CHAPTER IV

RAINBOW OF VOICES

The real does not efface itself in favor of the imaginery; it effaces itself in favor of the more real than real; the hyperreal. The truer than true; this is simulation.

Jean Baudrillard. Fatal Strategies

Autobiography presents a platform where women writers engender in the act of writing, and experiment with reconstructing the various discourses of representation of ideology- in which their subjectivity has been formed. The truth that any autobiography produces is always necessarily a truth restructured and revised in its telling, a mixture of past and present, a process of self-invention in which the content of life-the very subject of autobiography is not impassive but mutable. Autobiography is characterized by a particular act of interpretation act: lived experience is shaped, revised, constrained, and transformed by representation. In telling the story of the self, the writer imposes order where there is chaos, structural coherence where there is memory and chronology, voice where there is silence. Yet this process is no simple mimesis shaped by the internal coherence of life and text. As Felicity A. Nussbaum says in “The Politics of Subjectivity and The Ideology of the Genre,”
For Lacan, universal symbolic categories describe and define the human subject through its developmental stages when it loses its androgynous unity and shifts from the diffuse infant to a subject who differentiates herself or himself from the (mother) parent. The Human subject moving through the imaginary stage of identification and duality, sees an ideal image reflected in the mirror and simultaneously recognizes that image. The mirror stage or movement into the symbolic realm in the beginning of the “self” dividing from itself. (qtd in Smith, *Autobiography*, 161)

As Gilmore says in autobiography the name has several functions: it identifies a person within a historical context of place and patrilineage, and focuses attention on the solid corporeality to which it refers. The crucial figure of the “I” is one of autobiographical identity’s names. It marks a place in self-representational writing where some one is. From this location, the autobiographer brings forward self-evidence. The autobiographical ‘I’ however is only deceptively self-authorizing and not all autobiographers may write with equal authority from this location.

The concept of the female selfhood in the work of feminist theorists like Sheila Rowbotham and Nancy Chodorow, are grounded in a recognition of the historically generated differences between men and women. Application of their theories of women’s selfhood to women’s autobiographical texts—particularly those by women who also belong to racial, ethnic, sexual and
religious minorities- illuminates the unfolding narratives of women’s life writing and thereby revises the prevailing concerns of autobiography.

Early theorists of women’s autobiography often defined the difference between men’s and women’s self-narrations through the framework of relationality and individuality. In her critique of western individualism at the center of autobiography, Friedman reveals how “individualistic paradigms of the self ignore the role of collective and relational identities in the individuation process of women and minorities.” (qtd in Smith 72) Models promoting individualism, she concludes overlook the significance of a culturally imposed group identity for women and minorities and the differences of socialization in construction of male and female gender identities.

The most salient feature of autobiographical subject is and often explicit “plural subject” rather than the singular subject. The association with traditional autobiography of Domitila Barrios for example begins her testimony *Let Me Speak ! Testimony of Domitila, a Woman of the Bolivian Mines* like this: “I don’t want anyone at any moment to interpret the story I’m about to tell as something that is only personal….What happened to me could have happened to hundreds of people in my country” (qtd in Brodzki 107) Similarly Rigoberta Menchu in her *I Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* opens by disclaiming her particularity. “I’d like to stress that it’s not only my like, it’s also the testimony of my people” (qtd in Brodzki 107) Autobiography is precisely that genre which insists on singularity. When
women write it they tend to distinguish themselves from others and to assume what they consider to be more differentiated, male personae, as Elaine Marks puts it, women’s autobiographies proclaim “I am my own heroine” (qtd in Brodzski 108) Of course, some autobiographers assume that they represent others, and that the reader is ideally among them. And even where there may be no such assumption, the ‘I’ of the writer inevitably spills over to stand in for the reader, who, paradoxically, achieves a kind of specialness by identifying with the heroic autobiographer.

Linked in this way a “self” is construed and explored as something as much more than “individual”: unique in one sense, but also closely articulating with the lives of others, an articulation that can remain every bit as important after these others die. This in turn raises questions concerning to the nature of “authorship”: a single-hand writes, but the self who inscribes, who is, is herself enmeshed with other lives which gives her the meaning it has. For the “authentic self” is itself very much a social product, and the attempt to assert its privileged autonomy can merely underline its ideological systems through which it is constituted. The more clear subjectivity is revealed to be permeated and dependent upon those very symbolic constraints from which it seeks to liberate itself. In other words, the act of confession can potentially exacerbate rather than alleviate problems of self-identity.

On the other hand, the internalized cultural values which define specific identities as marginal, inferior, or deviant can come to the surface in feelings of
anxiety and guilt. Regina Black Burn, analyzing a number of autobiographies by black women writers, shows that black identity generates ambivalent feelings, that it can be a source of pride but just as easily give rise to a sense of shame and self-hatred. This phenomenon of a strongly negative self-image can be a particular problem for women, whose socialization typically endows them with feelings of inadequacy.

In the autobiographies of well-known and publicly successful women 5Patricia Meyar Spacks, comments upon their self-denial in *Selves in Hiding*:

“They use autobiography, paradoxically partly as a mode of self-denial.”(132) This negative pattern in which attempted self-affirmation reverts back into anxiety and self-castigation is a recurring one in at least some examples of feminist confession. The ambivalence of autobiography as both the ultimate truth of the author’s life and as a mere simulacrum which can never fully encapsulate the reality of which it speaks is clearly apparent in the contemporary fascination with confession. It is as if the written text has acquired the function of guaranteeing the author’s identity. Feminist confession thus seeks to affirm a female experience which has often been repressed and rendered invisible by speaking about it, by writing it into existence. The act of writing promises power and control, endowing subjective experience with authority and meaning. Kate Millet writes in *Sita*: “My notebook … has become my friend, solace, obsession. I will live in it, in the ability to record
experience which makes me more than its victim…Magical transformation of
pain into substance, meaning something of my own” (137).

Identities or subject positioning materialize within collectivities and out
of the culturally marked differences that permeate symbolic interactions within
and between collectivities. One is a “woman in relation to a “man”. One is a
“disabled” person in relation to sentence who is seen as “abled”. Identities are
marked in terms of many categories: gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and
nationality, class generation, family genealogy and religious and political
ideologies, to cite the most obvious. These are differences that at least for now,
have meaning in the material and symbolic structures that organize human
experience. But identity as difference implies identity also likeness. As
Friedman notes, “an identity affirms some form of commonality, some shared
ground” (qtd in Smith, Reading 33).

The stuff of autobiographical story telling is drawn from multiple,
disparate and discontinuous experiences. Sometimes narrators explicitly resist
certain identities. Sometimes they obsessively work to conform their self-
representation to particular identity frames. These tensions and contradictions
are seen in the gaps, inconsistencies, and boundaries breached within
autobiographical narratives. The effects of multiplicity of identities are not
additive to the effects of another to understand the position from which
someone speaks to speak autobiographically as a black woman is not to speak
as a woman and as black. It is to speak as black woman. There is no universal
identity of man or woman outside specificities of historical and cultural location. In *The Souls of the Black Folks* Du Bois wrote:

The Negro is gifted with second sight in this American world, a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks in amused contempt and pity. One ever, feels his twoness. (30)

Du Bois’s and Rowbotham’s metaphors of reflection, invisibility and silence are useful for understanding the process of alienation in the identities of any group existing at the margins of culture: women in a man’s world; blacks in a white world.

An analysis of Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* underscore the issues relevant to a young African-American female’s quest to know and develop herself. Angelou admits: “I decided many years to invent myself. I had obviously been invented by some one else-by a whole society- and I didn’t like their invention” (CB 88). In *I Know why the caged Bird Sings* Maya Angelou, the adult poet and writer—subject re-examines her “other” self, the self begins to define its identity. As Eva Lennex Birch argues that this process of development is a painful, as one by one Angelou faces and has to overcome the constraints imposed upon her by her race and gender. Within the
autobiography the young Maya becomes aware of the social norms that attempt to identify and label her. Society has already “invented” her, but rather they accept the reflections of herself seen in the eyes of the black community around her and white society at large, Angelou defines her identity in spite of those social mirroring.

Angelou sees her self and her classmates in the reflection of White man’s vision. Her infinite possibilities unravel and she sees future of “maids and farmers, handymen and washer woman, and anything higher that we aspired to was farcical and presumptuous” (CB 152). Angelou actually loses her sense of identity in the aftermath of this whitewashing – “My name had lost its ring of familiarity I had to be nudged to go and receive my diploma (CB 154). The mirror image revealed to her by the social norms mandated by the white male society momentously erase her identity. As Lacan’s mirror stage Angelou acknowledges a self that is other, a self that is being looked at, a self defined by the black community and the white society.

Catherine Belsey suggests the female self in the symbolic order splits once again to participate both in the liberal humanist discourses of freedom and at the same time in the specifically feminine discourse. Although men also seemingly operates both human and as man, they avoid a similar split in the subjectivity because, as the dominant social force and fully situated in the symbolic, they mandate for themselves what it means to be human and man. The female however must learn to define her self while functioning in the
symbolic male discourse that has already defined her role as a woman. The female subject is not simply human. As Irigray’s says she is neither one nor two but both. Consequently the female in Lacan’s model is split. She remains aware of her self as other and of her self as real.

In fact in an interview Robert Chrisman with Angelou states “To bring up a person healthily you must be liberated. You have to be liberated from all sorts of things, for one, from being in love with the child” (qtd in Elliott, 63). Throughout *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* Angelou liberates herself from the negative reflections of the black community and white society, and she challenges the restrictions of male dominated symbolic order. In effect, Angelou liberates herself in order to “raise” a healthy concept of herself as a young African-American female. She embodies the struggle of women to define their “selves” in a white, male-dominated society where definitions of identity pre-exist. Although Angelou’s self in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is certainly in part of construction, it challenges any social or historical confines and becomes a construction of Angelou’s own design.

It is interesting to note that Angelou the author dedicated her first volume to her son. The mother’s energy flows unchecked and unselfconsciously. She has raw power, and her style is improvised like the ebb and flow of jazz. Perhaps this is a perfect example of the ambivalence that occupies the centre of all feminist’s problems about writing: to produce the book, the woman must follow rhythm of creativity which may be in conflict
with mothering/nurturing role. To be sure one can see Vivian Baxter as a non-nurturing, highly competitive, and goal oriented mother. Yet she is the one who teaches Maya to trust her body, to follow her maternal instincts when her son Guy was born. *I Know Why the caged Bird* ends with the birth of her son Guy. Famous for awkwardness the narrator was afraid to touch him. But Vivian coaxes her into sleeping with baby, although at first she “lay on the edge of the bed stiff with fear, and vowed not to sleep all night long” (CB 245). Eventually she relaxes and sleeps with her arm curled and the baby touching her side.

Vivian puts it in a less, poetic, more pragmatic way, teaching Maya that her body is a friend she can trust: “See, you don’t have to think about doing for the right thing. If you’re for the right thing” (CB 246). What this remark implies is that the conflict between the productive and reproductive roles is a false problem, a myth created by false anxieties; nonetheless it is a myth internalized by women writers, perhaps because there are as yet so few “creative mothers” like Vivian Baxter, who can show up how to surrender to the air not just order to face death but so as to do the right thing without thinking, without being petrified by fear and guilt in the face of life, which always change, flux, flow, tide, rhythm- like the music of Vivian Baxter’s lover.

Angelou feels strongly that a mother can never be fully independent – psychologically detached and constantly wrestles with this conflict. Her text embodies these tensions in its structure. During her year in Europe, she keeps
having pangs of anxiety about her son, although she enjoys every minute of freedom: “uncomfortable thoughts kept me awake. I had left my son to go gallivanting in strange countries and had enjoyed every minute except the times when I had thought about him.” (SS 230). Hysterical and anxious after her son becomes sick, she pays a useless visit to a psychiatrist; for whom she imagines, she is only, “another case of Negro paranoia” (SS 235). Finally she follows the advice of a friend and writes down her blessings: “I can hear I can speak…I can dance/I can sing…I can write” (SS 236). She regains her self confidence and her son simultaneously recovers; “Before my eyes a physical and mental metamorphosis began, as gradually and inexorably as a seasonal change” (SS 237). To write is to give herself the permission not to feel guilty. To write is to love her son in a life-affirming way. The third volume ends on this image of rebirth a rebirth for both mother and son: she writes and names himself. There is no real conflict: it was only a societal myth about maternal neglect, an internalization of false dichotomy between mothering and smothering or mothering and working.

It is during the trial of her rape that she finally internalizes the religious teachings of her childhood completely and consequently begins to perceive herself as evil: “I had sold myself to the Devil and there could be no escape” (CB 73). The defendant’s lawyer attempts to put the blame on her, and the child becomes convinced that she is responsible for the rape. “I didn’t want to lie, but the lawyer wouldn’t let me think, so I used silence as a retreat” (CB 70). The
child quickly learns how to decode the social system in order not to be victimized any further. She has no choice but to lie for survival’s sake. On the familial and social level, the spirit has been punished, justice has been done. On personal level, however, Angelou’s ordeal is just beginning: having sworn on the Bible to say the truth, she is now much more traumatized by the memory of the lie and of their belief that she is responsible for the man’s death.

The little girl is thus in possession of another deadly secret: that every word she utters may allow her inner and evil reality to escape and to hurt or kill others. She has no choice but to remove herself from the community by refusing language:

I discovered that to achieve perfect personal silence all I had to do was to attach myself leechlike to sound… I simply stood still in the midst of the riot sound. After a minute or two, silence would rush into the room from its hiding place because I had eaten all the sounds. (CB 73)

But it is the result of her own absorption of patriarchal, social and religious discourses that she stifles herself. She has become a docile and benumbed element of the oppressive system that controls her life, until the discovery of literature allows her to weave her own story.

But now there is yet another move. Once again Angelou is forced to travel in the train, westward to San Francisco. In Stamps the way of life is rigid, in San Francisco it ran fluid. Maya Angelou had been on the move when
she entered Stamps and thus could not settle into its rigid way of life. She chose not to allow her personality to become rigid. The fluidity of the new environment matched the fluidity of her emotional, physical and psychological life. She could feel in place in an environment where everyone and everything seemed out of place. Angelou accompanies her father to a small Mexican town where he proceeds to get obliviously drunk, leaving her with the responsibility of getting them back to Los Angeles. But she never before drove a car. For the first time, Maya finds herself totally in control of her fate. Such total control contrasts vividly to her earlier recognition in Stamps that she as a Negro has no control over her fate. Here she is alone with that fate. And although the drive culminates in an accident she triumphs.

This “moment” is succeeded by a month spent in a wrecked car lot scavenging with others like her. Together these experiences provide her with knowledge of self determination and a confirmation of her self-worth. With the assumption of this affirmative knowledge and power, Angelou is ready to challenge the unwritten, restrictive social codes of San Francisco. Mrs. Cullinan’s broken dish prefigures the job on the street car. Stamps acquiescence is left far behind in Arkansas as Angelou assumes control over her social destiny and engages in the struggle with life forces. She has broken out of the rusted bards of her social cage.

As Angelou writes it, that story of subject formation is one fraught with tension between the subject in the process of becoming and those external
forces that would define the possibilities of her being. Certainly, the opening scene can be reread as emblematic of that struggle: the black girl child feels herself the object of gaze, and asserts her intention to elude that gaze and disrupt the power of those who look at her to define her. Judith Butler’s theory of the performative offers a language for the subject/social dynamic at work in the autobiography’s opening speech performance and throughout the text. She says in her work *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*:

> The performative is not a singular act used by an already established subject, but one of the powerful insidious ways in which subjects are called into social being from diffuse social quarters, inaugurated into sociality by variety of diffuse and powerful interpellations. In this sense the social performative is not crucial part not only of subject formation, but of the ongoing political contestation and reformation of the subject as well. The performative is not only a ritual practice: it is one of the influential rituals by which subjects are formed and reformulated. (160)

The awareness of the imposition of such interpellations and the subsequent sense of displacement experienced by the developing Black female subject are Angelou’s points of departure. From the moment in the opening scene when the child Maya breaks free of the social performative space by forgetting the rest of her speech and feeling the church, however the text turns upon the girl’s ongoing resistance of these interpellations and her negotiation
of her own subjectivity. In a parallel fashion, within the text as a whole, Angelou, the writer thwarts the performative space of genre, upsetting the individualist and intersubjective yet allegorical imperatives of autobiography to craft a relational, intersubjective memoir.

O’Neale’s assertion that Angelou dismantles negative stereotypes is certainly upheld by the author’s careful revelation of Black women who give the lie to those images. The scholar further points that Angelou creates a “new identity” an alternative “composite self” which does not seem in keeping with the author’s project of creating an expensive and experiential and discursive space for Black female subjectivity. Indeed, O’Neale’s argument implies the exchange of a socially imposed stasis for another of one’s own marking. Just as social serotypes objectify the Black female subject, this new archetypal, composite self would impose a different manner of limitation on the Black women’s becoming establishing a fixed notion of what Black Woman is and can become. Rather than a complacent composite the black female subjectivity that Angelou forwards turns upon the potential for a resistant hybridity within black female subjectivity.

Angelou executes this project by establishing a complex tension between representation and disruption in her text. Her project moves beyond Lionnet’s notion of “double voice” to evoke Mae Henderson’s critical concept of internal heterogeneity in “Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics and the Black Women’s Literary Tradition”: 
What is once characteristic and suggestive about black women’s writing in its interlocutory or dialogic, character, reflecting not only a relationship with “other” “but an internal dialogue with the plural aspect of self that constitute the matrix of black female subjectivity.

(118)

Just as Henderson locates the black female writers “relationship with other[s]” as integral to the plurality of black female subjectivity, the dialogic nature of the lack of female subjectivity that emerges in Caged Bird begins with young Maya’s relationship with an adult women in her life. O’Neale offers an interestingly paradoxical take on the influence of these relationships on the child, diminishing the impact of the adult women in her life- “aside from the will of determination (Angelou) could not extract dependable techniques from their experiences” (31) –yet asserting that Angelou’s ultimate achievement of a particular hybridized subjectivity through her emergence as a Baxter-Henderson woman. Francoise Lionnet on the other hand holds firm to her positing of Angelou’s mother, Vivian Baxter, as the critical figure in young Maya’s development in her article “Con Artists and Story tellers: Maya Angelou’s problematic Audience”: “It is against [Vivian’s] maternal persons and role model that Maya the narrator keeps measuring her accomplishments” (132).

Vivian Baxter certainly plays a crucial role in May’s process of subject formation, but she is by no means the only black female figure that impacts the
girl’s development. Two other important formula presences collaborate with Vivian to influence young Maya’s becoming, Grand-mother Annie Henderson and Mrs. Bertha Flowers. Together, these three women from a triad which serves as the critical matrix in which child is nurtured and sustained during her journey through southern Black girlhood.

During the historical moment in which Maya is growing up, these women also seem to represent three images of black female identity which the young girl must negotiate in the course of her own subject formation. Angelou, the adult autobiographer reveals these images and the identities they describe as constructs, however disrupting them to collapse the dualistic portrayals of Black women as embodied in the age old images of the Matriarch and the Jezebel and the oppositional construction of black female identity as embodied by the image of the lady. Out of the rubble of dismantled images and identities, binaries and oppositional constructions, Angelou’s autobiography opens up a discursive space of political resistance and personal potential arising from an organic, ever emerging, hybridized subjectivity.

Angelou paints Vivian in evocative, sensual terms in the novel—“to describe my mother would be to write about a hurricane in its perfect power. Or the climbing, falling colors of a rainbow’—and in the process places her opposition to Momma—“her red lips [Momma said it was a sin to wear lipstick] split to show white teeth and her fresh butter color looked see-through clean” (CB 49).
Vivian embodies essentially not only through her physical beauty, but also though her lack of certain quality of self-consciousness Angelou best reveals this quality in a few lines describing the children’s meetings with their mother in a St. Louis tavern: “At Louie […] while we sat on the stiff wooden booths, Mother would dance alone in front of us to music from see burg. I loved her most at those times. She was like a pretty kite that floated just above my head” (CB 54). Vivian’s life is one marked by a very different manner of independence from Momma’s. She lives according to her own rules, redefining traditional views of maturity, eschewing conventionality and according to the times, violating accepted morality.

Maya the child positions Mrs. Flowers outside of the black community and draws Momma and Vivian as diametrically opposed figures. Angelou the autobiographer forwards an altogether different project. She takes quite a risk by portraying these three women in a manner that alludes to these culturally constructed images or interpellations: her project might be mistaken for an attempt merely to humanize these images to somehow reappropriates and empower them. Such a gesture however would ultimately have only reiterated these interpellations and empowered the social and political forces that collude to create them, making Angelou complicit in Black women’s disempowerment and displacement. Instead of an ultimately negating attempt to redeem these images of black women Angelou moves toward a critical transformation of black female subjectivity disrupting the boundaries and collapsing binaries that
limit it to reveal a discursive hybridity within the text that, in turn creates the promise and potential plurality in her life and the lives of other black women.

Angelou begins this project by [re]presenting the fragmented black female subject, dispossessed of her strength, sensuality and intelligence through her cultural displacement into negative stereotypic/mythic images. Rather than simply empowering these women, and consequently the images in which they are inscribed to offer a new composite, as O’Neale posits. Angelou frees the women from the images collapsing the oppositional constructions and moving the disparate visions of womanhood toward convergence. This convergence is represented in two emblematic moments in the text:

My picture of the Mother and Momma embracing on the train platform has been darkly retained[...]The sounds they made had a rich harmony. Momma’s deep slow voice lay under my mother’s rapid peeps and chirps like stones under rushing water.” (CB 171)

“They talked from the side of the building [...] heard the soft voiced Mrs. Flowers and the textured voice of my grandmother merging and melting “(CB79). Angelou uses images of fluidity of “rushing waters” and “merging and melting” to suggest the way these women, so seemingly different, flow into each other. She elaborates this critical confluence beyond, however within the text; there are other narrative moments when their convergence occurs. One such moment in relation to Mrs.Flowers and Momma occurs when the child, Maya, experiences a passionate hatred of Momma for “showing her ignorance”
by addressing Mrs. Flowers as “Sister Flowers” and doing so in non Standard English. The child Maya experiences only their difference and it is only after many years, writes Angelou the autobiographer, that she realized that “they were as alike as sisters, separated only by formal education” (CB 78). The blurring of black female images continues as Angelou recognizes the beauty of each of the three women. Whereas her mother’s beauty assails her immediately and she appreciates Mrs. Flowers beautiful in warm color and graceful deportment Maya only recognizes Momma’s beauty in the aftermath of the traumatic, pivotal incident when three white girls, in a deliberate show of racial privilege, arguably a part of their own inauguration into southern, white sociality, expose their bare rear ends in the yard of Momma’s store, already aware that they are impervious to any chastisement or reprimand by the older woman’s because of the color of their skin. After the girls tire of their antics to display of power, Angelou’s grandmother comes in and looks down on her, crying in her frustration and rage over the perceived humiliation of the girl’s disrespectful behavior. “She looked until I looked up. Her face was a brown moon that shone on me. She was as beautiful” (CB 26).

Momma joins Vivian and Mrs. Flowers becoming beautiful in Angelou’s eyes. Perhaps the most effective area of convergence is the participation of all three women in mothering. The text contains a provocative sign for this multiplicity of mother’s in Maya’s imagination
I could cry any time I wanted by picturing my mother (I didn’t quite know what she looked like) lying in her coffin. (…) The face was brown like a nig O and since I couldn’t fill in the feature I printed MOTHER across O”. (CB 43)

Although Angelou only has mother, MOTHER serves as a shifting signifier in the text, signifying all three of the adult women in Maya’s life. This is not to say that Angelou’s project is to establish or validate an image of the Black woman as mother: again, that would be just another socially sanctioned and reified interpellation. Rather, to destabilize the oppositional constructions, Angelou shows these disparate black women, Momma, Vivian and Mrs. Flowers, all engaged in this critical relation which is dynamic. She is nurtured by all the three women and each greatly influences her emerging subjectivity.

It is after a year in Stamps that she meets Mrs. Bertha Flowers a very dark-skinned woman, whose color “was rich black” (CB 78). She is a maternal and nurturing figure like Momma, but her aristocratic demeanor and formal education make her an instant role model for Maya, the imaginative reader of English novels. This woman has a positive self-image and makes Maya “proud to be a Negro just by herself” (CB 79). As a narrative figure she is the opposite of the tall white god like policeman, and she becomes Maya’s savior a sort of tribal deity who helps her reevaluate her position within the community as well as the community’s virtues.
Angelou begins to compare the “uneducated” speech patterns of her grandmother unfavorably to Mrs. Flower’s perfect diction and elocution. The child begins to notice the “texture” of the human voice and simultaneously opens up to human language as Mrs Flowers encourages her to read aloud and try “to make a sentence sound in as many different ways as possible” (CB 82). But she also teaches Angelou that illiteracy is not ignorance and that in the “mother wit” of country people is “couched the collective wisdom of generations” (CB 83). Thus from the start Angelou is forestalled from destructive temptation to hierarchize different cultural models to devalue the “primitive” folk attitudes of her rural background.

Reading for Angelou, is also a depersonalizing, but this depersonalization returns her instead to the collectively human dimensions she had forsaken, with language, in her attempt to shied herself from the wrath of God the Father. Reading enables her to enter into a human dialogue with Mrs. Flowers, to discover a loving and nurturing intellectual relationship. She loses her self but merges with a community of theirs. Bertha Flowers is an ideal other but not a mirroring presence: She medicates and guides Maya’s entry into a multiplicity of “private lives”, which can only enlarge and enrich the girl’s point of view.

The confrontation of self with the blue street tradition takes place while she is with her mother, Vivian Baxter, in St. Louis and California. Vivian is kind in counseling Angelou concerning her sexual confusions, in creating a
celebrating atmosphere that children would in her matter-of-fact acceptance of Angelou’s unwed motherhood, and in the strong support she gives to idea of self reliance. Thus she believes in preparing for the worst hoping for the best, and being unsurprised at anything which happens in between.

But in her fluid existence amidst threatening chaos, one drawback is the requirement of intense absorption, in one’s own life and in the alertness which makes on-topmanship possible. Thus, the mother manages well her own relationship to one of her mates, a Mr. Freeman. In *Gather Together in my Name*, an artistically more mature work than *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* Angelou transcends the boundaries of adolescence to embrace more universal concerns about independence, self-reliance and self-fulfillment. A more subtle, less obvious reason for this insecurity relates to the young mother’s strong feelings of guilt about her illegitimate Son, feelings that the adult Angelou never fully explores or explicates in her autobiography. As Angelou chronicles her movements from independence to awareness, from childhood to adolescence, there are certain social barriers that she must confront and overcome in order to maintain a sense of self and relative freedom.

As a central and polysemic narrative figure, Vivian Baxter embodies all the traditions whose combined influence are evident in Angelou’s textual production. Meeting her mother in St. Louis Maya is stunned by her mother’s beauty and presence. Her light skin, straight hair and talented dancing make her
unreal to her children. “I could never put my finger on her realness” (CB 57) Vivian Baxter is such an individualization and in *Gather Together in my Name* the narrator does attempt to adopt her mother’s life style. But in sharing ideals of beauty and independence which are beyond reach, the daughter only alienates herself. Through the four books Vivian is Angelou’s certain rock, an invincible resource from which the mystique of exultant Black feminine character is molded. Tough, rarefied beauty, Vivian effectively challenged any stereotypical expectations with which the white world or Black men attempted to constrict her being. Her instructions to Angelou are mindful of the pitiful words in Zora Neale Hurston’s novel: “The Black Woman is the mule of the world” but Vivian insisted that not one ebon sister has accepted that warrant.

The saddest part of *Singin’ and Swingin’ and Getting’ Merry Like Christmas* is the young Guy, who, though deeply loved by Angelou seems to be shoved to the background whenever a need to satisfy her monetary requirements or theatrical ambition arise. Throughout the work, one sympathizes also with Angelou in her maternal angst ambivalently wrestling with guilt for leaving her song to sing and swing with *Porgy and Bess*, yet needing the freedom and the space such a tour gave her to expand both intellectually and psychologically. By marrying Tosh for the wrong reasons, Angelou makes mistakes, stumbles, but emerges a stronger person in spite of and because of her choices. When she discovers the price of compromise is too
great, Angelou changes her mind. She makes a conscious choice to look further at her emerging identity in hopes of discovering inner happiness.

Maya’s marriage has reverted her into the role of a trapped bird—a metaphor introduced in *Caged Bird*. In Angelou’s eagerness to please Tosh, she has traded her authentic self for a contrived one, failing to heed Emerson’s advice: “insist on yourself: never imitate” (GT60-61). By conforming to other standards, Angelou weakens the authentic self. Indeed, she has lost the focus of her quest for self, and her contrived self asserts control over her life. In order for Angelou to move forward and re-establish her authentic self, she must spurn conformity, unless it is on her own terms. For, Angelou, autobiography continues to serve as a way of enabling her to contemplate the most painful and terrifying aspects of existence and as a way of enabling those things she values most highly in life. Family, home music: faith friends and knowledge and cornerstones of this life

In *Heart of the Woman*, Maya continues to discover new aspects of her identity, while at the same time her social consciousness is awakened, making Angelou aware of her role as a black woman. In the midst of all the political and social upheaval, Angelou decides to marry Vusumzi Make, an African freedom fighter, without clearly thinking out all the possible consequences. With Make, Angelou reasons, her son would finally “get a chance to have an African father”. But as Angelou soon discovers, her life with Make evokes the familiar caged bird metaphor. Angelou alludes to re-inventing herself when she
reflects upon her husband’s need: “If I didn’t already have the qualities he needed, then I would just develop them. Infatuation made me believe in my ability to create myself into my lover’s desire” (HW 123). This “alien cage” Angelou finds herself trapped in causes her a great deal of undue frustrations: “I was too busy with household chores, I was unemployed but I had never worked so hard in all my life, [and most importantly] an uncomfortable sense of uselessness sets in” (HW 141-142).

Angelou’s uselessness stems from “giving over her entire life” to Make. She “follows him meekly,” “accepts that he knew what he was doing, finds herself placed “in his care,” and finally, understanding and accepting “the place and strength of women in the struggle”(HW 141). Angelou, who prior to Make, was in the midst of discovering her independence and self-confidence- all of which were leading her closer to unfolding her core identity- is once again reduced to the status of nonbeing an invisible.

At the end of the fourth volume, Angelou recounts a tale of Brair Rabbit: how he succeeded in winning his freedom from the angry farmer by pretending to be more afraid of the thorny briar patch than the farmer’s cooking pot. She identifies completely with the Briar Rabbit, feeling just as free, standing in the library of the newsroom where she has earned the right to work and write for a living, despite Vusumzi Make/s pompous initial objections.

When one meets Maya Angelou in her fifth volume, All God’d Children need Travelling Shoes one encounters the humor and pain exuberance,
honesty, and the determination of a human being who has experienced life fully and retained her strong self. A careful examination of African values, transmitted through generations provides Angelou with new insights about herself as an individual and as a Black American. Angelou re-experiences this “boundless envy” when for the first time, she watches a poor uneducated servant in Africa react with contemptuous indifference to the callous inactivity of white professors at the university of Ghana and ignore their display of “established white rudeness”.

No black American I had ever known knew that security, our tenure in the United States, though long and very hard-earned, was always so shaky. We had developed patience as a defense, but never as aggression. (AGC 52)

For Black Americans, like Angelou, who have become frustrated with rejection, disparaging remarks, and lost opportunities from white America, Africa represents a “welcoming mother” to her lost children. It represents a place in which black Americans can escape the “void” and “inner chaos” America offer them. In Ghana Angelou derives many personal truths: the cultural restraints that keep her from truly African, the severe impact of slavery on the Black American psyche, and her own prejudice. Through this experience, Angelou discovers that being Black in a black country has its own frustrations. Whether she likes it or not, she begins to discover that she is a Black American, and that in Africa is a Black American in exile.
As Angelou attempts to define herself and her aspirations against her preconceptions of Africa as Motherland, she is forced to confront her expectations, as well as those of others, thus gaining insight into herself and her compatriots. Gradually she becomes aware of the nativity of their expectations, thereby realizing that Africa provides escapes but not redemption. As personal history *All God’d Children need Travelling Shoes* is richly significant in what it records about W.E.B.DuBois, Shirle Graham and more significantly for what it reveals about Angelou’s growing confrontation with her double consciousness: her American and African Selves. While hiding a self-defined standpoint from prying eyes of dominant groups. Ella Surrey an elderly Black woman domestic eloquently summarizes the energy needed to maintain independent self definitions:

> We have always been the best actors in the world…. I think that we are much more clever than they are because we know that we have to play the game. We have always had to live two lives—one for them and one for ourselves. (qtd in Collins 91)

The double voiced nature of Angelou’s text allows her to oppose an oppressive social system without risk of becoming a term within the system, since a part of her message relies indirect “signifying” practices will always elude any direct attempt to inscribe it within the general frame of that dominant discourse. This elusiveness bespeaks a form of alienation differing only in
degree from Momma’s “secretiveness and suspiciousness” and inherent in all survival strategies.

In Black women’s autobiography much more of the personal is revealed because the female self is constructed simultaneously as the family is reconstructed. Since the self is here dialogic, it repeatedly asserts its identity against a rather specific tradition. The double voicedness flourishes in Angelou’s autobiographies precisely because the writer is in an ambiguous relation to family and tradition. Angelou's singular life has often been inseparable from crucial episodes of black history, and her talent and triumph is to distil uplifting lessons from both private and national adversity.

Her Sixth volume *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* opens on her return to the US after years in Ghana, where she left her teenage son in the care of friends. She also wished to put distance between her and the desirable but imperious man who had been her partner. Referred to simply as "the African", he is emblematic of every mistaken choice of lover a woman could make: "If I wanted chicken, he said he wanted lamb, and I quickly agreed. If I wanted rice, he wanted yams, and I quickly agreed. If I wanted to visit with friends and he wanted to be alone but not without me, I agreed." (SFH 1062) Angelou left Ghana when her friend Malcolm X (El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz) asked her to join him in New York and help him create an Organization of African-American Unity. As soon as she arrived, she phoned him to tell him that she
would first spend time with her family in California. With eight hours in forty hours came the devastating news of Malcolm's assassination. With the help of her wise mother, her beloved brother and her loyal sister-friends, she picked herself up and found work: singing in a Hawaii nightclub and doing market research in Watts, the black area of Los Angeles.

Her credentials as a public and political figure are admirable, but it is in the dilemmas she grapples with as a woman that was seen most clearly of Maya Angelou's vulnerability, tenderness and humour. By 1968 Angelou had returned to New York, and when Dr Martin Luther King sought her help, asking her to travel the country raising funds for a poor people's march, she promised to start soon after her birthday, April 4. But on that very day King, too, was assassinated. The book is more a summing up than a breaking of new ground. Much of Angelou’s wisdom has already appeared in other series. Reliving the trauma of those pivotal years is affecting enough for those who experienced it only from afar. Angelou, at the time, suffered weeks of despair and withdrawal. When she was in her new furnished flat alone Angelou writes:

I expected a litany of pitiful accounts to come to my mind, a series of sad tales. I was a woman alone, unable to get a man, and if I get one, I could not hold him... I had only child and he was beyond my reach in too many ways. I expected a face full of sorry and a lap full
of if-you-please. Nothing happened. I didn’t get a catch in my throat, and there was no moisture around my eyes. (SFH 1080-81)

As it happened many times in her life she repeats here the advice her grandmother gave her as a child earlier reported in *Nothing for My Journey*: “Sister, change everything you don’t like about your life. But when you come to a thing you can’t change, then change the way you think about it. You will see it new, and may be a new way to change it” (SFH 1081). This time it was her friend James Baldwin who prised her out of isolation, introducing her to well-connected company who lapped up tales of her childhood. An editor who had heard of her talent as a raconteur suggested she write an autobiography, but she demurred until provoked by his comment that she probably couldn’t manage it anyway. The next morning she sat down with notepad and pen.

As Audre Lorde says, the house of women is "the house of difference", where they can openly express the different aspects of their personalities, without one representation prevailing over another. Angelou considers it necessary to see the potential creativity of difference and multiplicity, and that is why she unmask herself in this work, accepting her multiple identities, and contributing to the building of the house of difference. Critics like Mcpherson and Lionnet have often read Angelou’s autobiography as the quintessential American story of the quest for self, celebrating Angelou’s ability “find her /self” despite the social forces that would limit her. Such readings are based on
the unexamined and so precarious precept that the person’s emergence as an
Individual is positive, liberating Angelou’s autobiography suggests that this
mythic attainment is not simple. She negotiates the spaces to which she is
consigned because she is southern, black and female. Angelou reveals the
manner in which the black subject a distinctly communal and relational subject,
is engaged in an ongoing series of negotiations with the social, cultural and
political interpellations of itself.

By first establishing and then disrupting dominant images of black
subject she escapes stasis to become a subject in the perpetual process of
forming and emerging. It is a dynamic subjectivity that emerges out of the
young Maya’s girlhood, setting the stage for the multidimensional nature of
Angelou’s adult years. *I know why the caged bird sings* then, does not aspire
towards or conclude with a sudden epiphany of identity. There is no final “I” or
“Me” that is revealed and reveled in. But there is the process of the journey not
toward the self but of selves. And so the question remains “what are you
looking at me for?” (CB 1) The Maya at the end of the work has still not come
to stay she has escaped the gaze, transcended its displacement and become
“becoming” Like Angelou’s continuing autobiography she becomes a work in
progress. Friedman in her article “Women’s Autobiographical Selves” says:

Women’s sense of collective identity however is not only negative.
It can also be a source of strength and transformation. Rowbotham
argues cultural representations of woman leads not only of women’s
alienation but also to the potential for a “new consciousness” of self. Not recognizing themselves in the reflections of cultural representation. Women develop a dual consciousness – the self as culturally defined and the self as different from cultural prescription. But always we were split in two, straddling silence, not sure where we would begin to find ourselves or one another. From this division Our material dislocation came the experience of one part of Ourselves as strange, foreign and cut off from the other which we encountered as tongue-tied paralysis about our own identity. We were never all together in one place, were always in transit, Immigrants into alien territory… The manner which ourselves as an historical being-woman. [qtd in Private Self 39]

In the light of the above criticism Lessing’s Under my Skin constructs a dual consciousness [which she terms the “Hostess personality” and ‘Tigger’] to protect her private self, which leads to the presentation of a divided self a division which is also apparent. She writes:

Now I look back at that child, that girl, , that young woman, with a more and more detached curiosity. Old people may be observed peering into their pasts, Why? – they are asking themselves. How did that happen? I try to see my past selves as someone else might, and then put myself back inside one of them, and am at once
submerged in a hot struggle of emotion, justified by thoughts and ideas I now judge wrong. (UMS12)

The act of trusting “the reader with her life”, indeed can be quite frightening to a fiction writer, particularly to someone like Doris Lessing who dislikes public scrutiny and is skeptical about the genre of autobiography. “Writers may protest as much as they like” Doris Lessing gripes near the beginning of Under My Skin “but our lives do not belong to us” (14). As proven by her Jane Somers experiment, she writes and lives in an age when personalities are responsible for them. Yet Lessing also points out that despite her “conditional respect” for the history that she cannot help but notice how often “women get dropped from memory, and then history” (UMS 12). And, in order to ensure that one of those women, herself is kept on record in a way that “somewhere connects with the truth” (rather than as a tissue of (another’s) invention” (UMS 14). She has chosen to write her autobiography in spite of her reservations about the genre and her dislike of the public gaze.

In the first part of her autobiography Lessing begins by giving some consideration to the question of honesty and truthfulness within the context of “writing about yourself for publication” (UMS 11). She writes “The truth… how much of it to tell, how little? The older I get the more secrets I have never to be revealed and this I know is a common condition of people my age” [UMS 11] in fact, the entire second chapter of Under My Skin foregrounds subjective nature of autobiography, focusing not only on deliberately concealed “secrets”
but also on the fallibility of memory itself which both serve to problematize the validity or truth of life writing.

Whereas in the preceding passage Lessing suggests that she and other “people [her] age” choose to have “secrets” and intentionally conceal the truth below she points to the deceptive nature of the memory itself. She writes:

Ah, yes. Fond lying memory, picking out of the high points of ‘everything in this case (her first experience of leaving home) all the pleasure, crystal springs, pythons, vegetable soup, the somnolence of doves, cats, luxuriously rolling under my hand…However the truth compels me… (UMS 146)

Lessing states here that she is “compelled” to come as close as she can to the “truth”. She also implicitly rejects the model she proposed at the beginning of chapter two of Simon de Beauvoir, who declared in her autobiography that about something, “she had no intention of telling the truth” (UMS 11). When Lessing considers the reader’s perspective with her hypothetical question, nonetheless she promises not to “intentionally” conceal the “truth” even as she closes chapter two with a caveat emptor to the reader about the relativity of truth: “I am trying to write this book honestly. But were I to write it aged 35, how different it would be?” (UMS 17). Lessing compares here a writer’s setting down of her memories to a child building a “sandcastle” not only can this be read literally in the above example, but proves Lessing’s usage of ‘building’ and ‘sandcastles’ as metaphors of life-writing process. Her
metaphors emphasize both the work involved in giving shape to the memories (molding grains of sand on a beach into turrets and draw bridges) as well as the tenuous and impermanent nature of memories themselves (the sandcastles’ shape and substance are easily washed away by a strong wave or the rising side) Lessing suggests here that memories can be influenced by other’s accounts of them and even replaced by someone else’s version of the events if reinforced.

According to Lacan’s mirror stage, the human subject, moving through imaginary stage of identification and duality, sees an ideal image reflected in the mirror and simultaneously recognizes and misrecognizes that image. That mirror stage or movement into the symbolic realm is the beginning of the “self” dividing from itself, which is identified in Lessing. In the beginning of her life story she says how she feels insecure and frightful “as if her memory were Self, Identity” which is not so. She says:

Now I can imagine myself arriving in some country with the past Wiped clean out of my mind: I would do all right. It is after all only what we did when we were born, without memories, or so it seems to the adult: then we have to create our lives, create memory. (UMS 13)

Lessing however seems to be less afraid as an adult of losing her own childhood memories by “replacing” them with “more intense” written versions, than she felt threatened as a child by the adults “insistence” that she accept
their own version of events, as will be shown in the following passage. Moreover, because of her childhood fear of losing her own perception of reality, she now claims that not only is she interested in examining the validity of her memories – “the truth compels me” – but she asserts her ability to sort through “fond lying memory” [false memory] in order to get more reliable real memory. She says:

But there are moments, incidents, real memories I do trust. This is partly because I spent a good part of childhood ‘fixing’ moments in my mind. Clearly I had to fight to establish a reality of my own, against an insistence from the adults that I should accept theirs...I am deducing this. Why else my preoccupation that went on for years this is the truth, this is what happened, hold on to it, don’t Let them talk you out of it (UMS 13-14)

Here Lessing describes an unusual childhood, when she felt her own sense of “reality” threatened by “the adults”[ her parents] who “insisted she should accept theirs with which she did not always agree, she began to engage in a ‘fight’ which she felt necessary for her survival: she insisted over and over to herself “this is the truth this what happened, hold on to it, don’t let them talk to you out of it” And it was this childhood preoccupation with ‘fixing’ moments in her mind “she claims which led to her ability to separate “real memory from false memory.
Even though the following passage from *Under My Skin* describes the personality of “Tigger” Doris Lessing’s public persona to 1949 the description and the comments of the narrative voice apply equally well to the Matty from *Land Locked*

I was the fat and bouncy Tigger [from Milana] I remained Tigger Until I left Rhodesia for nothing would stop friends and comrades using it. Nicknames are potent ways of cutting people down to size. Tigger, Tayler, Tigger Wisdom, then Tigget Lessing… Also Comrade Tigger. This personality was expected to be brash, jokey clumsy and always ready to be a good sport, that is to laugh at herself, apologize., clown, confess inability. An extrovert. In that it was the protection for the person I really was, ‘Tigger’ was an aspect of the Hostess.(UMS 89)

Lessing says that is only in her name she seems to be detached about in making this claim, she implicitly denies experiencing herself “as split” in various ways… as two or more selves. Yet, the tone of this passage which describes her detachment from her name suppresses the loneliness and alienation she experienced because she perceived herself as unwanted by her mother who was convinced to the last possible moment that Lessing was a boy.

By contrast hurt that Lessing represses about regarding her mother’s lack of preparation and love her, surfaces in Lessing’s writings:
She did not know love as a child, and was making sure we would not be similarly deprived. The trouble is, love is a word that has to be filled with an experience of love. What I remember is hard bundling hands, impatient arm and her voice telling me over and over again that she had not wanted a girl, she wanted a boy. I knew from the beginning she loved my little brother unconditionally, and she did not love me. (UMS 25)

Moreover, this pain and her feelings of being shut out and unloved re-surface in her description of a mescaline induced rebirthing experience. In *Under My Skin* Lessing writes:

I was being born. In the 1960s this kind of religious experience was common. I was giving myself ‘a good birth- in the jargon of the time, The actual birth was not only a bad one [it involved forceps which temporarily disfigured the new born Lessing] but made worse by now it was reported to me, so the story teller [Lessing] invented a birth as the Sun rose with light and warmth coming fast into the lamp lit room. Why not? I was born early in the morning. Then I invented a chorus of pleasure that I was a girl, for my brother had been sure I was boy and had a boy’s name ready. In this game my girl’s name had been planned for months instead of given me by the doctor. (UMS 21)
More over Lessing links this experience to her recognition of the existence of “the different personalities” within her “self” She writes:

Probably this ‘good’ birth was therapeutic, but it was a revelation Of the different personalities at work in me I valued and value now. One had to be authentic and not invented because it was expected. Before my eyes, through the whole experience that, for hours, ran a Picture show of beautiful and smart clothes, fashionable clothes as if a fashion designer inside me was being given her head. They were not on me, but on fashion models: I have never worn this kind of garment. The other person, or personality, was a sobbing child, I wept, and wept much to the concern of my companions…

(UMS 21)

Whereas Lessing’s subconscious here attempts, to heal herself emotionally even as express her pain by “weeping without constraint” the self-conscious older Lessing immediately criticizes that emotional child as soon as she steps out-side of her drug induced state.

The outward looking and receptive character is nothing less than a public relation figure that is in ready conformity with societal expectations. Lessing admits that “our lives are governed by voices, caresses, threats we cannot remember” (UMS22). It is also important to note that there is no contradiction in the coexistence of these identities. They actually compliment, or even more allow for the creation of a critical space where the authentic “I”
can thrive. Depending on context the authentic ‘I’ can fulfill the social expectations through the Hostess personality and Tigger personalities, and also withdraw into its inner space to explore its potential possibilities, aspirations and sensibilities. This also points out the humankind’s capacity to have multiple selves. The autobiographical act therefore explores these multiple selves while at the same time it attempts to disentangle the inner, private self from these other selves.

Even as Lessing expresses the desire to escape her mother through geographical distance, she actually, “incorporates her mother’s life into her own”, displaying contradictory desire to separate from her mother and identify with her. This is based more closely on Chodrow’s understanding of “mother-daughter relations” as determined by connectedness in which the daughter “established more fluid and permeable ego boundaries with her mother. The danger however as Neuman points out is that autobiographers will affiliate loss of their own selfhood, loss of autonomy with reabsorption into their mother’s bodies.

Lessing portrays her mother as a ‘victim’ of an indifferent step mother and an authoritarian father. She records her own “determination not to reproduce that life”. Despite this determination to separate herself from her mother and her mother’s upbringing, Lessing seems to merge with her mother, Emily Maude, carrying her mother with her in the personas of Tigger’ and Hostess personality to such an extent that Lessing does not always maintain
her own ego boundaries. While Maude Taylor was made miserable by the limited sphere consigned to white female settlers in southern Rhodesia, Lessing rejected the limitations imposed by such protections- and racist prescriptions that underlay them. In like manner, Lessing’s rebellions against her mother are generally staged by creating breaks in the structural integrity of the house. Maude Taylor struggles to preserve the interior of the house as hermetically sealed relic of England to stave off insanity, although her efforts to maintain this impossible division are the chief cause of her breakdown. To separate from her mother, Lessing must efface the house /bush distinction upon which her mother’s fragile psychic security depends. Conversely, her mother’s efforts to preserve this distinction can be read as attempts to mould her daughter in her own image. When mother and daughter seek to renovate, mother upholds the existing structure. The house is more than the battlefield on which mother and daughter fight out their differences: it structures their understanding of those differences.

Lessing’s escape into the bush dramatizes her rebellion against her mother. This battle reached its peak when Lessing was fourteen, at the onset of puberty, when her own body’s maternal capabilities emerged: “My fourteenth was to make or break year, a sink or swim year a do or die year, and I was fighting for my life against my mother” (UMS 155). If her mother, suddenly aware of her daughter as sexual being sees this sexuality as making her daughter vulnerable, her daughter experiences it as strength, one that will give
power to separate fully from her mother. For the first time, Lessing experiences her body not as an extension of her mother’s body but her own.

However, Neuman’s pattern in “‘Your Past… Your Future’: Autobiography and Mother’s Bodies” by “incorporating her mother’s life into her own” which Lessing follows to a large extent in Under my Skin offers another explanation for Lessing’s anxiety: despite her desire to separate herself from her mother, Lessing also, paradoxically, fear of identifying completely with her mother. Neuman explains this paradox: “Daughters will speak with great ambivalence, for it is daughters who caught in the contradictory position of identifying with while separating from their mother’s bodies” (UMS 76).

This anxiety regarding identification with her mother, even as she expresses fierce determination to separate herself from her mother’s body, desires, and voice is the strongest in the first volume of her autobiography. “I will not. I simply will not” (UMS157,190,201) is a phrase which Lessing continually repeats, stressing as one of the themes of Under my Skin. Upon discovering her adolescent daughter’s conversation to Catholicism, Emily Maude “exploded into reproaches Lessing continues “This [hostile reaction] marked the beginning of a rejection of my mother, like a slamming of a door” (UMS 12). Moreover, the metaphor is repeated at the end of this first volume of her autobiography, once again, in the context of “rejecting her mother this time by escaping her family:
That’s all over I was thinking that’s done with meaning the tentacles of family. I was born out of my own self- so felt I. I was not going home I was fleeing from it. The door had shut and that was that.

(UMS 419)

Ironically however the door slammed at the end of *Under my Skin* is not as final. The narration of her mother’s story and their future relations before her mother’s death in 1957 is left open until volume II *Walking in the Shade* in which the reader is ‘doomed’ as she reruns the mother daughter quarrel. Lessing fails to outturn her mother of the Hostess personality, stows away “under Lessing’s skin” and makes the journey with her to England.

Lessing goes on to describe herself as grief struck upon news of the death of her mother but in a “chilly grey semi-frozen condition- an occluded grief” (WIS 223). In the beginning she feels remorse and guilt. “As usual I pitied her for her dreadful life, but this rage of pity was blocked by the cold thought: If you had to let her live with you she would not have died” (WIS 223) It takes Lessing another two years after her mother’s death to thaw the protective “shield” and her grey semi-frozen condition and submerge once again in the “hot struggle of emotion”. She describes her mother’s death, this time, in a more personal and emotional terms :

There are deaths that are not blows but bruises, spreading darkly, out of sight, not even really fading. I sometimes think, suppose she were to walk in now, an old woman, here I am an old woman…
how would we be? ...I think would simply put my arms around her.

Around who? Little Emily, whose mother died when she was three leaving her to the servants, a cold unloving stepmother, a cold dutiful father. (WIS 240)

This hypothetical reaction of her resurrected mother is much warmer than her decades earlier defensive hypothesis that even if her mother “returned to life” and “stood there, brave, humble, uncomprehending … nothing could have been different” (WIS 223) Further more it shows a change in Lessing’s ability to display emotion from her earlier choice to express her grief by passively listening to blues while suppressing the emotions which Lessing could not out of honesty allow herself, like simple tears. Earlier Lessing describes herself as “an over sensitive, always observant and judging, battling and impressionable, hungry loving child” (UMS 26). and she criticizes her mother for not being able to display her emotions in *Under My Skin*:

She talked about love often. The tenderness she had never been taught came out in worrying and fussing and in the case of my brother making him delicate so that she could nurse him: in my case, actually making me sick for a time.(UMS 26).

Thus Lessing in turn lacks the tenderness she has never been taught by her mother, and the result is that she, too, lacks the ability to display her emotions, apparent in her cool, controlled descriptions of her mother’s death and her decision to leave her two children from her first marriage.
When Lessing left her children to “break some ancient chain of repetition” (UMS 262) she ensures the continuity of that generational chain by reproducing the abandonment her mother experienced as a child. This in turn influenced her mother’s inability to show warmth and love to her daughter. Thus Lessing misses the opportunity to create a closer and more congenial relationship with Jean than Lessing had experienced her own mother. Lessing fails to escape her mother along with her children and Southern Rhodesia, because she carries her mother’s voice with her to England embodied as previously mentioned, in the personas of the Hostess which shields and protects her “private self” from becoming “public property” (UMS 20). The Hostess accomplished this function by being bright, helpful attentive receptive to what is expected, all qualities which Lessing has learned from observing and listening to her socially accomplished and capable mother. In fact, her mother’s voice seeps under Lessing’s skin so deeply that Emily Maude becomes part of Doris Lessing, a fact which J.M. Coetzee claims Lessing acknowledges by her epigraph to *Under My Skin*:

I’ve got you under my skin
I’ve got you deep in the heart of me
So deep in my heart you’re really a part of me
I’ve got you under my skin
I’ve have tried not to give in…[ vi]
In *Under my Skin*, Lessing tries to understand at least, why her mother reacts this way to her daughter’s developing body. First, she offers the suggestions of a therapist with whom she became friendly in later life, who specialized in mother-daughter relationships “It is common, said she for mothers to be identified with a girl-child she can hardly tell the difference between her own body and the child’s. (UMS 2). She recounts another experience, which reveals Lessing’s sympathetic attempt to understand and represent her mother’s desires, apart from mothering. Lessing teaches herself to sew her own clothes and raises money for fabric. She writes: “My mother raged and accused and stormed, but what she really said was, “You are escaping me, you are leaving and I am struck here in this awful, miserable life of mine and I shall never be able to get out” (UMS174).

Here, the older- narrating self of *Under My Skin* interprets her mother’s rage as jealousy over her daughter’s ability to escape the life in which her mother feels she has been trapped. Yet there seems to be more to the discomfort Lessing’s mother experiences with her daughter’s budding sexuality. In scene after scene of *Under My Skin* confrontations show that it is her mother whom adolescent Lessing fears will “take away something that is her right” this feeling fuels Lessing’s desire to escape her mother before she begins to identify with her mother completely, incorporating her mother’s life in her own.
Lessing paradoxically identifies with her mother even as she tries to separate from her, which results in Lessing’s incorporation of her mother’s *Under My Skin* as embodied in the Hostess personality. Even so, in her late seventies, Lessing seems better able to separate herself from the Hostess, and to let down her guard in order to manage a reconciliation between her mother and herself, in her imagination at least: forty years after her mother’s death, Lessing envisions her mother and herself meeting in the present as two “old women” who could share “some kind of humorous comprehension” of the damned awfulness of life. In *Walking in the Shade* Lessing finally seems able, through her imaginative transcendence of her life long battle with her mother, to resolve the conflict she has experienced over the years concerning her division into “I” and “She” her private self, the observer and its protector and the Hostess.

Nonetheless in both these volumes Lessing appears to be following Neuman’s matrophobic pattern of escape, in which the daughter overcomes her fears of becoming her mother through physical separation unwittingly perhaps incorporates her mother’s life in to her own by separating from her and identifying with her at the same time. Through autobiography, Lessing understands her mother, but only after her death. As she states, ‘you have to be grownup, really grown up, not merely in years, to understand your parents’. (WIS 159) She acknowledges that it took her a longer time to appreciate that her mother:
This was the girl who had defied her father to become a nurse, standing up to years of his refusal even to speak to her. This was the woman who impressed everyone she met by her vigour, her competence, her independence, her humour. I cannot imagine that, had I met the young Emily Maude McVeagh, I would have much to say to her, but I would have had to admire her (WIS 160)

Lessing continues

I think what happened was this: When she arrived on that farm… when she knew that this would be her future, a lonely one, because of her neighbours, with whom she had nothing in common she knew that the forward drive of her life which had been towards some form of conventional middle-class living, was blocked; when she knew her husband was an invalid and would not be able to keep his grasp on life… then she had a breakdown and took to her bed. (WIS 160)

Lessing’s account of her personal life combines disarming frankness on certain matters with silence on others. She expresses surprise that some readers of *Under my Skin* were disconcerted by emotionless way in which she presented her decision leave the two children of her first marriage behind Africa with their father, noting that any intelligent person should realize how painful it was, in *Walking in the Shade*.

In the process of narrating the subject, Sidonie Smith says in one of her articles, a specific recitation of identity involves the inclusion of certain
identity contents and the exclusion of others. It is as if the autobiographical subject finds herself on multiple stages simultaneously, called to heterogeneous recitations of identity. These multiple calls never align perfectly. Rather they create spaces or gaps, ruptures, unstable boundaries, incursions, excursions limits and their transgressions. Even Lessing considers her Hostess personality which sometimes acts as protective shield to her private self. She writes:

…the observer, and it is here I retreat to, take refuge, when I think my life will be public property and there is nothing I can do about It. You will never get access here, you can’t, this is the ultimate and Inviolable privacy. They call it loneliness, that is this place unsharable with anyone at all ever, but it is all we have to fall back on. Me, I, this feeling of me. (UMS 20)

She leaves the subject undiscussed once again in Walking Shade. She makes it plain, however that her early years in London were constructed around the needs of Peter, the younger son, from her second political marriage to the German refugee Communist Gottfried Lessing. Her older son John makes a brief appearance as a young man but her daughter is not mentioned at all in both books. Lessing acknowledges that her flight from Africa was largely from her background; her anxious, socially aspiring mother in particular represented everything she wanted to leave behind. She takes up the “cruel story” of her relations with her mother, as Mrs. Tayler decides that it is her duty to follow her daughter to London. The panic Lessing felt and the subsequent, guilt after
she found the strength to refuse to allow her mother live with her, was the prelude to several years of therapy. It is tempting as Lessing wants the reader to see her eventual decision to join the Communist Party as, she expresses of a need for another kind of family.

At the heart of this book is Lessing’s dogged, painful, bemused and in the end inconclusive attempt to explain how she spent almost twenty years involved with communism, an involvement she now regards as lunatic and neurotic” and wrong. It is hard to understand how it began in Africa in 1940s where it was in communist circles that she could find people who read books, discussed ideas and rejected white supremacy. She arrived in London with her allegiance with the far Left already formed, so was naturally drawn people of similar views, many of them survivors of Nazi persecution in Europe- survivors such as the man calls Jack a Czech doctor with whom she fell deeply in love, despite his marriage and his compel womanizing. Lessing became a Party member and performed as she describes as probably the most neurotic act of my life.

There is an obvious advantage in staking out the false position as her natural territory, it forestalls criticism. It is, in fact, a form of self-justification, although there is no doubt of Lessing’s wry distaste for her past behavior. At the same time, her years, especially the visit she made in 1952 to the Soviet Union as a member of a delegation of writers for the authors World Peace appeal: her companions were Naomi Mitchison, who lectured the comrades on
free love in piercing upper-class tones. A.E. Coppard, who believed everything he was told, Richard Mason, who continually announced that he hated great literature, and Douglas Young, a very tall Scottish Nationalist in kilt, who made long speeches about Scotland’s right to self-determination. Less amusing was the moment when, on a carefully stage-managed visit to a collective farm, an old man suddenly told them, in front of Party officials, that they were being fed lies. Lessing never found out what she calls “the bravest thing I have ever seen” After that visit, she writes, she avoided such trips and indeed all meetings and party occasions as far as possible. Nevertheless, she seems to have attended quite a few, including the writer’s gathering where she spouted the Party line on social responsibility in literature, while not believing a word of it. And found herself developing a stammer as she did so. As late as 1956 she was asking the Soviet Embassy in London to sponsor her as a journalist on a return visit to Africa.

Her description, from the inside, of the Cold war years, the potent mixture of arrogance, emotionalism and nativity that kept her and others tied to the Party line, long after they knew it was nonsense, will not be bettered; but her diagnosis of the origins of “the mass psychosis” in which she shared, namely that it originated in the deep illusion with authority, and addiction to revolution and bloodshed, that were the legacy of the First World war, is less compelling.
The years of her slow withdrawal from communism coincided with the end of her relationship with “Jack” which despite its destructiveness, she regards as the one real love of her life. Thereafter here were several more lovers, are many romantic friendships with Americans in flight from McCarthy, or Africans on the run from the colonial repression; as her writing became better known, she began to be regarded as fashionable by a new, younger group of rebellious would-be-intellectuals, such as Kenneth Tynan and John Osborne, included among the Angry Young man. She never stopped being active on the Left, she marched from Aldermaston, sat down in Trafalgar Square and tried to persuade Bertrand Rusel to detach himself from the sinister Ralph Schoenman and the committee of 100. But as 1950s waned, her main preoccupation was with the writing of *The Golden Notebook*, the long novel which she first explored the emotional and political experience of her recent past. The honesty with which she wrote about an intelligent woman’s sexual nature helped to make that book a landmark for women in writing it, she now says, she was seeking not just to explain but to change herself. *The Golden Notebook*, published in 1962, marked the end of one political period of her life and the beginning of another, since then, her search for a discipline and a framework of belief, which she calls, in the language of mysticism, “the Way” continues.

This volume is repetitive, and the more gossipy sections have a perfunctory air, as if added under pressure from her publishers. But even its flaws testify to her seriousness of purpose, and her reluctance to smooth over
the intractable difficulties of writing truthful autobiography. One of the hazards of old age she observes citing Tolstoy, Russell and Sartre can be “loss of moral independence”. So far, this fate does not seem likely to claim Doris Lessing.

According to Shirley Geok-lin-lim Asian women writers in the twentieth century were and continued to be marginalized first by gender, in socio-political structures that have functions except as nurturers (nurses, teachers, lovers, mothers, what is called the helping positions). They are marginalized, also, in nations where national identity has been forcibly equated with national language policy, by their choice of writing in English. If members of a minority ethnic or regional group they are further marginalized by majority ethnic power structure. f Geok-Lin-Lim observes in “Semiotics, Experience, and the Material Self: An Inquiry into the Subject if the Contemporary Asian Women Writer”

As the semiotic principle that constitutes the subject; self as Experience in which both agent and receiver act and are acted upon and self finally As constituted by the Other, which is the field of the political. Together they form not layers of a self like the flesh of an onion easily peeled apart but rather types of chemicals whose different properties bind to produce for each individual a unique process, reaction, and alchemical substance. (qtd in Smith, *Autobiogrophy* 444)

Sheila Rowbotham suggests, women as a group can develop an alternative way of seeing themselves constructing a group identity based on
their historical experience. If the idea of collective solidarity with other women happens, women can move beyond alienation. Kamala Das’s life story is set in the once matrilineal framework of the Nair tharvard. Colonization and imposition of the western notions often influenced her upon the naïve system influenced upon her peculiar individual position. From the secure and serene warmth of the Nalapat, both Kamala and her mother were taken away into the rashness of city culture. They were not accustomed to their new social set up. From a matrilineal and matrilocal framework that offered complete security to the women and their kids were thrust into a westernized patriarchal society. Women who were habituated to gentle maternal care and consideration certainly are at loss in a male centered society. Men folk of Nayar tharvard turned to be efficient enough to cope up with the emotional as well as economic requirements of their counterparts.

Das traces her roots to her ancestress, Kunji a wealthy aristocrat who, at age fifteen fleeing from the war between the English and Dutch “made to change her route by an amorous chieftain who brought her over to his village and married her” (MS12) However, while telling the story this marriage, Das does not present the possibilities of abduction, rape and forced marriage. Rather it suggests instead a romantically blurred portrayal of male figure motivated by “amour” a male figure more over that “was well-versed in Astrology and Architecture” (MS 13) and who set his bride up in the Nalapat house.
In *My Story* women together form an original patterning proud and powerful womanhood against which the narrative of patriarchal marriage and abuse develops. She shares everything about her life with the secrets that should not be openly expressed in her society. According to Carolyn Heilbrun, there are four ways to write a woman’s life:

the woman herself may tell it, in what she chooses to call an autobiography; she may tell it in what she chooses to call fiction; a biographer, woman or man, may write the woman’s life in what is called biography: or the woman may write her own life in advance of living it, unconsciously and without recognizing or naming the process… woman of accomplishment, in consciously writing their future lived lives or more recently, in trying honestly to deal in written form with lived past lives, have had to confront power and control. Because this has been declared unwomanly and because many women would prefer [or think they would prefer] a world without evident power or control, women have been deprived of the narratives, or the texts, plots or examples by which they might assume power over take control of their own lives. (qtd in Smith, *Autobiography* 3)

Das chooses the fourth way in Heilbrun’s description. She writes her autobiography to take control of her life and get power in a patriarchal society.
Despite the fact that she is criticized by many people for doing exceptional thing for an Indian woman, she becomes very successful.

Kamala Das describes her ancestral home in Malabar which is called Nalapat House and the women who are living in that house. Generally, in autobiographies that are written by women, the central theme is the relationship between the author and her mother. However, Kamala Das does not prefer to talk about her relation with her mother. It seems that she does this intentionally, Das focuses on third world women’s oppression and she puts her relations with men to the centre of her story. Only in the first chapter, there is some information about her father as a man always busy with his work. He is not very affectionate and because of this Kamala Das and her brother grow up neglected. On the other hand, her mother is a vague and indifferent woman who spends her time “lying on her belly on a large four-post bed, composing poems in Malayalam” (MS2) It can be understood from here that Das’s mother is also an exceptional woman. She was not a caring mother figure.

Kamala Das notes that her parents were not aware of the independently developing personalities of her kids. But the readers can feel that Das had inherited the art of writing. At the tender age of six Kamala Das used to write poems on her dolls. Each of her poems on her dolls made her cry. Das’s life story is centered on her inner self many a times making the readers doubt about the authenticity of her account. Nevertheless she sounds very convincing when she narrates the experiences of inner self of a woman in a typically
conservative social scenario. She has depicted incidents, events and characters of other people but her inner self is at the center.

The women who deeply influenced Kamala Das is her Aunt Ammini “an attractive woman who kept turning down all the marriage proposals that came her way” (MS 14). While listening to her Das sensed for the first time that love was beautiful anguish and thapasya”(MS 14). In these maternal figures Kamala Das finds as indigenous tradition that her English educated childhood denied her. Only in Nalapat House, in a matriarchal society, do the identities of Indian, woman writers come together.

Das’s autobiography is a strongly public work, exhibiting a deliberate consciousness of audience. The audience that Das locates is the existence of an ancient female ambition for writing, expressed and perhaps only capable of being expressed, in the mirror of strict and narrow social structures of the time and place, This writing ambition while associated with female spinsterhood or chastity is made more complex by its juxtaposition with intimate symbols of female sensuality. As a middle aged woman Das returns to her maternal home and discovers books containing Ammalu’s poems. Together with “the leaves of her books yellowed like autumn leaves” Das finds in the secret drawers of [Ammalu’s] writing box, a brown bottle shaped like a pumpkin that smells faintly of Ambergris… (MS 18)

For Das their biographies offered knowledge of the complex intersections of asceticism and sexuality that form major themes in her
autobiography. The identity of her ancestress while associated with love or yearning remains women—or subject—centred and this subject condition is integral to and invested in the literary enterprises. The shift from “I” to the communal “we” emphasizes Das’s explicit recognition here of a collective female “primal instinct” associated with the repressed aspects of womanhood, the un-nurturing, destructive forces of female passion. The area of sexuality Das explores is defined in a patriarchal society to the advantage of men, and the narrative’s tales of extramarital affairs are also tales of male abuse. This is yet another spiritual damage women suffer on account of sex; the masochistic rationalizations of drives, while more conventionally expressed as religious growth, is itself an example of psychic damage in the female protagonist.

Das goes beyond economic/sexual class bond to examine the place of class in her society. Observing the lives of the working class and poor who surround the protagonist and commenting specifically on the protagonist’s fascination with the poor, the narrator offers these lives in moral contrast to the protagonist’s own middle class ennui. She is able to revise her subjective perspective:

I was pining yet another settee for the drawing room while these grand men and women were working from morning till dusk carrying cement and climbing the scaffoldings. And yet they had more vitality than I had and more optimism… My gloom lay in its littlest corner like a black dog. I had had the idiocy to think myself
Kamala, being separate from all the rest and with a destiny entirely different from those of others (MS 214)

The inclusion of this incident in a subjective genre such as autobiography indicates the writer’s unease with her own subjective project, the project of constituting “Kamala, a being separate from all the rest and with a destiny all her own.” The passage contains less a materialist critique of class inequalities than an interrogation of the Westernized middle-class privileging of the individual which forms the autobiography’s subtext. In its valuation and equation of vitality and singing a communal activity, with the working class, the passage offers another example of narrative “double-voicedness” The incident represents another instance of the protagonist’s attempt Reflecting upon the possibility of divorce after a large number of years, She writes when she was young, she did not think of it on more than one occasion But she didn’t think of her children. She didn’t want her children to think her as a mother abandoning her family only for some physical reason. This depression kept getting intensified. The domestic responsibilities, the care of her childhood of emotional communion with her husband, the denial of freedom to the extent that she had been stifle with sobs led her to a state of utter despair ting to break the psychic isolation of a middle class marriage; but the attempt of this occasion, dragging her husband with her is licit and legal and serves to underline her identification with, rather than separation from the larger Indian society.
In her preface Das locates her origin of her autobiography in the confessional impulse attending the deathbed. She indicates that the autobiography was written during her first serious about with her disease and she wanted to empty herself of all the secrets so that I could depart when the time came with a scrubbed-out conscience. This intention indicates a particular understanding of the autobiographical genre, one attuned to the confessional tradition of Christianity exemplified in Augustine’s *Confessions* that Creative activity which is a defence against the threat of finding the world meaningless, protected her against mental illness and gave her hope for “a new life, an unsustained future” It was in the field of literary creativity that she could hope to “Wipe out the paints, unmould the clay Let nothing remain of that yesterday” (MS 104)

She wished to destroy obliterate all memories of her unhappy past and to begin afresh. Reality had not given her freedom of self-expression and recognition but creative writing showed her the possibility for this. As it was Kamala Das was torn between feminine and feminist mystique. It was her inability to resolve this conflict that had turned her crazy. And there came another shock for her. Her victim position was more firmly established.

When I became pregnant for the second time the foundations of my sanity were shaken. Suddenly I took to eating meat and fish. I became short-tempered and temperament. During the eighth month of pregnancy I went home to Nalapat to be with my grandmother
who was distressed to see the change in me. I would sit still staring
at a dot the wall for one or two hours, as though hypnotized. Has the
child forgotten how to laugh, asked my grandmother why has such
a change come over her. (MS 108)

Obviously she was finding ways and means to come to terms with
herself but there was nothing to cheer her spirits up although with all the
physical care she received after the birth of her second son her health certainly
improved “But I could not abandon the habit of staring all the spots on the
walls.” (MS 115) She returned to Bombay but

On my return to Bombay I found my unease growing. I wished to
escape from my home and walk on and on until at last my feet
reached the end of the world. I did not think then that such a traveler
could only reach ultimately his starting place and that our ends, our
real destinations are our beginnings (MS 109)

As Geok-Lin-Lim states that Asian women writer, like every where,
continues to be constituted by a Male Other. She continues:

When we look at ourselves in maturity, the gaze we have
reconstituted from our culture is male. Our valuation of our selves,
our femininity, learned from our mothers, is inexorably the market
value of the male world. (qtd in Smith, Autobiography 444)

Kamala’s alienation from society as well as self led to psychic
disequilibrium. The main cause of her psychic disorder was the denial of
freedom of autonomy and she herself was aware of the cause of her malady. “I had begun to shed my clothes regarding them as traps.” [MS 116] The protagonist’s nostalgia for an authentic self is evident. In her efforts to shed clothes she was rejecting all masks, artificialities and the societal restrictions. Sanity gave her an acute awareness of the denial of freedom of opportunities for self-actualization, while madness gave her the freedom to lead an unmasked, authentic life. Madness she felt was one way of asserting her freedom. It gave her the possibility of deviance from the traditional social norms which made reality unbearable for her. Moreover it was her nervous breakdown when “there was a murkiness veiling my consciousness” (MS 117). When “The contours of my world had gradually blurred”(MS 117) that she could shed self-love, and could also for a moment forget about her cult of chastity. Now when she was mentally sick, “I shed my shyness and for the first time in my life learned to surrender totally in bed with my pride intact and blazing.” (MS118) But she had not gone oblivious of the cares and worries that marriage brought. She still envied the girls “were unmarried and carefree.” (MS 118)

As it is said by Geok-Lin –Lim that in looking for the selves in Asian women’s literature, one is more usually negated to find something one may not wish to recognize because it has been mutilated by an Other which imposes weakness, marginality, inferiority, and the absence of being . As many critics have identified, colonial and postcolonial women have suffered a double
colonization, alienated from the free exercise of their power by a foreign race and also by a native patriarchal society. In order to locate her authentic self Kamala Das has to leave the rule of the community and become, if only in her writing undomesticated and wild. She writes:

I withdrew into the cave I had made for myself where I wrote Stories and poems and became safe and anonymous. There were books all around me, but no friend to give me well-meaning Advice, no relative telling me of my discrediting my family home by my unconventional ways of thinking…(MS 176)

In the autobiography, Das comes to a point in her life when she questions her own sense of being exceptional. The same kind of necessity of open consciousness, to the dialogic presence of others, whether of a different race, class, gender also admits into the autobiography the other aspect of self, of tradition. Yet it is this aspect of woman as patriarchal mate, those most unexpected women in Indian society that the autobiographical discourse has been most energetically displacing. In naming her experiences, the modern Asian woman is an existentialist. As Geok-Lin-Lim puts it the story of the Asian woman writer is the yet-to-be-told story of these selves which are dense with facticity, intersected by history and politics. The material world is political world; and the self, which is always already in exile, is also always already in birth.
As Friedman says Women as a group has never been the “gatherer of men, of lands, of power, maker of kingdoms or of empires”, [Gusdorf] Instead they have been the gathered, the colonized, the ruled. Seldom the “inventor of laws of wisdom”, they have been born into those inventions-all the more so if their race, religion, class, or sexual preferences also marginalized them. Nonetheless, this historical oppression has not destroyed women’s conciousness of self. As Rowbotham says, women have shattered the distorting identities culture imposed by culture and left “the sign” of their “presence” in their autobiographical writings. Their signs, however, remain marginal or even untranslatable when they are placed in a context in which individuation is defined as the separation of the self from all others. They do not recognize the significance of interpersonal relationships and community in women’s self-definition, nor do they explain the ongoing identification of the daughter with her mother. Rowbotham’s historical and Chodorow’s psychoanalytical models on the other hand, offer a basis for exploring the self as women have constituted in their writings. As Gusdorf says this autobiographical self often does not oppose herself to all others, does not feel herself to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much with others in an interdependent existence asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community which is explicit in the autobiographies of Angelou, Lessing and Das. Self in all these autobiographies like a rainbow of voices is multicolored and interdependent yet each is unique and beautiful in its own way.