Chapter III

Mother Daughter Relationship and
The Temporal Pulls of Culture

"Of all the things upon earth that bleed and grow
a herb most bruised is woman"

Euripides: Media (431 B.C)

This chapter attempts to explore the life situations of modern Indian women through a reading of mother-daughter relationship, particularly their attributes to marriage and man-woman relationships. The study reads in detail Indira Ganesan’s two narratives, The Journey and Inheritance, and also Githa Hariharan’s The Thousand Faces of Nigh. Feminist texts explore the relationship between daughters and mothers, sometimes psychologically, and on some occasions allegorically. Mothers and daughters are bound by the umbilical cord. Commenting on the psychological implications of mother – daughter identification, Sudhir Kakar observes:

The special maternal affection reserved for daughters, contrary to expectations derived from social and cultural prescriptions, is partly to be explained by the fact that a mother’s unconscious identification with the daughter is normally stronger than with her son. In her daughter, the mother can re-experience herself as a cared-for girl. And in Indian society... a daughter is considered a guest in her natal family, treated with the solicitous concern often recorded to a welcome outsider, who, all too soon, will marry and leave her mother for good. (60-61)

The daughters are disciplined by their mothers so that the former chart their territories of life with success. Since one needs the umbilical pull and also the traditional
chord in the love/hate relationship, women’s narratives deal with this relationship in detail. As the mother wants the daughter to be an ideal stereotype, the former becomes the representative of the tradition and culture, the spokesperson of the patriarchy and a symbol of the overwhelming past. Daughters, however, attempt to seek a future. Hence, the mother, as an entity of the past and the tradition, puts brakes in the ‘free rolling journey’ of the daughter. Mostly, the material interests condition and govern the mothers’ decisions. They want to retain their daughters at home, marry them into a wealthy family, thereby, ensuring the tradition of a great house. Daughters, however, attempt to disengage themselves in a quest, to travel into unknown worlds and during this process, attempt to understand the elements of sexuality, picking up their revelatory moments of subjectivity. Hence, the daughters are found to represent a future, a new world of experience, and their quest becomes a quest for self-knowledge. In this matrix of mother-daughter relationship, the mother becomes a symbol of the immediate past, overwhelming and repressive in character and the grandmas too become the voice of the distant past. The latter, bind the new woman with the mythic and primordial past of one’s culture, with their doses of tales, parables and fables. As the daughters listen to their grandmothers, the grandmas’ sessions toss up brainstorm questions on heroism and victimisation, subjugation and emancipation and the encounter between woman and the man.

Indira Ganesan’s *The Journey* describes how the protagonist Renu tries to come out of her childhood memories of Rajesh, her dearly loved twin-cousin. The memories frighten her as nightmares and ghastly illusions. Hallucinations and weird apparitions of the dead Rajesh haunt her and she entertains even suicidal tendencies. The very first and the last sentence in the novel *The Journey*, reveals the clash of the cultures, which leads Renu, the protagonist, into an awareness of her real state of life. As a sixteen year old girl, Renu, returns to the Pi Island along with her mother and younger sister Manx to attend the funeral.
of her twin brother Rajesh. Renu’s parents were scientists based in Newyork. “You were born in the space age” (Jny. 21), her father used to say. Renu and Manx grew up believing they could become astronauts one day. There was no trace of Pi Island in their house in New York. But her father’s death, which occurred, when Renu was fifteen, changed the course of her life style. Though her mother continued with her job in New York against the expectations of the family, her life-style became typically Indian. She put away her pantsuits and started wearing saris under her lab coat. She curtailed the girls’ activities. She refused to allow them to dances and late night parties. The three became a close knitted family drawing against each other. Though living abroad, Renu continued her childhood relationship with her favourite cousin Rajesh in India through letters and phone calls.

When Renu lands in India, she is gripped by the childhood fear that the gods are still hunting her, that they are waiting to seek retribution for her childhood act of causing the death of a monkey in the backyard of their grandfather’s house at Pi Island. According to Hindu beliefs the monkey god known as Hanuman is not only a symbol of unmatched physical prowess and indomitable moral strength but also of perpetual life and youth (John Dowson 116). The villagers built a temple for Hanuman god at that site. When she was in America, after her father’s death, it was easier for her to avoid everyone - people, friends and even her mom and sister, Manx and lead a secluded life as per the guidelines of her mother. It was “easier to daydream about Rajesh, whom [she suspected] would have automatic approval from her family” (Jny. 132). All these years Renu had developed such a strong relationship with her cousin Rajesh that his death news in a train accident was a very great shock. She had just wanted to see his face once again. “They would probably not let her see the cremation believing the sight to be more than unmarried girls could stand. But she was determined to attend the rites: she would say goodbye to her cousin, her childhood companion, and her twin. She would brave those flames” (Jny 14 & 15). Her agony
increases when she hears everyone wanting it to be herself who died and not Rajesh. In this male dominated society the death of a young boy is clearly a blow, especially if he is the only boy and her mother is a widow. The society thinks and the village women in their ignorance blurt out, that, instead of the boy the gods could have taken the girl namely, Renu. The agitation within her begins to rise even before her arrival in the long island when she tells herself ‘even if they prevent me I will attend the funeral of Rajesh’. It is the custom of certain families in which women are not allowed to take part in the funeral rites. So Renu has decided to oppose the custom. But unfortunately the cremation gets over before they arrive. This disappointment also adds to her agony. As a result, Renu starts having nightmares about Rajesh. Incidentally, this inflicts suicidal tendencies in her. The various experiences, relationships and encounters that Renu faced, form the rest of the narrative.

Renu struggles to come to terms with the loss of her twin cousin Rajesh and finds it difficult to accept his death. Rajesh gets drowned in a train accident. The time of conception and delivery of Rajesh and Renu by their mothers, Chitra and Rukhmani, are one and the same. So, the villagers said that both are really identical twins. From her childhood Renu develops a deep love for Rajesh. Even during her stay in America she always wants to visit India for the summer holidays. ‘Nirmala Nivasam’, the ancient family house at Pi Island where her grandfather and uncle Adda, aunt Chitra along with her son Rajesh lived is ‘heaven’ for Renu.

The more she tries to escape from the memories of Rajesh, the more she is caught up. The kind attention shown by her aunts and other cousins, uncle Adda and her dear grandfather, including her relationship with Freddie, an itinerant American and a journey to Trippi, a tourist spot in the western coast of Pi Island, could not help her to come out of the magic spell of Rajesh. But suddenly, the candid remark of Kris, the adopted son of Highway
Amir, a childhood friend of Adda Krishnamurthy, the westernised uncle of Renu, seem to have brought her an awareness of the reality.

The element of contrast and juxtaposition has been well used by Indira Ganesan in the portrayals of the important characters, Renu and her sister, Manx. Renu, the timid and highly imaginative teenager, represents the Indian culture. She is an introvert born in a joint-family culture. She indulges in frequent fantasies. Her childhood memories, quite fresh in her mind, creates a little world of fantasy, in which she and Rajesh alone exist. Their arrows targeted at the monkey god, could not have killed the little monkey, yet she suffers from a guilt complex. The villagers as well as her family members believe that it is Hanuman, (god), who has visited them and at once build a small temple in the garden. People regularly visit the small temple to worship and get the blessings of Hanuman. As R.K.Sharma aptly remarks in his article, “Myth and Metaphor in Indira Ganesan’s The Journey”, “the killing of the monkey becomes a turning point in Renu’s life; the equivalent of an expulsion from Eden” (76). The guilt complex is perhaps heightened by her deep love for Rajesh, her cousin. The Tamil communities in India prevent the blood relations from getting married to each other. Renu too must have been aware of this custom and that is why the death of Rajesh increases her guilt complex. She feels as if her whole world had crumbled. The superstitious belief of the people that among the twins - if one dies the other too will die soon – instils in her a death wish. In her nightmares and visions of apparitions of Rajesh, she sees Rajesh inviting her to join him. She is caught up between two conflicting aims, following Rajesh to the world of death or taking a new turn for a better life. Her alternatives are the dreary past or a positive turn towards a new life.

Renu’s dilemma symbolises the influence of the west on the young minds and their inability to break the age old traditions of the homeland and switch over to the world of the
west. The Indian custom of ‘sati’ and the status of women in a traditional joint family system are such that a woman is expected to spend her life for her husband and family. Remarriage or frequent marriages, divorces, inter-caste or inter-religious marriages are still considered a curse to a good family. Hence, Renu’s nurturing of love for her cousin, is equivalent to incest in Indian culture. She could not reveal or justify this love. This is the root cause of all her sufferings. Western education or exposure to western life could not solve her problem. Her father, a scientist in New York expected her to become an astronaut. Renu and her sister Manx grew up in New York in western culture. But after his death, when Renu was fifteen, everything changed so suddenly. Her mother Rukmani, a dutiful wife, followed her husband’s wishes as long as he was alive. Though she continued with her job in New York for financial reasons, yet she saw to it that both her daughters and their lifestyle changed completely to Indian culture. Debbie Tucker aptly remarks in the Library Journal that “Ganesan warmly portrays the differences in culture that Renu and Manx have to cope up with and offers surprising insights into the bravery of the girl’s mother, who left behind all that she knew for a strange world in America” (93-94).

As Renu and Manx become friendly with Freddie Flat, an itinerant American, they are allowed to go on a journey along with Kris. Shyamala A. Narayan remarks: “There are a number of journeys in the novel. The journey and the true parentage of Krish somehow symbolises Renu’s coming to terms with Rajesh’s death by water” (136). Renu comes across the first of the three women, who changed the course of her life in this journey to Trippi. Mirazi, ‘Light of the World’ is a snob, and a rich tea estate heir. She is born of Indian parents in Brooklyn, and educated in Switzerland. Freddie falls for her beauty but she never bothers to settle in life. She represents the wayward west. It is no wonder that this beauty queen failed to have any influence on Renu.
The second woman whom Renu met during her travel at Trippi is Marya the seer. Marya tries to console her with her experience and ideas about solitude, life, truth and being oneself, which can be taken as the views of the novelist herself. As an ordinary Indian girl Marya entered her wedlock. She trusted her husband totally and loved him deeply. But Maya soon found out that he had many extra marital affairs. When she questioned him how about his loyalty and meaning of marriage sanctity, he gave a shocking reply. ‘But I think of you all the time’, he said. ‘Like Krishna and Radha’. The subtle dig at the concept of Lord Krishna and his love for a bevy of gopikas, is indeed a remarkable one. Deceived and deserted, Marya turns to solitude. She rids herself of the trust, the uninhibition, the generosity of spirits, and the real love. She puts forth an important question, “You see, in this life, women are constantly asked to become brides. You can be the bride of a man, of another woman, of your parent, of a teacher, or a god. You can marry the past. Whose bride are you, Renu?”(Jny 126). However, Renu could not understand or accept her advice; “I understand that each one of us can be our own light. ... We all have our disguises and nothing is what it seems... But we each make a choice of life.... The change occurs inside. You cannot change the world around you; you can only determine your own path. Your life is your light. (Jny 126, 127) Renu is still confused and is groping in her inner darkness. The cultural bindings and the traditional beliefs, along with her timid nature increase her turmoil further. The awareness of the guilty self and the reality of her identity makes it all the more painful to her. But pain is a catalyst; it brings about a slow but steady change.

The arrival of Kris, the adopted son of Amir, into the life of Renu marks the beginning of the change in her character. Not interested in education, Kris has run away from Amir and accidentally lands up at Nirmala Nivasam. Adda, a close friend of Amir comes across Kris in an interesting situation. When Kris is arrested by the police in Madhupur for a street fight with a bully and is asked for the contact person, he gives the
name of Adda Krishnamoorthy of Nirmala Nivasam. Adda brings him home and introduces him to Renu and others. The tour arranged by Adda to help Renu get out of her gloom, with Kris and Freddie as companions, symbolises the journey of life. “To refer to life as a journey is a well-worn cliché in many cultures of the world,” comments Shyamala K. Narayan in *Voyage as motif in Indian English Fiction*. She further adds,

The basic difference between *The Journey* by Indira Ganesan and Nina Sibal’s *Yatra* is in their presentation of India... Sibal’s India includes many elements of the sensational, but it is credible. *The Journey* is set in island (Prospero’s Island) which is a chunk of India torn free to float in the Bay of Bengal. (127)

The experiences, encounters and incidents of this journey slowly opens her eyes to the outside world. It changes the focus of her attention from her guilty self to the real world.

When Kris takes them to Amir, his adopted father, Renu meets Konga, the assistant of Amir. The conversation with him reveals the hidden facts about Alphonsa, her aunt and wife of uncle Adda. Renu is given to understand that her uncle Adda fell in love with the Spanish girl, without even seeing her face (just by looking at a white hand in a coach in the market place of Pi island) and he goes in search of her to Europe at once. After a tiresome search for about six months he finds her in a Spanish village and brings her back to ‘Nirmala Nivasam’ as his wife. It gives a terrible shock to the village people and the inmates of the house. But Adda’s mother never shows her resentment in words or actions. “But such was the look she fixed on Alphonsa, one full of a mother’s wrath and loss, that Alphonsa couldn’t speak. She lost her voice, and for the rest of her life would speak to no one save her husband and his best friend, Amir” (*Jny* 66).
Amir and Adda are close friends from their childhood. Amir grew up to be a revolutionary and an umbrella maker. He is the founder of the Pi Island Party and fights for the freedom of the island from the British imperial throne. After his return from Europe Adda also joins as an active member of this party and he has to be away from home for weeks on party errands. Naturally, Alphonsa is left friendless and almost forsaken in the great house of Nirmala Nivasam. It is said that finally she goes away to a convent on the hills, leaving a written note to Adda about her decision. After a short while, when the news of her death came to Adda, he cuts all of his silk ties in utter grief. He never spoke her name again. Renu comes to know the buried truths about her uncle Adda, Amir, his best friend aunt Alphonsa, and Kris during her conversation with Konga. It is implied that the loneliness and the long absence of Adda played havoc in the lives of Amir and Alphonsa. But smitten by the guilt bug, both of them take rash decisions about their life. Alphonsa goes to a convent with a hope of finding pardon for her sins. Amir takes part in death-wish terrorist activities and becomes a nomad and recluse. When Adda returns from the Congress meeting he finds both his best friend and wife have gone in two different directions in life.

When Renu suggests that Kris should be taken back to Nirmala Nivasam to continue his studies, Konga objects to it violently. Renu opts for Amir to be taken to Nirmala Nivasam to get better treatment for his illness. Objecting vehemently to this idea Konga reveals the secret about the death of Alphonsa, and the possible guilt feeling which leads her to death. He narrates dramatically the death of Alphonse in a convent, after the delivery of her baby. When Renu evinces disbelief about the father of the child to be Adda, Konga looks at her curiously, and replies indifferently; ‘That was what she told me in that bare cell with the picture of the Christian goddess on the wall. I’m going to die,’ she said. ‘Adda is the father but the child should go to Amir... The past will always return to drag you back to the river’ (Jny151). The westernised Alphonsa, her true love for Adda the Indian and her
struggles to adapt herself to Indian soil and customs, the cross current Amir's relationship and above all her decision to gift the child to Amir for reasons known to her only, open Renu's eyes to the naked reality of human life.

Thus, the influences of the three women namely Alphonsa, Maya and Mirazi effected the necessary changes in the development of the character of Renu. The final change occurs when she learns about Kris and his silent acceptance of his birth secret. When Renu tells Kris about his birth secret that Adda is his father and Kris belongs to the family, the nonchalant response of Kris "I knew already" captures Renu quite unaware. She is astonished at the radical and non-chalant attitude of Chris to life. This shakes thoroughly and uproots her dreamy and sentimental crush towards Rajesh from her heart. Besides this, Freddie's parting advice, about life and its reality, and acceptance of life in a positive and sometimes passive way, completes the clean sweep of her brooding over the past. "Life and death are givens. Life and death, birth and re-birth- it is cycle and we can never be sure of where we are exactly... At some points, we all have to create an absolute" (Jny 168). These words sum up her final act of decision making. She makes another list: "They killed the monkey with the arrow. The monkey was divine and chose to be shot. The arrow's flight and the monkey's fall had nothing to do with one another... She stared at the paper as if she'd written her own destiny" (Jny 168).

Both her cousins Rajesh and Kris played an important role in Renu's life. Rajesh represents her past and Kris represents her future and Freddie represents the present. Untangling from the clutches of the past (Rajesh), understanding the realities of the present (with the help of Freddie) and guided by the clear light of future (clear thinking of Kris) she stands up to face life and begins her journey of life anew from where she left, namely Newyork. So Renu decides to go back to New York. Her decision surprises not only her
mother but also her own self. It is interesting to note that while Freddie decides to go to Lahore and not to his native place, Renu decides to go back to the west, the place of her upbringing. Rooted in Indian tradition brought up in western situation, Renu thinks that it is high time she made a decision about her life. Instead of clinging on to the past she prepares herself to face the future anew.

There is an interesting counter-foil to the character of Renu in Manx, her younger sister. If Renu represents the East, Manx represents the West. With the lip gloss and short hair cut, Manx is typically westernised, very modern in her thinking too. It is Manx who forms a friendship with Freddie first. She is a typical teenager wanting to break all the traditional fetters. During her tour she does not hesitate to have physical (sexual) relationship with Freddie. When Renu is upset about this action, Manx pretends as if nothing has happened. "Manx lived for the future making and changing plans, refusing to settle down to any moment. Renu moved through the world slowly, so certain was she, of its precarious state, that things in it could dissolve at any minute" (Jny 104).

If Renu is imaginative, Manx is very radical in thinking, highly sensitive and deeply humane. Her tender act of putting back the baby bird which had fallen down from the nest on the thulsi plant stand clearly reveals her positive self. Manx is a professed atheist and Renu is a dreamy visionary. Renu is dutiful and obedient but Manx is ready to break loose any custom or practice. In short Renu is an introvert and Manx is an extrovert. Ironically at the end of the story, it is the outspoken and westernised Manx who decides to stay back in Pi Island whereas Renu, the Island lover decides to go back to the West. The novelist seems to indicate that the new modern Indian youth Renu has come of age and is ready to take upon the world. She has flowered into the new Indian woman, with her changed ideas of Indian woman-hood.
It is interesting to note that the novelist brings out the salient features of the postcolonial elements through a peculiar kind of character portrayal. The contradictory elements in the character of the grandfather are significant. He names the house after his wife Nirmala as ‘Nirmala Nivasam’. But he refuses permission to Chitra, the musical prodigy to go the college and she stays at home to practise veena. At the time of her proposed tour with the national ensemble, Chitra’s father puts his foot down declaring “No daughter of his was going to tramp across South India, travel on trains, eat at strange hotels. On hearing this Chitra’s body had crumbled and never stopped shrinking. Even now her body was getting smaller, folding into itself in sorrow” (Jny 21). But the same father cannot prevent his son Adda, going on a tour to Europe even at the age of eighteen. Another example of the gender disparity with regard to the tradition and customs of the Indian family is the marriage of Anu, cousin of Renu. She marries a German painter, with whom she has fallen in love at Berlin. This marriage is not approved by the family because she has married out of caste and so she is completely ostracised. But the same family could not do anything when Adda returns from Europe with his foreign bride Alphonsa. Neither his father nor his mother or his in-laws could voice out their protest in any visible manner. Only his mother expresses her dislike through a contemptuous look which she casts on Alphonsa after making arrangements for her stay at Nirmala Nivasam.

Rukmani, the mother of Renu, is a typical example of the traditional Indian woman. Her life before and after the death of her husband clearly indicates the status of women and the expectations of the society. Her husband is a scientist who believes in modern ways of life; he wanted his daughters to become astronauts. Their life style is totally westernised. But soon after the death of her husband, Rukmani changes their lifestyle so much like that of ‘Nirmala Nivasam’. She curtails the activities of her daughters and refuses to allow them for dances and late night parties. Due to regular communications between Long Island and
New York and Rukmani follows all the traditional Hindu customs, rites and rituals of the family even in New York. This is one of the reasons for the confusion that torments Renu, the teenage daughter. Being a docile daughter Renu could not oppose her mother or go against her wishes. Her aunt has described the real position of woman as “Bend to adapt, a woman whose back sometimes bend, parallel to the ground” (Jny 154). This is a clear indication of the real status of the woman, even in the so called educated upper class society. Renu thought marriage was a strange thing in her family and disappointments were not uncommon. Then she believed that most of the women married with their eyes shut. And it was no wonder that the women in her family wedding photographs looked so grim, burning their disappointments within.

The patriarchal male dominated societies in India saw to it that woman was not provided with enough opportunities to develop her personality, neither interiorly nor exteriorly. But the development of education and scientific technology and the influence of a few institutions and organisations, under the social ‘regeneration movement’, have urged for women’s emancipation from the age old fetters by awakening women to the awareness of her identity. The identity question is as old as human nature. However, the concept of identity and the meaning of it and its crisis have changed a little from time to time. Dr. N.D.R Chandra observes, “Identity is concerned with the self-esteem and self-image of an individual, a gender, a community, a class, a race or sex or a nation-real or imaginary-dealing with the existence and role” (19). This is what happens to Renu during the journey in which she comes across certain experiences that remove her false notions about herself and life in general. When Renu sees Manx very free and casual about her way of life, speech and actions including her relationship with other sex (in this case with Freddie) Renu subjects herself to a scrutiny of her sufferings and her loneliness. This self examination makes her aware of her intense agony. The more and more she becomes aware of herself,
her personality, her characteristics and her possessions the more intense is her pains. She struggles to leave her past following up the advice given by her uncle Adda who said “Leave the past alone and it will not trouble you... Dick it into the past and only murder and insist will result, it proved over and over again” (Jny 154).

But Renu is not able to bend to the past nor is she able to hold herself erect in the present to face the future. In her delirium she thinks if Rajesh had been here it would have been different. Women are always dependent on men in their traditional bonds. Renu tries to take refuge in this dependence act. She is seized by the superstition of this island and consequently undergoes numerous trials and turmoils. Her childhood fantasies and deeply impeded fantasy of love for Rajesh makes her think that she also will die quickly in fire. But contrary to what she expects, so many other incidents occur in her life. It may be due to her childhood dreams of Rajesh and the disciplined life imposed by her mother Rukmani, who is fully submerged in the tradition and culture of her native island. Hence Renu feels much trapped in her nightmares and apparitions. Surprisingly Renu finds, the helping source is the light in Kris who is a half foreigner because his mother, Alphonsa is a Spanish woman.

There is a striking similarity in the love affair of Renu and Amir, the revolutionary. Both of them suffer out of a secret guilt because of their forbidden and hence hidden love. Knowingly Renu loves Rajesh her cousin, whom she knows she cannot marry because of the cultural taboo. As far as Amir is concerned he has fallen in love with Alphonsa, the wife of his dear and close friend, that too in the absence of his friend. It is this secret guilt that drives both of them directionless adventures and fills them with death wishes. But for Amir, the solution or the help comes from Kris. Whether he knows that Kris is the son of Alphonsa and Adda or not, Amir’s love for this boy Kris, provides him with the necessary solace for his wounded heart. He spends his life in bringing up Kris and for his better future.
The three versions of the story of the Spanish Alphonsa are quite interesting since they keep up the suspense and implied meanings till the end. The first version is given by Renu when she narrates the story to Freddie. The story is as follows: The white hand belongs to Caroline Right gutter, a seventy years old woman, nearly blind but who dressed up in silks and was fond of native boys. Adda is clearly disturbed by the sight of a white hand stretched outside the carriage and he decides to go on a trip to Europe. To him the arm seems to symbolise everything rotten in the world and the power that ought to have been on wane, instead of its full strength. In order to discover the root of his island’s problem, Adda sets out on a journey to Europe. But when he sees Alphonsa in the small Spanish town Cadiz his aversion for that white hand, white people changed. He decides to marry this white woman. There is a symbolic and implied meaning in this action of Adda. The colonised people have always hatred towards the coloniser. The dislike, hatred and aversion felt by the people of the colonised countries are the root causes for their efforts to break the bonds of slavery and find expression to their identity and the real self. Initially the pressure and the amount of hatred was very strong but as the years rolled by, slowly the third world countries or the post colonial countries established themselves before the eyes of their imperial masters, and gradually this hatred reduces in its intensity. Indira Ganesan seems to indicate this factor and seems to say that love alone could erase the hatred felt by different groups of people.

A startling truth revealed by Konga’s version of the story is that Alphonsa committed suicide. With this narration Konga philosophises that, “if you give your heart completely to anything it turns on you” and “the past will always return to drag you back to the river” (Jny 151). Renu is dumb founded to know the secrets behind the life of Adda and her Spanish aunt Alphonsa. Indira Ganesan seems to say that her job is to present the truths
and place it before the readers and it is up to them to accept or deny or change or do anything with it because changes in the society can occur only if individuals change.

The response of the people at Nirmala Nivasam to the marriage of their beloved son Adda to a foreign woman Alphonsa reveals the tradition bound family culture of the East and the substandard position given to women in the society. “The old women shook their heads. To marry out of caste was to stick a tongue out at the gods. The neighbourhood was scandalised. Adda’s mother handed her new daughter-in-law a cool drink but with such a look she fixed on Alphonsa one full of a mother’s wrath and loss that Alphonsa couldn’t speak” (Jny 66). Alphonsa was very sensitive of her body being exposed by sari and bodice, the Indian attire of the woman, and so she stitches roomy caftans for herself hiding her body under masses of cloth. She abruptly ends the narration with Alphonsa being buried by the moon faced nuns of the holy order of St.Magdalene and Adda never spoke of her name again.

But in his version of this story Amir narrates the details about his friendship with Adda from his childhood. He narrates even incidents connected with the father of Adda and how he requested Amir to help him in bringing back Adda from his foreign travels. But about the lives of Adda and Alphonsa he is generally silent. He completes his narration abruptly: “So he (Adda) became a real member of our party – intelligence officer, we made him, for the fellow is the genius. He left Nirmal Nivasam and lived with me and his wife came too. Amir was selective with his memory choosing his details deliberately. He never spoke of the schism that drove the two friends apart.

In postcolonial fiction, symbols like Island house, garden and journey are frequently used. In this context it is apt to quote Robert Fraser about Postcolonial symbols. He observes : “Journeys … represent probably the most common symbolic feature in all
postcolonial writings” (Fraser 164). Indira Ganesan has titled the novel as The Journey and uses the house on the island and the garden in the house very effectively in the novel. The house Nirmala Nivasam stands for the traditional combined Hindu family wherein the man is the bread winner and the woman manages the household. In that house whatever the man says is the law or at least accepted whether they like it not when compared to the advices or suggestion given by the women of the family. One example is the situation when a tour or a picnic or a journey is suggested for Renu who is sick with nightmares and is in a state of remorse since the death of her dear cousin Rajesh. It is suggested that Renu and her sister Manx, along with the new found friend Freddie and Kris could take up a tour to the hill stations. The women folk like Renu’s aunts are against it. Two young girls should not go alone with the company of two young men from their family. The family prestige will be at stake. The social custom prevented young girls going on a journey with young men unchaperoned. But surprisingly, it is uncle Adda who comes to the rescue of these young girls and supports their picnic. He assures that the four can go alone and he will see to the arrangements.

Since Renu has more or less identified herself with her Spanish aunt, she could not recover from the shock of hearing the truth about Alphonsa and Amir. In her dream, in her nightmares, she comes across women like Nefertiti and another picture of sati wherein she sees an oil drum gleaming hot embered fire smoky and rancid. In her pain and isolation Renu identifies herself with the Egyptian queen Nefertiti who held firmly to her ideology even when she had to contradict the king. As a result she had to suffer in silence. Alphonsa seems to echo the words of Edna Pontillier a character in kate Chopin’s The Awakening: “I would give up the unessential, I would give up my money, I would give my life for my children, but I would not give up myself” (Chopin 122). Like Alphonsa and Nefertiti, Renu feels and suffers in silence.
The *sati* is a Hindu social practice, wherein women jump into the funeral pyre of their dead husbands. Because Renu already thinks of her as the wife of Rajesh, she thinks she also should die by fire after Rajesh’s death. This is the superstition which has gone deeper into her inner self. At the same time, she questions about the heroines of the traditional epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Didn’t king Rama demand that his wife, the lotus born, step into the fire to prove her chastity? Sita, Uma, banished brides of fire of faith. So, on one hand she wants to be the traditional culture-bound Indian woman of the family holding on to the beliefs and customs of the society. But on the other hand, the reality and the awareness that she is a young girl not yet married, pulls her towards a new horizon. Hence, when she sees Meenakshi or Manx very casual and straightforward, she feels why she cannot be like her. All along, she thinks she is different from the common herd and she is unique; but now even her secret of love for Rajesh, gone. There is nothing to prevent her from choosing her light. So in her dream three women appear Maria, the seer, Mirazi, the actress and Alphonsa, her Spanish aunt.

Rajesh is dead, but she is alive. It is this awareness, which makes her decide for her a new future. Her journey is completed in the path of awareness and though painful it is, it brings her to the shore of light. It is up to her to make the most of the life that is awaiting her. Renu who went after the imaginative love and the hidden pain about the dead lover, comes out of it using her experiences and her awareness and decides her attitudes towards another cousin Kris. But now the painful awareness which has opened her eyes makes her understand that the world is waiting outside. Very clearly her aunt Bala says “Enjoy yourself. There are so many things for you to see” (*Jny*172).

The concluding passages in the novel, about life in general, seem to describe the liberated Renu more:
This is our secret dream, our need to break free from the ground on which we, half the time drag our feet resentfully...even while flight is in our hearts. Weightless travel, metaphorical soul soaring, a shedding of swallowed stones, the ability that can hold is of the universe. Our heroes are those who defy gravity, the gods who live in the clouds, beings who walk on water, those with magic boots and caps. There are some of us at our windows waiting for our rescue from the world outside. But even the sages walked on the earth; they gathered staffs and bowls, placed foot after foot further into life, eyes open, palms open. (Jny 174)

Symbolically Indira Ganesan suggests that Renu and Manx have had finished their journey of awareness and have begun their journey of life anew, but there are countless number of women still waiting to get help from outside; in fact, the help, the realisation, the change and the action should occur and come from within and show forth in the world outside. Only then the change in the status of the women could be effected and liberation from the clutches of unwanted bonds in the name of culture, tradition and society could be obtained. As Germaine Greer observes in the Introduction of her book The Female Eunuch, “Liberty is terrifying, but it is also exhilarating. Life is not easier or more pleasant for the Noras who set off on their journey to awareness, but it is most interesting, nobler ever” (10).

Indira Ganesan talks about the Indian inheritance in her novel, Inheritance. Normally the term indicates that it is about certain assets, which a person has received from the ancestors. Tradition and culture of any country is set to be inherited and transmitted on to the future. In the family set up the best inheritance a person can get from the parents is, health (mental, physical, material and spiritual) and wealth (material and spiritual). In the postcolonial period the encounters of contrasting cultures (East-West) and traditions gain
momentum. Almost all the writers of the literary field have mentioned about it and its consequential influences on the people. In the life of an individual, apart from the biological genes, the psychological traits also play an important role in the development of one’s personality. Cultural habits in the form of fashions and norms imported from the European tradition to Eastern countries like India have created remarkable changes in the life of the people. The upper and middle class families and the youth are no exceptions. Post Colonial writings reveal a trend that is concerned with searching for one’s roots, delving deeper into one’s own inner self and finding the identity. “This identity also refers to the identification of the self with cultural norms and social normative models” (Rosi Braidotti: 40). Hence, the confrontations, the consequences and the resulting anecdotes in the life of women especially find frequent expressions in the fiction of postcolonial women writers.

The colonial impact and its aftermath have left an indelible impression in the lives of colonised countries even after gaining independence. Countries like India which have a long and deep historical tradition also have to undergo this changing phase, during the post independence period. The habits, customs, rites, rituals and celebrations of the traditional Indian family underwent many changes after the independence. The status, the position, and the life style of the men and women of the traditional Indian family set up changed as per the needs, developments and lifestyle of the society. It is interesting to note that the new vistas opened up for the women of the post independence era like education and job opportunities. It provided them with ample chances to develop not only the mental and economic facilities but also a general awakening of their interiority. The women of the post colonial period woke up to the truths about their womanhood, and their identity as women. There is an increasing awareness of their inner self and the longing and the urge to know better about their identity, their position, their status and their need in the society. This awareness led them to strong influences and they had to respond to their inner questions.
This awareness also affected their life style – their daily chores, their duties, their rights, their privileges and their forces as a member of the changing society. Any transitional period, or any social change has its own positive and negative effects, so also the new woman of the postcolonial period.

As a writer of this transitional period, Indira Ganesan, an ex-patriate, could not but deal with the problems of the new woman and the awareness and its consequential effects. The Inheritance can be called a complete ‘woman-novel’ – written by a woman novelist about the problems of the women in Indian society, for the women of the whole world. It centres on Sonil a teenager coming to terms with her relationship with her mother, friends, and her inner self. Ronny Noor in World Literature To-day observes: “Sonil’s inheritance becomes our inheritance, our inheritance of the human race” (687). The first chapter of the novel opens with Sonil’s description of her mother, “My mother woke in the holy hour before dawn, rumple-eyed and irritable”... “Perhaps she thought of marrying again. Didn’t she have forty six years of life to tell?... she was the strange one, the daughter gone wrong, the bad woman who refused to go to temple, who needed her own mother to fetch morning coffee, who would not wear the widow – white sari. ‘Why should I wear white if I still have fifty years more of my life to live?’ she asked refusing to look at my grandmother’s face... “My mother Lakshmi, who hadn’t spoken to me in nine years” (IN 1&2).

This very description reveals the conflict in the novel between the teenage daughter and her mother of disrepute. Their love – hate relationship, their awareness of themselves, their disappointments in life, in society and above all their conscious and unconscious search for the ‘Self’, the truth and the ultimate reality are highlighted. Reviewing theories that focus on the uniqueness of mother / daughter relationship, Carol Boyd, an eminent psychologist points out that, the mother is the early care giver and primary source of
identification for all children... A daughter continues to identify with the mother. “She summarized the research done by Lucy Fisher, who maintained that because mothers and daughters identify with each other and because their individual boundaries are not always clear, daughters struggle all their lives to separate from their mothers” (292).

Sonil, a teenager, a college girl is brought up by her aunts and grandmother. She is supposed to be a sickly child and gets the chance of visiting her grandmother during her convalescence period. Her mother Lakshmi, uncle Raj and her grandmother live in the traditional house in Pi Island, off the coast of India. She is described to be a voracious reader and is very selective and choosy. She is a lover of adventure and dreams and believes in Hindu Gods. The description of her birth and her name indicates the inner conflict that is tormenting her. “They named me Sonil, a name with no definite roots... my identity was lost. I did not know who I was” (IN 69).

The indifference, shown by her mother towards her has been gnawing her very being and hence she decides to find out the mystery of her mother, ‘to find out what part of her was me’ (IN 15). Sonil’s knowledge about her mother’s story is collected from the mere shreds and bits of conversation from the servants of the family. Her inner longing for the physical touches and expressions of love from her mother which she lacked from her birth is the root cause of her physical illness. She suffers from bronchitis and her grandmother takes her to the Island house for her faster recovery from the Island air. The details that Sonil has collected from the servants and other village women make her think of her mother Lakshmi as a totally bad woman, an immoral character, even after becoming a widow indulging in illicit love affairs. In Sonil’s views she is “a monster of carnal desire, a rakshasha like the one who tried to seduce Rama and Lakmana. A sister of Ravana and a would-be seductress. She always remained the victor” (IN 15).
When she is fifteen, Sonil gets the chance of spending four months in her grandmother’s house and her resolve to know the truth about her identity increases. Since she is denied the much-needed love from her mother, she tries to seek love and recognition elsewhere. Her wish for a confidante which is a result of her persistent inner cry, screams to her silent mother, “I’m your daughter, talk to me” (IN 7). Her mother’s pretension as if she did not exist, though both of them live under one roof is quite agonising. “I could accept her madness but not her hatred... I wanted to pull her hair, tug at her ears as babies did, I wanted to cry for milk. Sometimes the loneliness was so great I crept into my grandmother’s bed where she held me warmly” (IN 11).

Frances A. Nadeau remarks, “the mother-daughter relationship undergoes added conflict and strain in the adolescent years because the mother is the primary role model and teacher of cultural values” (ALAN Review 22). This conflict of hatred and dislike for her mother whose love she longs for and whose indifference she detests, form the central point of the theme of the novel. Her affection and friendship with Jani, her cousin, provides a little solace. Nevertheless, Jani’s decision to go to a convent to avoid marriage and child birth (fear of the pain) shocks Sonil. She tries to dissuade her saying; she need not marry or give birth to a child even if she is married. However, it does not prevent Jani from joining the convent. At once Sonil thinks why her mother had not chosen a convent. This indicates that she has not learnt the real meaning of life.

In her description of her mother Sonil goes to the extremes; she describes even her illicit affairs or rather she imagines the illicit rendezvous which her mother would have had with so many men. She even thinks of the possibility of rape by the gang-men during her late night returns from parties, functions etc. The picture portrayed by Sonil about her mother Lakshmi is not only bad but this is the crux around which the plot is spun.
The remarkable turn and surprising events begin once Sonil finds herself in the same predicament of her mother in her youth. The depressed Sonil tries to take refuge in a love affair with Richard, an American who has come to study Ayurved medicine in the Island and who is twice her age. Her accidental meeting with him in the market place leads to a deep and intimate relationship with Richard. For a short while, she holds that 'cup of happiness, deep sea fantasy, the enchantment of first love, after-noon love affair' her paradise of illusion (IN 83). She thinks. “Here was someone I could love, someone who loved me” (IN 83). She thinks sex is love. In her enjoyment and enchantment of her first love experience she can forget her mother's indifference. But soon she is made to realise that nothing is permanent and life goes on. Richard leaves her for Ethiopia when his mother comes to live with him in India. He wants to avoid his mother and he is uneasy and uncomfortable living with her under one roof. So when a selfish need beckons him he is ready to leave Sonil the so-called loved one. It is interesting to note that the meaning of love in the dictionary of Richard is entirely different. Not able to get over the pain caused by the separation of Richard, Sonil succumbs even to seduction by an unknown mad preacher Bevenu, who speaks in the words of Dylan, the poet.

When she commits the same prohibited actions and entertains the negative thoughts and ideas which the society has restricted, the process of self-realisation begins in her. All the accusations and the attributes which she hurled at her mother, return to her and caused such damages in her inner soul that Sonil could not but accept and understand the true worth of her mother and her silent sufferings. “To love someone, as old as Richard, was not all correct. I knew. But I did not know why” (IN 82).

There is something similar in the event of the farewell of Richard to that of Donaldson leaving Lakshmi, Sonil’s mother. Sonil thinks that Richard has been a
distraction an error, a wrong turn and wonders whether he will come back to her or is she worth coming back far. The fact that he has left her even after knowing that he is Sonil's first love and that Sonil loves him very deeply makes her understand what could have happened in the affair between Lakshmi and the ex-patriot American lover. The agony and the inner sufferings make her understand that in the traditional family set up, the solace comes from the family and the relationships. She understands that she will never be able to cut herself from the family, because of the strong cultural bonds based on deep relationships. She thinks loudly;

It was my aunts, my uncles, my great uncle, my grandmother, all of them in their noisy quarrel-some ways, their pettiness, their awkwardness that would burst out of my seems, no matter what my affectations. My mother tried to escape it but she could not ...and me with Richard... even if we were to be married I would never gain admittance into his family. (*IN 114*)

Sonil realizes the truth of the human bonds, the bonds of relationships, the roots of an individual which lies in the family. The process of realisation gains momentum with the death of her beloved grand mother and her return to the Island. When she sees her mother crying so helplessly her sorrow reincarnates as compassion for her mother. She realises the depth of love Lakshmi would have had for her mother. She also understands that Lakshmi is also a normal woman and it is because of the sufferings she had undergone she had opted for a different way of life.

The plot, details of events, the settings and even narrative techniques and style are almost similar in the two novels under discussion. The theme underlying the plot or the central idea is made clearer in the second novel, *Inheritance*. Sonil, the protagonist, tries to dig deeper into the identity crisis because she feels very much alienated and lonely in this
big bare world. Naturally she is affected by concurrent illness due to the psychological affectations. The location of the novel is very much Indian and the people in that island village have more or less similar traditional and cultural set up like that of an Indian village. The character of Sonil is indeed a good example for the postcolonial cultural conflicts which occur especially in the upper middle class educated society. The women of this class become more and more aware of their womanhood and their identity, as they gain new experiences in life. Hence, Sonil also is caught in the culture clash of the East and the West. Gradually the inner conflict within her makes her realise the real meaning of life and the mystery behind her mother’s life. Her visit to the temple is indeed an important event. It is typically an Indian custom and habit of women, to visit the gods in the temple and pour out their worries, hoping and praying that they will get good results; so Sonil also goes to the temple. In this context, the description of a small shrine of Sita, an avatar of Lakshmi, strikes a significance note.

Indira Ganesan seems to indicate that Indian women are expected to be submissive, sacrificial, persistent and very pure in the area of morality like Sita the wife of Rama who, in spite of her proven purity is not accepted by Rama since he hears the suspicious rumours about her chastity in the conversation between two of his subjects. It is evident that however good, chaste and sacrificial a woman may be, she is not accepted by the society once she goes out of the traditional, protective ring of the society. It is also interesting to note that only women are subjected to such chastity tests and once they go away from the family circle, they are not allowed to return and retain their old position in the family. Sonil prays for forgiveness from the goddess and asks for a boon to make her judgment clearer, “for extra strength to see my mother as she truly was and to help me get over Richard’s absence” (IN 102). There are conflicting questions within her inner conscience:
I had begun to think of the ability to abstain from love as a peculiarly human trait. But then that couldn’t be true, I thought... why didn’t I abstain? Why didn’t my mother? Why could she not follow the proper path of widowhood?

(IN 105)

Sonil realises that she can never be able to cut herself from her family. The symbolic action of putting on the Ray-ban glasses and seeing things differently makes her understand that despite any alienation she can smile back at life. As a consequence, Sonil thinks that a change of place can ease out the pain in her heart and decides to spend some days with her cousin Jani, who is a nun in a convent. Her stay at the convent and the peaceful atmosphere make her think a while and she is caught in a dilemma. She wonders why she can’t become a nun like Jani. But the thought about her mother and her defiance of the culture bound society, makes her think otherwise.

The death of her beloved grandmother whom she adores and for whom she has real affection turns the course of events in Sonil’s life. On her return to the family at the Island she gets a chance to see the other side, the hidden side of her mother. The self revealing narration of Lakshmi about her life to Sonil is indeed a remarkable turning point in the story. Sonil comes to know that Lakshmi had to accept an elderly man as her husband, due to her family circumstances. Though Sonil wonders why her mother is telling all such details to her Lakshmi continues to narrate how she met Ashoka who paid much attention and made her think that she deserved better love from young and eligible rich man like him. He swore to her that he would be faithful to her always. “After Savitri was born, I stopped listening to him” says Lakshmi dryly (IN 137). Then she met Donaldson the American photographer, father of Sonil. Lakshmi’s description of their meeting reveals her longing for true love.
We met at the library and later he came to a reading by my friend, the poet...

Our courtship was low – I know what people say, that we leapt into bed immediately, but that’s not true. Ashoka had flattered me with his attention, but your father took me seriously. I fell in love as I never had before. (IN 137)

Sonil cannot but think of her feelings for Richard. Lakshmi continues “But I must have been born between two warring planets. After six months your father told me he had been married once before and had two children. I was not as shocked as you might suppose, for hadn’t I a past as well, and children besides?” (IN 137). The concluding note of Lakshmi about her life with Donaldson is that he received a letter from America stating that his wife died in an accident, his daughter became an addict of heroin and his son a thief. So, Lakshmi told him to go and help his family at once. Donaldson went back to America. Lakshmi never received any letter from him after that: may be, he met with an accident. She remarked, “I was pregnant with you and he didn’t know. Madame Butterfly on Pi. It was like a bad Tamil film. Her voice turned comic, her own solution to unhappiness” (IN 138). This ‘new’ Lakshmi disturbs Sonil very much as her words kept ringing in her ears thus:

Life is not easy. Freedom does not come easily in this world. ... It is about how one can survive after things are taken from you. It is about the prospect of losing what you loved and the effort it takes to continue. (IN 139)

The startling revelation and the naked truth about the painful life of her mother changes not only her idea about her mother, but also her life as such. Sonil learns not to take anything for granted. Thus, a changed Sonil returns to her college studies after her four months vacation. Concentrating in her studies eventually, she gets admission in Radcliffe. Then she makes all her attempts to spend her life more studiously.
Sonil’s search for her American father continues. She comes across her father somewhere near Kansas City and learns from her father that it is her mother who is the reason for their separation. Her father tells her that Lakshmi prevented him from returning to India and she also refused to move over to America to lead a new life with him. The saddest part of the story is that he came to know about Sonil his child only after many years “By then I let things be. It seemed senseless to try and patch things up” (IN 151). The astonishing disclosures are not much surprising to Sonil who has learnt to take things in a stride. She thinks about her mother and asks only one question silently; “How could she deny him in her life? Perhaps the same way she denied me. I guess she had been wounded but weren’t we all wounded?” (IN 151). She is ashamed to know that her father has a better understanding and more love for her mother though he is far away from her than she. “Perhaps he still loved my mother in the way I loved Richard, may be even more” thought Sonil. She has changed a lot, grew up and matured into saying, “I do not have to be like my mother. I’m not destined to walk in her shadow”. (IN 151) She feels that her grandmother is in her heart, a mandala never to part with and her mother a necklace, she never could take off. “My mother a necklace I never take off. My father is a hat, protecting me from sun and rain, but a hat I can take off at my will” (IN 151).

The egotistical attitude is detested and opposed by any woman who is aware of her identity and equality with men in the world. Subash Chandra rightly observes thus:

With the tide of feminism which rose assertively in the sixties, there emerged the ‘New woman’, radically different from her traditional counterpart. She is conscious, resourceful, confident, dynamic, at times even aggressive busy re-defining herself, acquiring a new identity and dealing with the world around on her own terms. She occupies the centre stage and has shed her position of the ‘other’. (13-20)
So, a sensitive and innocent a woman like Lakshmi cannot but feel disappointed, depressed and vexed with men in totality by her bitter experiences not once but twice in her life. Hence losing hope in mankind, and feeling thoroughly deserted, Lakshmi opts for a way out. It had resulted in her expressive actions of freedom and rebellious actions against the traditional male dominated society.

At the end of the novels, the protagonists of both the narratives do not fly away from the scene of action. In fact, they return to the west imbibing deeper within themselves, the culture and ideas of womanhood of their native country. Renu of *The Journey* and Sonil, in *Inheritance*, return to the west with a deeper realisation and awareness of their womanhood. The first generation women represented by the grandmothers end up with storytelling and helping their daughters and granddaughters to come up in life with love and affection in the two novels. Both the grandmothers of Renu and Sonil are very wise, affectionate, endeavouring and sacrificing typical traditional Indian women, though they felt oppressive experiences in their life. They persisted with the stoic endurance with love in their hearts for the granddaughters.

The grandmother’s love for the granddaughter whom she understands in her own way and accepts without any qualms is quite remarkable. Sonil who longs for her maternal love gets it from her grandmother. It proves to be an apt consolation. Hence, it is not surprising that Sonil feels that her green hill of dependence, her strength, her rock of strength is lost at the death of her beloved grandmother. The love-hate relationship between a mother and daughter, Lakshmi and Sonil reveals the damages of meaningless restrictions imposed on a woman, especially a widow in the society. The widow’s inner feelings, longings, emotions etc. are not at all recognised or fulfilled. She is treated as an object rather than a human being. She is expected to suppress all her natural yearnings for a normal family life with a man as husband. In short, for a woman, life ends with the death of
her husband. Rituals like *sati* reveal the extent to which a widow is treated in this male-dominated society. So, naturally Lakshmi is also expected to lead a life of a slave. Even Sonil wonders why Lakshmi did not turn to religion to get consolation, satisfaction and diversion. If a daughter is not able to understand or accept her mother, who else will be able to do so? When Sonil undergoes more or less the same experiences and situations in her life, she understands Lakshmi her widowed mother more clearly. It is very evident from the character of Lakshmi that she cares nothing for the rules and regulations of the society. This she had done, not once, but twice at least. As Urvashi Bharat remarks that Lakshmi’s decision to re-marry is a sign of social and sexual emancipation – not a sign of continuing subjugation- that leads to autonomy and self-hood (64). In fact, the character of the Lakshmi clearly indicates that the ‘New Woman’ has started emerging. It gets a better shape in Sonil’s character at the end of the novel where she accepts the “inheritance that was inescapable” (*IN* 151) and at the same time, turns to ‘Boston’, to begin life anew.

The mother daughter relationship is the underlying current in the treatment of myriad forms of love and expressions of love that are used by the novelist in general. Sonil indulges in self-pity because she thinks that her mother is indifferent to her. She thinks that her mother does not show any explicit expression of her love for her daughter. She longs for the physical touch of her mother, the tender material caress of her mother. Actually Lakshmi has a deep and a very true love for her daughter Sonil, who resembles her mother in many ways than her other two daughters. It is precisely this factor that makes Lakshmi fear about the future of Sonil. Hence, she leaves Sonil in the tender care of her grandmother.

However, Lakshmi never evades her duty as a mother especially when her child is sick. With due anxiety, she visits Sonil in her sickness. Again, Lakshmi decides to reveal the hidden facts of her life to her daughter after the death of her mother. She knows very
well that for Sonil her grandmother is the only refuge and source of true love. When Lakshmi confronts Sonil smoking a cigar, instead of rebuking her or scolding her, she says sarcastically, “So you smoke. We could be twins. You are more like me” (IN 9). All along Lakshmi is afraid that Sonil also will become like her or rather will be drawn to situations from where she could not escape. But the defiant Sonil replies to her mother “No, I don’t want to be you” (IN 9).

Ironically, Sonil turns out to be another Lakshmi. If Lakshmi breaks the rules of the tradition and culture, consciously, knowingly Sonil does so sometimes without even being aware of it. The absence of the true love in her life and the separation from Richard whom she loved so deeply, leads her to certain other situations on which she has no control.

Women like Rukmani, a homemaker and mother of Renu, and Lakshmi the widowed and vagabond mother of Sonil, try to show some protest against certain restrictions and oppressions, which they feel in the male dominated society; but they were not successful because they lack the much-needed support from others in the family. Hence, they create a world of their own, trying to have comforts and conveniences without affecting the external decorum or the visible norms and rituals of the established family structure. In a way, it amounts to a kind of escapism because they cannot find means to be free and to be liberated from the oppressive elements. The situation improves further in the colonised countries after the independence. The awareness of the identity and reality of womanhood, the equality and essentials of the true nature as a woman has been revealed and realised by the modern young girls through their proper use of the opportunities of education and professional carriers. Though Renu and Sonil, come across different cultures of the East and the West, it is their awareness of their real self, the inner self, their identity as a woman that makes them undergo all the experiences with courage. On the other hand
learning from their experiences, becoming fully aware of the true worth of their womanhood and with new ideas and beliefs and hopes, they enter their world anew. The post-colonial women novelists of Indian writing in English try to expose the realities of the standards and position of the women in society and show that awareness has already set in. Pain is a forerunner of any new change for the better. Hence, through this awareness created by these painful experiences makes the young women to develop the power of resistance and necessary strength to continue their life anew with new hope, new belief, new ideas in the new vistas. In this context Indira Ganesan remarks, “Silence is shame. Silence is the closed eye. Free one prisoner and you free yourself” (IN 29).

Indira Ganesan tries to expose the East West cultural encounters, and their consequences in the postcolonial countries especially among the women in both her novels. The secondary status, the subaltern and subservient position that has been allotted to women in the traditional, patriarchal societies cannot be prolonged forever. The man-made rules and regulations, traditions and customs are to be changed by man himself or women cannot but make efforts to change them. The awareness of the truth, though painful, has to be carried on. It has to be accepted and it has to be allowed by the woman herself. So that, a process of action takes place, to effect changes in the society, for the upliftment of women in general. In both her novels, Indira Ganesan has dealt with the problems based by women in the male-dominated society, and the postcolonial societies like India. She very subtly indicates that, escapism is not an answer, but fighting within one’s self, waging a silent conflict in their own position and the place in which they live alone can bring about the desired changes.

The mother daughter relationship in tandem is poignantly expressed in Githa Hariharan’s The Thousand Faces of Night. Reena Kothari observes that “the mother
daughter relationship is deformed” and “motherhood has a limited meaning” (41). The novel highlights three women - Devi, Sita and Mayamma - who represent three different generations and the many faces of women in India who still are in the ‘Night’ – (dark, obscure, unseen, unrecognised, gloomy, ignorant, subservient, indistinct). The colonial experience had been not only transmuted but also more devastating for the Indian women who suffered under the hyper masculine construct of colonialism because “in Patriarchal societies, female values are defined by men not women” (C. Margaret Hall 5). In Post-colonial India, women continue to be the victims of double standards. At one level they are idealised as mothers and protected as sisters but at another level as wives they are battered and bruised indiscriminately. This is rampant, even among the educated middle class where restricted rules and traditional customs of casteism play havoc. The psychological stress and gender subordination, apart from marginalisation by caste barriers, which the women had to undergo in a cultured society (family) makes her inner freedom and individuality a near – extinct phenomenon.

Sita, the middle-aged mother of Devi, the teenage daughter dominates the family because of her knowledge and intellect. In her desire to become a good wife (which is the ‘reward of womanhood’) she sacrifices her very self (musical talent). In the world of male chauvinism, her desire could never be fulfilled, because of which, she faces a sense of discomfiture and futility. Therefore, believing in material and worldly success she makes her moves “like a veteran chess-player”. Devi is like ‘putty’ in her hands. Subtly she leads Devi to her carefully laid out plans – a marriage, a swayamvara.

Tradition and modernity, belief and action are the opposing facets in the character of Sita, whose commanding presence in the lives of Mahadevan, her husband and Devi, her only daughter is responsible for many developments in their lives. Sita has been playing
assigned roles as wife, daughter-in-law and mother, but entirely on her own terms. She is an embodiment of efficiency and her planned operations are moves towards success or realisation of accepted and admired social image. By controlling the lives of her husband and daughter, she holds the control of her own life. In her pride and anger, Sita resembles Gandhari of Mahabharata. Gandhari was not told before her marriage that her husband was blind. When Devi asks her grandmother, the great storyteller, the reason for this, she was told, “Because, my child, a woman meets her fate alone” (TFN 28) and so Dhirudrastra agrees to marry Gandhari. “All husbands are noble, Devi. Even the blind and deaf ones” (TFN 29). However, Gandhari’s pride and fury, wrapped tightly round her head in a lifelong blindfold, burnt in the heart of Sita too. In traditional reading, Ghandari’s gesture was considered as a large-hearted gesture of sacrifice, for the sake of her husband. As destiny chose her a blind king, she imposed blindness on herself, by blindfolding herself with a piece of cloth. Nevertheless, in the postcolonial reading, Ghandari’s infliction was an attempt of revenge and an act of unwillingness to gaze her man who represents the ill-fated society.

Sita was a good player of veena and loved to play on it rapturously. She was a dutiful wife and a good daughter-in-law until one fateful day when she had forgotten to prepare the pooja things in the morning for her Father-in-law, and continued playing on the veena. She was rudely shaken by the piercing questions, which were slapped on her. Her father-in-law barked, “Put that Veena away. Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law?” (TFN 30). The hurt pride of Sita came out in the furious action of pulling the strings of the precious veena from its wooden base. They came apart with a discordant twang of protest. She answered in a clear, stinging whisper, “Yes, I am a wife, daughter-in-law”. On that day she gave up her first and deep love for veena with a neat, surgical cut” (TFN 30).
Thereafter, she never touched the veena again. On the contrary, she became a dutiful daughter-in-law whom the neighbours praised. But the household never heard that heart-rending music again. By self-inflicted sacrifice, she has avenged those who wounded her inner-self. Her decision to discard the veena is an act of vengeance as well as the reaction of her wounded pride. It is as much self-denial as denial for the family. Loss of her veena signifies her loss of freedom. Knowing full well that power is necessary to get back the lost freedom, she cunningly manipulates the lives of her husband and daughter. She cleverly destroys Mahadevan’s passion for folklore and pushes him to earn more wealth through tireless business activities. Gradually, she usurps the power, the control of the household and thereby gains predominance. A traditional, dutiful wife turns out to be a dominant head of the family. A talented bride became an efficient executive. Creating a scene is not Sita’s style of functioning. Once determined, whether it is the exchange of veena for household duties or getting rid of Annapurna, who wove web of passionate intimacy with her husband and daughter, her calculative moves always yielded desired results.

Bitten by this success bug after the death of her husband, Sita could not restrain herself from dominating the life of Devi, her teenage daughter. Surreptitiously, she makes all decisions for Devi. Though Devi is given freedom to study abroad, yet she is cunningly brought back to home country and made to settle down in family life with an Indian husband. Making Devi feel that she is the one in control of things, Sita traps her into choosing an Indian bridegroom. Each decision Sita makes for others is an assertion of her own power. Her success and self-esteem are very much dependent on Devi becoming the ideal woman. So she creates a vicious cycle of dependency where she needs others to live her life vicariously. But her presence is so commanding that others lose their sense of direction without her. Devi, the American – returned young girl, is not able to decide upon
her 'young man'. “A week later... I met and accepted Mahesh I had the limpid-eyed blessings of my mother, and I never saw the mute again” (TFN 22). Sita always did what she wanted, though she appeared to be listening so intently to her mother and relatives. Devi remarks “Amma listened to every bit of advice as if she had never heard it before, then she did exactly what she wanted” (TFN 23). It is ironic that Sita thinks of a “life devoted to being the ideal woman” (TFN 107) as ‘soiled’ and undesirable, but takes all efforts to make her life appear so systematic and tries to institute a similar life to her daughter. This is due to the loss of her inner harmony, which was ‘buried alive’ with her veena. The suppressed inner freedom distorts her vision of self-identity. Hence she appears to be just the opposite of what she wanted and longed to be. This identity crisis mars her life style and through her dominance, deviates and affects the lives of her daughter and husband too.

Unlike her relentless, self-disciplined mother, Devi views herself as a hesitant confused person. Though she tries to fit herself in the role of a young wife and rich daughter-in-law, yet she ends up as a miserable cipher. However, “Marriage is a necessity, a milestone like any other. It is a gamble” (TFN 49), according to Mahesh her husband. He says, “Thank God, we Indians are not obsessed with Love” (TFN 49). It is her unsteady mind, which makes decision making, in her life a dilemma. Stifled by her traditional and sophisticated mother and her expectations, Devi escapes to America, the land of freedom. But in that atmosphere of free air, she fails to utilise a good opportunity to extend her stay abroad. Dan, the black American boy friend, proposes to marry her. Instead of grabbing the chance, she decides to return to India where, dry cracked soil is ‘burnt brown by the merciless sun’. “She always raced ahead, not so much to escape her purgatory, but to meet it halfway, naked and vulnerable her home coming” (TFN 11). She was bookish and dreamy, as much of an oddity as her elusive father.
Devi has an inbuilt sense of revolt – a trait, which she has inherited from her father. She does not accept her grandmother’s versions of Amba, Gandhari and Damayanti, the mild mythical women. The stories fill her mental canvas and act as a tool of empowerment. So, her mother told her father, “This has gone far enough. Your picture books her feeble-minded fairy stories of gods and goddesses. I want no more of these fantasies. The girl is almost a woman, she must stop dreaming now” (TFN 45).

But the effects of dreamy fairy tales of gods and goddesses can be found in her married life too. Thinking that she could “tear aside all pretence” and “would be as matter-of-fact as Mahesh” Devi marries him, because “he is honest at least” (TFN 22). But very soon she realises that there are only wives and mothers, not heroines in his life. She is shocked to realise that if Dan is too un-Indian, Mahesh is too Indian. Marriage is just a change of residence – from the vast empty, ancestral home, surrounded by a large, wild garden to a new home on Jacaranda Road which ‘reeks of character’ – Baba, the story-teller and father-in-law, Mayamma, the old house-keeper and Parvatimma, her absent mother-in-law.

The smothering control and cunning dominance of her mother Sita, felt by Devi in her childhood, created a strong repulsive oppression towards her. Since Devi is not able to give vent to it in words or actions it deepens her inner turmoil. This results, probably, in her lack of commitment to have intimate relationships with men, be it a lover or husband. The logical outcome is that, Devi refused to take control of anything or anyone in life. She uses men to attach herself to them for security or to affirm her worth, especially Dan, whom she considers as a shield in “the white claustrophobia of an all-clean, all-American Campus” (TFN 3). Establishing intimacy with Dan or smoking hashish is first, an act of rebellion against her mother, who used to make sure that Devi’s friends are all from Brahmin
families. She does not view him as a real person but clearly regulates this relationship "to the blurred regions of fantasy" (*TFN* 3).

If her grandmother's stories have initiated her into the numerous subterranean possibilities of womanhood, the mythical stories of Baba her father-in-law, define for Devi the limits of wifehood firmly patterned on Manu's laws. They are stories of virtuous and devoted wives who are instrumental in making their husbands walk on the spiritual path. Engulfed by an awesome loneliness and a wave of uselessness by the insensitive, un-romantic, matter-of-fact husband Mahesh, and the death of both her father and father-in-law, whom she loved and trusted, Devi symbolically decides to grow "a garden on weeds" (*TFN* 58) in her garden of life, so that she too might survive like the weeds against all odds. She is rudely awakened to her own inner need of self-pity and self-realisation by the utter male chauvinism of Mahesh. The denial of fatherhood to Mahesh is the unconscious but significant step to the assertion of herself. She asks Mahesh "why do you want a baby?" (*TFN* 87). Thus, the dreamy, romantic young girl Devi is drawn to "Kritya", a ferocious mythical woman who haunts and destroys the house in which women are insulted. She is moved from self-pity to 'Kirtis' of revenge. "In the age of Kali ... each household shelters a Kritya" (*TFN* 70). Devi thinks of herself like the Hindu goddess Durga, the most beautiful manifestation of moral and spiritual power, whom even Siva, the God of destruction, respects. But Mahesh (another name for Siva) destroys the very spirit of Devi. Both Mahesh and Gopal lose Devi because they do not look into her soul.

Though Devi realises that the stories of women she knows are far more contemptible than their mythological equivalents, she feels the urge to protest, to rebel against the causes of it. Instead of selecting the passive virtues of Gowri, Parvathi, Haimavathi and Sati, she decides on the avenging images, such as Durga, Kali and Amba. In an interview given to
Indian Express Sunday Magazine, Githa Hariharan stresses that, Devi’s punishing action of leaving Mahesh to a lonely life without wife or child itself is “a non-conformist mode of spiritual expression” (Prema Viswanath). This disenchantment leads Devi to self-awareness that all through her life, she has been running away from her trails – America, American boy-friend, Sita, the house of Jacaranda Road, Mahesh and Gopal. Devi reflects over the three lives, Mayamma, Sita and herself who “walked a tightrope and struggled for some balance in life; for some means of survival they could fashion for themselves” (TFN 138). She throws her peacock coloured sari over the mirror to blot out the myriad reflections of her. It is a symbolic gesture of her decision to turn from romance to reality, from fancy to truth, from the magic of myths to serious realities, of life. “Devi knew, for once, the time was right; if she did not act now, she would be forever condemned to drift between worlds, a floating island detached from the solidity of the mainland” (TFN 138). Though she feels like a fugitive, she realises that for the first time, she is no longer on the run. Nilufer E. Bharucha puts it thus: “The mother she had sought to escape all her life, first through fantasy and then through male-identification, provides the ultimate space Devi needs. It is to Sita’s neat fortress like house that Devi returns” (103).

The symbols of the out-grown garden and the big old house along with the ironic reference to the festival of Diwali are described thus: “Suitcase in hand, Devi opened the gate” on reaching her house “and looked wonderingly at the garden, wild and over-grown” – the beautiful garden which her mother could not bear to see it made filthy by the marriage crowd - now appears to be wild and overgrown, but lush in spite of its sand – choked roots. Then she quickened her steps as she heard the faint sounds of a veena” (a welcome note to her) “hesitant and child-like, inviting her into the house” (TFN 139). Devi clearly understands the statement of Baba, “Whatever dependent on others is misery; whatever rests on oneself is happiness” (TFN 68). Hence, she boldly decides to return to her mother,
to begin her life anew. It is in relationship to her mother that Devi hopes to find an identity for herself. Realising that she should not be a neurotic, an aimless fool, a teasing bitch, or a mere dreamer, she returns home at the end of the novel. The inviting call of veena that Devi hears on her return suggests renewal of a new, positive relationship between Sita and her daughter and the renewal of life itself. It is a call to deal with a repressed self and buried bitterness. The real music of the veena suggests a conducive climate for Devi to begin her renewal-process. This return denotes a renewal of a positive relationship with the self, her mother and the renewal of life itself. After witnessing 'the reality of night', she is prepared to meet the light of a woman's life. The hesitant self-doubting Devi decides, "to start from the very beginning... to stay and fight" (TFN 139).

Devi represents the present day intellectual woman who confronts loneliness and alienation. She returns after experiencing the so-called male world, which she realises, is full of sound and fury signifying nothing. Therefore, in a paradoxically regressive moment, Devi finds her enlarged female spaces within the inner recesses of femaleness itself - her mother's womb - like fortress. Pradeep Trikha in her article on the novel comments appropriately; "Like the women characters of Kamala Markandaya, Bharathi Mukherjee, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai, Devi also adds a new dimension to psychological complexity of Indian women. Githa Hariharan seems to have identified herself with Devi in order to decipher her feminist concern with emancipated women"(169).

If the first shock in her life (her father-in-law's reprimand) changes the course of Sita's life from positive to negative, from reality to illusion, the second shock – the elopement of Devi from her husband Mahesh, with the musician Gopal – changes the direction of her life once again. Her initial fury and bitterness are spent over the resettlement of her over-pruned garden, the sloppy, impertinent cook and the nosy
neighbours. After a second round of ruthless spring-cleaning, slowly and gradually, Sita settles down for an "even more merciless exercise of introspection. Ready for self-examination, she sat before the relic from her past, the broken Veena, freshly dusted, and waited for Devi to come back to her" (TFN 108). The ideal of such reflection would be self-knowledge or self-identity through an experience of life. She realises that she could make her garden or the old house perfectly what she wanted it to be, but not so in the case of Devi or her own life.

If Devi wields her authority and authenticity by her choice of motherhood, Alphonsa, the Spanish wife of Adda Krishnamurthy, of The Journey by Indira Ganesan, opens a new door in the way of woman's emancipation and empowerment. Though brought up in western culture, Alphonsa adapts to traditional Indian (Hindu) family set up to a certain extent. Her secret affair with Amir, a close friend of Adda, is also a result of loneliness caused by the frequent travels (physical absence) of her husband, who is ignorant, unaware and insensitive to the realities.

Alphonsa hides the truth about Krish, the son of Adda and herself and leaves it as a puzzle or enigma at the eve of her death. Since she loved Amir, she wanted to give him a token of her love before her death. At the same time, she does not want to hurt her ignorant and loyal husband, Adda, either by her elopement or living with him with a guilty heart which may expose her 'sin', any time. So, she puts an end to herself. It is interesting to note that Indira Ganesan colours the character of Alphonsa, the Westerner with the special qualities and characteristics of a good, traditional, Indian wife (woman). Alphonsa, not only puts on Indian dresses, but also puts up with the typical Hindu mother – in – law and angry father – in – law and other members of her husband’s family in Nirmala Nivasam, who do not like a foreign bride. However, in the depth of her heart she is a woman – a total,
complete, clear, normal and wise woman. So, she takes upon herself the prerogative – the right – of choice with regard to the grant of fatherhood and choice of motherhood and acts very boldly. As far as Alphonsa is concerned, Adda does not deserve the grant of fatherhood. The motherhood and fatherhood are generally customary and in a traditional institution called family, it has weighty social implications too. Nevertheless, Alphonsa crosses all the borders of culture, tradition and society and views life only as a composite woman equal to man in every aspect.

This idea of the grant of fatherhood is again used by Indira Ganesan in her second novel, Inheritance. Lakshmi, mother of Sonil, the protagonist, never reveals the secret of her birth to her father, an American, even when he asks for it. Since she is hurt deeply by the fact that her lover, the American, whom she loved so deeply and truly is not truthful to her and has hidden the fact that he already had a family – a wife and two children in America, Lakshmi sends him back to take care of that family in America and chooses a free and independent way of life – (‘a loose woman’). Sonil is desperate to know about her father, and only towards the end, after the death of her grandmother (mother of Lakshmi) Lakshmi reveals the name of Sonil’s father. Only after the meeting with her American father, after so many years, Sonil learns the fact that Lakshmi has hidden her birth from her father. The depths of the heart of a real woman and her sensibilities and values are very different. Once aware of her identity, the real woman accepts it and lives accordingly; she is so powerful and so enigmatic too. Even the grant of fatherhood – a very important element in family life, – is decided by the woman and according to her conscience. The emancipated woman is indeed a “Shakthi” – a force, to be reckoned with.

In Alphonesa’s tale Indira Ganesan deals with the issue of hybridity and nativisation. Alphonesa represents the magical charm of the orient for the occident. Her ‘naturalisation’ as
a Hindu wife and her endurance in remaining as a wife of a Hindu husband, are dealt with by Indira Ganesan as a kind, in Inheritance. At the same time, her secret extramarital liaison is not treated as an aberration. Her ‘motherhood’ is a kind of attestation of female sexual rights. In Indira Ganesan’s narratives, while cultural identity is highlighted in The Journey – the return ‘home’ as illuminated subject, the woman’s identity-including the hybrid subjectivity of Alphonsa, is dealt with in Inheritance. In both texts inferiority syndrome and inhibitive attitude of women are overcome, thanks to the interface of mother and daughter. For the mother, life is a state of pain, and for the daughter, life begins in a state of illumination. In home- ward experience this is made possible. When one reads the rejection of the West in the novels, naturally the suggestion is for returning to one’s culture, not as a stereotype of tradition, but as an illuminated individual with the subjectivation process activated.

Recent women writers of India attempt to read the living conditions of modern Indian women, in the context of stifling culture space and expanding geographical space. Among the women of Diaspora and the expatriate subjects, Indian women have to negotiate with the past and the present. They have to choose the terrains between culturally tailored roles and intellectually aspired domains. In the context of women who live as international subjects, the dilemma becomes acute and a choice becomes inevitable. An interesting data available in the stories of Indian women writers is the fact that the family exists as emotional and cultural space. There may be deviations as they aspire for or transcend into intense state of physical involvement with the other. But the home always remains the attractive and the final emotional space. They saunter out of their homes in their physical and emotional needs of quest and yet their return to the home is always the end of the emotional sessions.
Women characters of Indira Ganesan are exposed to multiple geographical and physical phases. Yet they come back to India after the illumination. The West remains attractive but India seems to be their final destination. Women characters like Sonil, Renu and even the Indianised Alphonse choose to remain in India. Their message is highlighted in the emotional conflicts between mothers and daughters, where the mothers remain as comfort healers and peacemakers. The elderly women like Paravatiamma and Mayamma of Githa Hariharan and the grandmother of Sonil in Inheritance, are representatives of the past, but they also assert a way out for the future of their granddaughters. While the mothers are symbols of suffocating immediate past, the daughters are representatives of a future. Their life is guided by their grandmothers, who symbolise the presence of a strong female subjectivity in them. In other words, they are natural women who understand their culture better. In mothers, there is a conflict between culture and nature, between instinct and instruction. For the instinctual and emotional well being of granddaughters, what helps is, not the mothers' role, but the grandmothers' presence and tales. This is not a simple generational gap, but a kind of culture immersion, activated by the 'female' grandmothers rather than the 'feminine' mothers. The granddaughters emerge as true female subjects when they are gifted with an interface with the grand mothers.

From the foregoing discussion one understands that the woman's world is torn between the past and the future. In the novels, the mothers play an active role of reorienting the young women engaged in a quest for new future towards their cultural roots. In the process, the new experiences become somewhat tentative and temporary phenomena and the daughters are moored back to the world of past and the cultural bindings, which is a result of Indian woman's inevitable family bonds.
The narratives, when closely studied, reveal a pattern - the changing times that fashion the roles of mothers and daughters. What seems to be the activating force is the element of culture. In the daughters' quest the changing times and culture shocks are seen, but there is a final moment of resolution, which happens, as daughters return to their cultural roots.
Chapter III

Notes and References

Books and Nonperiodical publications


Ibid. 127.


Articles and Other publications in Periodicals and Electronic Sources


