naturalize caste hierarchies and to create divisions among women. The importance of class and caste locations in the formation of maternal subjectivities in women therefore cannot be ignored. In fact class and caste hierarchies play a key role in the way the discourse on motherhood is constructed in Indian society. Within the hierarchies of caste and patriarchy which rule social relations in India, women are assigned to the private sphere, characteristically associated with reproduction and as Jashodhara Bagchi notes, "the hallmark of privilege lay with women who were delinked from productive labour and relegated to the reproduction of status through procreation of species" (13). This point can be illustrated by referring to the earlier example of Dalit women's autobiographies. The life narratives of Dalit women show mothers who courageously raise families, sometimes alone, and who use work to fashion an identity for themselves and also to support their family. The ideal of motherhood in which women are defined in terms of a culturally validated model of femininity is simply not available to Dalit women. In this model, motherhood is delinked from productive labour. Dalit women, on the other hand, often have to work outside the

house to help survive the family. The upper-caste woman traditionally did not participate in productive labour; her main role was regarded to be the bearer of sons. Clearly then, the model of good mothering is not easily available to all women as class and caste perspectives play definitive roles in the way motherhood is viewed and practised. While this does not completely free them from the power structures of gender and caste relation from both within and outside the Dalit community, they often resist these structures and more often than not are outspoken in their protest against exploitation and social exclusion. The resistance and conflict in the mother-daughter relationship can therefore be read as resistance to the tyranny of the patriarchal mother. In the novels that are discussed, the mother is shown to have ambivalent and resistant feelings to the daughter's need to move away from the limiting influence of the mother. The conflict and resistance in these stories must be evaluated within the context of a patriarchal society in which women as mothers are either silenced or they choose to become the beneficiaries of it by perpetuating its control. It is in the context of this patriarchal ideology and its framework that we have to ground the analysis of mothers and daughters in Indian Women's Fiction in English.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Some notable instances of Dalit women's autobiographies include Viramma, *Life of an Untouchable* (Jean-Luc Racine, Verso, 1999); *Writing Caste /Writing Gender* (Sharmila Rege, Zubaan Books, New Delhi: 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Dalit women's autobiographies attach a great deal of importance to the idea of empowerment through education and work. In this context it may be useful to note that Savitri Bai Phule who was the first woman teacher of the first women's school in India was a Dalit. She dared to open a school for Dalit girls as early as in 1852.

<sup>3</sup> It may be mentioned that R. K. Narayan's *The Dark Room* (1938), Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1947) and Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* (1947) have also dealt with women's role as mother. But their portrayal of motherhood sways between the extremes of veneration on the one hand and extreme frustration and victimization on the other. Since the thesis mainly looks at the portrayal of motherhood by women authors, I have restricted the examples to only those texts by women who have dealt with this theme in some manner.

<sup>4</sup> There is a lot of disagreement concerning the label "women writer". For example, Manju Kapur feels that it is almost impossible to avoid the question of gender when it comes to writing fiction by women. According to her, "Being a woman, being whatever you are, informs your writing" (Manju Kapur in "Female Factor", *Hindustan Times*, February 16, 2003, p. 2). Shashi Deshpande, on the other hand, believes that the issue of gender is incidental to her identity as a writer of fiction. As she herself says, she is a writer who happens to be a woman.

<sup>5</sup> One of the noted examples is Mahasweta Devi's *Standayini*, translated by Gayatri Spivak as "breast-giver", which visualizes the mother as a victim of class and gender oppression. In this gendered representation of the subaltern, the mother Jasodha who sells her milk is drained of life and finally dies of neglect and apathy in the hands of those very people whom she had nurtured.

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## Papers Presented, Published and Communicated

### Papers Presented

- Nath, Arpana and Rohini Mokashi-Punekar. “Mothers As Matriarchs: The Mother-Daughter Relationship in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and Kavery Nambisan’s *Mango-Coloured Fish*.” National Seminar on *Gender Studies: Matriarchal Assertiveness in Literature* organized by the Department of English, Government Arts College, Salem, during 21 and 22 January 2010. Paper accepted for presentation.
- Nath, Arpana and Rohini Mokashi-Punekar. “Aspects of Maternity in Subaltern Life Writing by Women.” National Seminar on *Life Writing and Self-Fashioning in India: Forms of Revision and Recovery* organized by the Department of English and Foreign Languages, Tezpur University on 21 and 22 February 2008.
- Mokashi-Punekar, Rohini and Arpana Nath. “Social Spaces and Voices in Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*.” National Seminar on *Re-reading Jane Austen* organized by the Department of English, Guwahati University during 30 October to November 1, 2006.
- Nath, Arpana. “Food, Consumption and Politics of Power.” International Colloquium on *Food: Representation, Ideology and Politics* organized by The Centre for Advanced Studies, Department of English, Jadavpur University during 16-18 November 2006.

## Papers Published

- Mokashi-Punekar, Rohini and Arpana Nath. “Social Spaces and Voices in Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*.” *Journal of the Department of English, Gauhati University*, Vol 6, 2007. 37- 44.
- Nath, Arpana. “Fasting, Feasting: Food, Consumption and Politics of Power.” *Gender: Problems and Policies*. Ed. K.R. Gupta. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2009. 135-149.

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- Nath, Arpana and Rohini Mokashi-Punekar. “Aspects of Maternity in Subaltern Life Writing by Women.” (2008) Communicated to *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*. Accepted for Publication.