Chapter One

Introduction

It was Virginia Woolf who first pointed out that women in fiction were, “until Jane Austen’s day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex” (88). The patriarchal tendency to centralize “the man” finds its reflection in literary characterization as well. But as Woolf suggests the relationship between the man and the woman is indeed a very small though important part of a woman’s life. However, even when women started writing, in their plots and characterization, they continued to present women in relation to men and never thought of presenting women in relation to other women. Emphatically and categorically stating that “Literature is impoverished beyond our counting by the doors that have been shut upon women” (89), Woolf in her landmark work *A Room of One’s Own* (1928) gives a clarion call to all women to “explore” themselves and “record all the infinitely obscure lives” (94) of women, to describe and delineate the relationships between women and thus “light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been” (89). However, only very few women came forward to answer her call. It was only in the latter half of the century that, women writers stopped modelling themselves on male writers and began to write more on themselves and other women. Though slow, the flow of literary works focusing on bonding between women steadily began to pile up.
The women’s movement of the 1960s gave an added impetus to this process. This movement had very strong literary affinities from the very beginning. When the movement began, feminists faced the daunting task of convincing not only men but also most women that they deserve to be treated as equals, since women like men were equally victims of patriarchal ideologies about the subordinate status of women. It is in this regard that literature played a major role. When women began to write about their experiences and when critics began to discuss these narratives many taboos were lifted and many walls broken, uniting women all over the world leading to stronger and bolder mass movements. These shared experiences not only helped women to understand each other better but also to recognize the nature of the strength inherent in female bonding.

The development of feminist criticism served to augment the process. In the 1980s feminist criticism became more multi-disciplinary by drawing upon the findings and approaches of other kinds of criticism like Marxism, Structuralism, Linguistics, Psychoanalysis and so on. It had also, as suggested by Showalter, switched its focus from attacking patriarchal versions of the world to exploring the nature of the female world and viewpoint, and constructing a new canon by giving prominence to the lost or suppressed and muted records of female experience. In the process it gained a new terminology and attained theoretical respectability. Showalter wrote with great passion of the way “the lost continent of the female tradition [rose] like Atlantis from the sea of English literature” as
the “works of dozens of women writers [were] rescued from . . . the enormous condescension of posterity” (*A Literature of Their Own* 11).

Thus a foundation was established, giving women writers the required inspiration and providing enough models to follow and surpass. By the late twentieth century there was a profusion of writings by women, especially novels and even more discussions on the experiences of women. In India too, many women had begun to share their experiences. Looking at the early history of Indian English Literature, one realizes that women writers were rare. However, when we come to the post-Independence era, things begin to change. For example, in *A History of Indian English Literature* (1982), M. K. Naik comments that a notable feature of the time “is the emergence of an entire school of women novelists” (213). Though it is debatable whether these writers form any sort of a school or not, one cannot dismiss the fact that since the 1970s, more and more women writers have emerged in India.

India has always had a rich oral tradition. Stories and the telling of stories form an integral part of the Indian psyche. In the estimation of India’s foremost psychoanalyst and cultural commentator Sudhir Kakar, narratives are much more than mere means of passing the time for Indians:

The spell of the story has always exercised a special potency in the oral-based Indian tradition and Indians have characteristically sought expression of central and collective meanings through narrative design. While the 20th century West has wrenched
philosophy, history, and other human concerns out of integrated narrative structures to form the discourse of isolated social sciences, the preferred medium of instruction and transmission of psychological, metaphysical, and social thought in India continues to be the story.

Narrative has thus been prominently used as a way of thinking, as a way of reasoning about complex situations, as an inquiry into the nature of reality. (*Indian Identity* 5)

This is especially true of Indian women. Women in India have traditionally been tellers of tales. The fact that one of the pioneers among Indian novelists, Raja Rao in his *Kanthapura* (1938) opted for a female lead narrator to give voice to the legends of the land certifies the statement. Even in casual conversations one finds a marked proclivity among the older Indian women to use stories to prove their point or to express their understanding of what the world is like or what it ought to be like. Almost every question directed to older women invariably leads to the much-awaited, “Let me tell you a story.” In their writings and narratives they have used not only the mythic materials of the epics, the lives of gods and the animal fables of the *Panchatantra* and *Jataka*, but also the more realistic material of family histories and memories.

Women writing in English in India do not form a coherent group. The geographical, historical and stylistic variety of these writers is extensive. They come from various cultural, linguistic, and geographical
backgrounds making Gita Krishnankutty, a well-known translator from Malayalam, comment that “there is no single ‘India’ or ‘Indians’” (2). Literature written by women in these postmodern, postcolonial times, aided by feminist criticism has emerged as “a new discipline . . . that has as the object of its study, a new field: women’s writing” (25), wrote Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha, in their preface to the first volume of the much applauded work *Women Writing in India*, published in 1993. This maiden attempt at representing the voice of the voiceless was in fact a late arrival. Indian women had been writing in their mother-tongues for a long time and even in English, since 1870. But when these works are studied as women’s writing, charted as an area of study and sculpted into a tradition, they take on a significance that is of contemporary invention.

Numerous gifted women have made significant contributions to Indian Writing in English. A random search through the virtual world of Google will reveal as many as a hundred and eight names of Indian women writers in English with the list being updated and expanded every single day. The names include Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Krupabai Satthianadhan in the last half of the nineteenth century and writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Attia Hosain, Rama Mehta, Kamala Das, Githa Hariharan, Anita Nair, Arundhati Roy, Namita Gokhale, Manjula Padmanabhan, Kavery Nambisan, Jhumpa Lahari, and Kiran Desai of the twentieth century to name just a few.
The first Indian women writers in English of the likes of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu dappled in poetry, while the first female prose writers were basically autobiographers. Maharani Sunity Devee of Cooch Behar wrote the first autobiography by an Indian woman in English, in 1921. Since then, though, there have been many women who wrote autobiographies, most of them except Kamala Das do not go beyond the surface level of experience in their autobiographies and “see their self-fulfilment in projecting a socially acceptable image of self” (Harish, Indian Women’s Autobiographies 13). These women do tell the truth but as in Emily Dickinson’s words they “tell it slant.” Indian women had not yet developed the courage to reveal the realities of their lives and hence hid behind the half-truths. Though telling their stories appear to be a natural act for these women they preferred to project images of good daughters, wives, and mothers by letting their lives and thoughts focus on the men alone, as can be seen from the twenty-one samples provided by Ranjana Harish in her collection of Indian women’s autobiographies.

The pre-Independence novelists of India too wrote in an autobiographical vein mixing up the facts of their lives with fiction, taking pains to portray for the world their predicament. Toru Dutt’s Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden (1878); Raj Lakshmi Debi’s The Hindu Wife (1876); Krupabai Satthianadhan’s Kamala, A Story of Hindu Life (1894) and Saguna, A Story of Native Christian Life (1895); Swarnakumari Debi’s An Unfinished Song (1913); Sita Chatterjee’s The Knight Errant
(1923); Cornelia Sorabji’s *Love and Life behind the Purdah* (1901) and Sunity Devee’s *The Beautiful Mogul Princess* (1918) can each be seen to fall into what Showalter describes as the feminine stage of women’s writing when women writers imitated dominant male artistic norms and aesthetic standards. Protagonists like Toru Dutt’s Bianca, Raj Lakshmi Debi’s Moni or Satthianadhan’s Kamala ignore the bonds with other women to the extent of nonexistence. Even in the case of Satthianadhan’s *Saguna* where there was much scope for elaborating on the bond between the mother and the daughter the writer fails in doing so making K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar remark that the characterization in the works of the early novelists lacks “depth” (437).

A. S. Dasan in his *The Rains and the Roots* (2006) identifies the arrival of Anita Desai in the late twentieth century as the point of change in the Indian literary scene, both in technique and theme (57). The best women writers of the time while working within the early tradition of social commentary, brought new material into Indian English literature with their strong portraits of women of their community and also brought in a refreshingly new spoken language, particularly the familiar language used between women, setting aside the early format of autobiographies by women where the lives of Indian women were shown to revolve around the men. What Jane Austen and the Bronte sisters had achieved in English fiction found its echoes in Indian English literature as well.
However, even amongst the scattered critical output, writings on the
earlier crop of women writers remained meagre. The entrance of feminist
literary critics into the field of English literary criticism could be said to
have brought about some change in the scenario. Starting with Susie Tharu
and K. Lalitha in 1993, who popularized Indian women writing, there have
been many critics who tried to analyze the characteristic features of this
new writing, notable among them being, R. K. Dhawan’s eighteen volume
anthology of *Indian Women Novelists* (1991-1995), a critical magnum
opus on Indian women writers which offers a multi-faceted, cross-
referential and comparative perspective on many issues related to women.

Yet Indian English literature and literary criticism continued to
interpret works in phallocentric terms. As late as in 1994, the well known
Indian critic Jasbir Jain accused women writers of engaging in the
displacement of the mother, and female relatedness. She wrote, “The
mother becomes important only in terms of her links to her son and in the
acts of sacrifice she undertook for him. The identity of the mother as an
individual is conspicuously absent from most of Indian works. Besides, the
bond between women is also another neglected area in these works” (“The
Displacement of the Mother and Female Relatedness” 51). Though Jain
here accuses writers of having concentrated more on the man-woman
relationships, critics too are equally at fault for having interpreted works
on the basis of man-woman bonds alone to the disadvantage of female
bonding.
The present study is an attempt to analyze the works by Indian English women writers with female protagonists, which are usually read in terms of man-woman relationships and re-read them in terms of the first bond that the female protagonists have formed—the one with their mothers. The title of this work *The Image in the Mirror* rests on the hypothesis that when a daughter looks into the mirror the image she sees is inseparably linked with the image she has in her mind of her mother. Psychology tells us that mirrors are not mere curiosities for humans but a necessity. They give us an image of ourselves and it is upon the nature of this image that all our actions and reactions rest. Many theoreticians have made a mark by discussing the effect of self-images, the most famous being Lacan’s mirror stage.

The mirror stage was the subject of Jacques Lacan's first official contribution to psychoanalytic theory. He described it in "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," the first of his Écrits. As can be understood from the very title, the mirror stage describes the formation of the Ego via the process of identification, the Ego being the result of identifying with one's own specular image (Bristow 84). By the early 1950s, he no longer considered it as a moment in the life of the infant, but as representing a permanent structure of subjectivity, a phase in which the subject is permanently caught and captivated by his own image. Lacan writes, “The mirror stage marks a decisive turning-point in the mental development of the child” (2)
and "is far from a mere phenomenon which occurs in the development of
the child. It illustrates the conflictual nature of the dual relationship" (3).
The dual relationship (relation duelle) refers not only to the relation
between the Ego and the body, which is always characterized by illusions
of similarity and reciprocity, but also to the relation between the Imaginary
and the Real. The visual identity given by the mirror supplies imaginary
“wholeness” to the experience of a fragmentary real. In more illustrative
terms:

    At six months the baby still lacks coordination, however, it can
recognize itself in the mirror before attaining control over its bodily
movements. The child sees its image as a whole, and the synthesis
of this image produces a sense of contrast with the uncoordination
of the body, which is perceived as a fragmented body. This contrast
is first felt by the infant as a rivalry with its own image, because the
wholeness of the image threatens it with fragmentation, and thus the
mirror stage gives rise to an aggressive tension between the subject
and the image. To resolve this aggressive tension, the subject
identifies with the image: this primary identification with the
counterpart is what forms the Ego. (Evans, D. 128)

The moment of identification is to Lacan a moment of jubilation since it
leads to an imaginary sense of mastery. Yet, the jubilation may also be
accompanied by a depressive reaction, when the infant compares his own
precarious sense of mastery with the omnipotence of the mother which
Lacan terms “La relation d'objet.” This identification also involves the ideal ego which functions as a promise of future wholeness sustaining the Ego in anticipation. Thus the image of the self, formed in the mind via the image in the mirror is jam-packed with innumerable facets. What concerns us most at present is that the process of formation of the identity in the mind of the child is integrally related to the image of the mother that the child sees in the very same mirror. Lacan in his Tenth Seminar, "L'angoisse" calls it the symbolic dimension of the Mirror Stage:

The Mirror Stage has also a significant symbolic dimension. The Symbolic order is present in the figure of the adult who is carrying the infant: the moment after the subject has jubilantly assumed his image as his own, he turns his head toward this adult who represents the big ‘Other’ as if to call on him to ratify this image. (48)

For Lacan, the mirror stage establishes the ego as fundamentally dependent upon external objects, on an “other.” As the so-called “individual” matures and enters into social relations through language, this “other” will be elaborated within social and linguistic frameworks that will give each subject's personality its particular characteristics.

It does not stop there, the mirror stage shows that the Ego is the product of misunderstanding—Lacan's term “méconnaissance” implies a false recognition—and the place where the subject becomes alienated from itself: the process by which the ego is formed in the Mirror Stage is at the same time the institution of alienation from the symbolic determination of
being. In this sense méconnaissance is an imaginary misrecognition of a symbolic knowledge that the subject possesses somewhere. The Mirror Stage introduces the subject into the Imaginary order. Thus the image of the self which the child forms is in Lacanian terms, always in relation to the mother who holds him/her and at the same time a false image a product of misunderstanding, making it even more complicated.

However let us go back to the point where the child forms the image of the self by comparing its image to that of the mother. Though according to Lacan, the child is struck by the omnipotence of the mother, it is this other figure in the mirror which gives the child an individual identity. So to begin with, the first individual identity that a child forms of himself is that he is “not the mother” in the mirror. Yet as Freud has said there is a period which comes prior to this, when the human infant identifies itself with its mother and sees the rest of the world as the other. This is referred to as the “pre-Oedipal” stage where the child has no sense of corporate or psychic identity. The maternal body is experienced as a continuum of “auto-erotic” pleasure and plenitude. Jayita Sengupta in her *Refractions of Desire* (2006) describes the transition stage thus, “As subjectivity is to be constructed in relation to objectivity, for a sense of “me” to be conceived there has to be a sense of a separate ‘other’” (69). “Stabat Mater,” Julia Kristeva’s prose poetic meditation on her own experience with maternity accompanied by a hypertext essay on the veneration of the Virgin Mary, understands motherhood as, like language, a separation accompanied by a
joining of signification, the loss being the marker of the infant’s embrace of identity (*The Kristeva Reader* 178). Many feminists follow Kristeva’s privileging of motherhood, arguing that, as Rivkin and Ryan put it, “In the mother-child relationship might be found more of the constituents of identity than are given during the later Oedipal stage” (531). The move from this infant stage of oneness with the mother to the creation of the first image of the self is characterized by a move away from the mother, and every child has to face this challenge in order to form its own identity, a thesis with which both Freud and Lacan agree. Thus, in psychological terms, the image in the mirror marks the point of deviation from the mother and the creation of the self but always in tune with, in contrast to, or in other words in relation to the image of the mother. Extending this statement to the world of literature where we come across female protagonists, the hypothesis that, to understand these women we need to begin with the bond that they shared with their mothers definitely carries a lot of weight. It is this aspect, in the fiction written by select Indian English women writers, that forms the focus of this thesis.

Mothers and mother-figures can be seen to play significant roles in works by Indian women writers. Even their absences are seen to be all-encompassing and their silences pregnant with meaning. Confining the sphere of interest to the works having urban, middle-class, educated, working-women as protagonists the list of writers included in this study was limited to Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan, Manju Kapur, Anita
Desai, Rama Mehta, Namita Gokhale, Kavery Nambisan, Gita Aravamudan, Jaishree Misra and Anjana Appachana. In agreement with the notion of the “insider view of Indianness” advocated by critics like Meenakshi Mukherjee, U. R. Ananthamurthy, Pankaj Mishra and Harish Trivedi, expatriate writers like Bharti Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Preethi Nair who in their own way focused on the mother-daughter bonds have not been included. The rationale behind the exclusion lies in the fact that the mother child dyad cannot be understood in isolation from culture. The writers who have had some experience of foreign cultures (either education, or living there for a considerable period) are bound to be influenced by those cultures. As Viney Kirpal expounds, theirs is the view of those who belong to the double-edged “nowhere and everywhere” state of mind endowed with a capacity to look at both inside and outside cultures with “equal objectivity” (“The Indian English Novel of the 1990s” 58). The inclusion of Anita Desai, Githa Hariharan and Anjana Appachana in the select list might in this context raise eyebrows. But a closer look will reveal that only those works which reflect the Indian ethos and not the clash between two cultures represented by the first-generation migrant mother and the second-generation daughter which immigrant writers tend to focus on have been included in this study.

A study of this nature with its focus on mothers, daughters and female bonding necessitates the use of the tenets of feminist theory and
psychology. But, the application of feminist critical approach, and the use of feminist theories to explicate works by Indian women writers, is confronted with a formidable obstacle. Since feminist theories have, by and large, been formulated in the West, based on a Euro-American social reality, there is a latent fear that western models of feminism might be indiscriminately imposed. Vrinda Nabar, a highly respected Indian critic points out:

Feminism is so global in its relevance, its terms of reference, the areas of struggle it defines, and its agenda for reform that the idea of these as being less relevant to another cultural context seems difficult to understand . . . Yet . . . [one has to] recognize the unsuitability of an arbitrary application of the essential values of a European-based culture to one which is entirely different and composed, in turn of various and mixed cultural value systems.

(Caste as Woman 18-19. Emphasis added)

In fact applying feminist theory which is mainly occidental, to the Indian milieu would be like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. Hence critics, writers, thinkers, activists and academicians in India have always shown a wariness of the very term “feminism.” One of the compelling reasons that Sharmila Sreekumar identifies for the women writers’ wanting to distance themselves from women’s writing is the “fear of ghettoisation and further marginalization” (68). According to her they fear that a constricting female identity will be conferred to and consolidated upon
them and that everything they write will be expected to contribute to and conform to this identity. They would rather in her view, “infiltrate the ‘male-stream’ and find a place under the arc lights” (68). In the words of Shashi Deshpande, “It is a curious fact that serious writing by women is invariably regarded as feminist writing. A woman, who writes of women’s experiences often, brings in some aspects of those experiences that have angered her, caused her strong feelings. I don’t see why this has to be labelled feminist fiction” (“The Dilemma of the Woman Writer” 31). In fact she frankly admits that “It took me years to say even to myself, ‘I am a feminist’” (Writing from the Margin 83). Anita Desai has expressed the same reservations. In an interview with Yashodhara Dalmia she said, “I find it impossible to whip up any interest in a mass of women marching forward under the banner of feminism” (6). Mahasweta Devi too according to Jasbir Jain has no apparent interest in feminism, having submerged the identity in the larger category “human,” and owns to just being a writer, not a woman writer (“Daughters of Mother India in Search of a Nation” 1656). The most modern crop of women writers in India too are clearly unhappy with the term as admitted by Anita Nair in a conversation with Aruna Chandaraju. Throughout the interview she maintains the stand that feminism as an “ism” is clearly outdated.

Evidently, “The image of feminism as a coherent ideology or a set of dogmas of a homogeneous monolithic feminism is only a misconception” (Begum 10). Felicity Hand Cranham writes of how Indian
critics and thinkers have rejected the theories based on the Western feminist model:

Indian feminists have often rejected the Western feminist model with its emphasis on socio-economic and sexual independence. They have argued that Western models assume the universality of middle-class, white, Euro-American values and lump Third World women into the same homogenous category, neglecting to take into account specificities such as class, geographical location, education, religion and age. (ix)

A notion that Miranda Davies elaborates upon in her editorial to *Third World—Second Sex* (1983). That brings us to the question of whether there is something called Indian feminism or an Indian version of feminist theory and if so, how is it different? The search would take us to Indian women activists such as Madhu Kishwar, Vina Mazumdar, or academics such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Ania Loomba, Romila Thapar, Susie Tharu, K. Lalitha, V. Geetha, Kumkum Sangari, Sudhir Kakar, Vrinda Nabar, Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, Uma Chakravarti, Malashri Lal, Shormishtha Panja and Sudesh Vaid who assert that unlike in the West, Colonial and Nationalist experiences have moulded the lives and identity of the modern Indian women. They feel strongly that Indian feminism should chart its own path, rather than be burdened with an imported culture-specific brand of feminism. Madhu Kishwar, founder of Manushi, a leading Women’s organization, expresses her view strongly in the article
titled “A Horror of Isms.” Madhu Kishwar who was once called the high priestess of Indian feminism and the Germaine Greer or Kate Millet of India vents her ire against the ones who try to adopt Western feminist theory in India and Indian feminists who have been overtly influenced by it:

Feminism, as appropriate and defined by the West, has too often become a tool of cultural imperialism. The definitions, the terminology, the assumptions, even the issues, the forms of struggle and institutions are exported from West to East, and too often we are expected to be the echo of what are assumed to be more advanced women’s movements in the West. (4)

What she clearly seeks is to “adapt” and not “adopt” the notions within feminism. In Kishwar’s opinion, Indian traditions such as the Goddess worship and feminine “shakti” provide Indian society with a far more suitable blueprint for voicing women’s issues than the tenets of feminist theory. Another critic, Vrinda Nabar has also categorically stated that Indian feminism is a separate entity though related to western feminism remotely. In her best seller, *Caste as Woman* (1995) which she says was written upon the insistence of David Davidar, as an Indian counterpart to Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1970), she stresses the socio-cultural realities which would make the application of Western feminism and feminist theory in India impractical. In fact she even comments, “My contention is that feminism hasn’t even begun in any real sense in India” (6). Paromita
Vohra comes to a similar understanding after a committed search for, “the how, the why, the what does feminism mean?” to an Indian woman in her *UnLimited Girls* a well-made documentary on the topic.

Feminism is a word most urban English-speaking Indians are familiar with but their understanding of it remains foggy. Nabar credits this ignorance to three factors, media distortion, older forms of patriarchal resistance and the failure of committed feminists to provide texts and generate discussions at the ordinary public level. Compared to stalwarts and trend-setters like Wollstonecraft, Woolf, Millet, Showalter, Beauvoir, Greer, Frieden, Rich, Gilbert, Gubar, Cixous, Irigaray, Moi, Faludi and Evans, the Indian counterparts are few and less known. The most famous among them, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Ania Loomba, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan and Kumkum Sangari opt to speak more of the colonial and post-colonial points of view, which is an integral part of being a woman in India. Madhu Kishwar, Ruth Vanita, Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, Medha Patkar, Vandhana Shiva, Aruna Roy, Monisha Behal, Kamla Bhasin, Nighat Said Khan and Arundhati Roy are more activist oriented and Anees Jung, Elizabeth Bumiller, Sara. S. Mitter, Shobhna De, Indira J. Parikh and Pulin K. Garg try a balancing act between journalism, travel writing and sociological study of women. Works of Sudhir Kakar, Katharina Kakar and Gitanjali Prasad are basically on the border between psychology and sociology. Just as in every
other aspect of India the variety and diversity are confounding, leaving it impossible to identify and define the features of Indian feminism.

If an Indian version of feminist theory has to be formulated it has to have its base specifically in the Indian social reality. When in agreement with Simone de Beauvoir’s “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (295), constructivist feminists point out the role of time, ethos and milieu in constructing the concept of woman it has to be understood that depending on the variations from culture to culture the concept of woman too would undergo differences. Though in India the concept of woman cannot be considered “a unicultural model in a pan-Indian ethos, in whom the immense heterogeneousness of the country’s cultural heritage is collapsed” (Jayasree 21) a few common aspects can be seen to enter into the psyche of any girl-child growing up in India constructing her differently from the girl-child or woman who forms the focus of western feminist theories. It is hence vital that we understand the differences in the social reality of the Indian woman before we move on to the more specialized field of bonding between women. This will help us to be wary in the use of feminist theory which is mainly occidental.

It has to be admitted that as in every other patriarchy, the girl-child in India is brought up on the notions of sacrifice and patience and the need to accept her inferiority in comparison to the man. “She is taught to be shy, gentle and dignified as a person, pure and faithful as a wife, and selfless, loving and thoughtful as a mother” (Uma 2). Feminism and
feminist literary theory talk of the many processes such as socialization and interior colonization whereby this conditioning is achieved. Kate Millet in her seminal work *Sexual Politics* (1977) identifies and describes in detail how patriarchy makes use of ideology, biology, sociology, class, economy, education, force, myth, religion and psychology to establish and maintain its hold. Though one has to accept the general correctness of the sketch provided, one also has to acknowledge the parallel existence of certain factors which affect the process of patriarchal socialization detrimentally in India.

First among these factors is the belief that women in India did not always have it bad. It is believed that the status of women deteriorated only in relatively recent times. Before this, some historians have theorized, there was an ancient “Golden Age,” sometime around 1000 B.C. in which Indian women were considered the equals of men or at least had a higher status than they did in the following centuries. It is interesting to note the origin of this belief. Uma Chakravarti in a well-researched paper titled “Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism, and a Script for the Past” vibrantly traces the history of its creation preferring to call it a myth—the myth of the Vedic Golden Age of Womanhood. She attributes the origin of the myth to the cultural and ideological encounter between England and India. Quoting Jadunath Sarkar, Chakravarti states how it was in the nineteenth century that the Indian came into close contact with his own heritage, ironically through the works of the British,
who translated the Vedas and Buddhist works which were on the track to extinction. This knowledge of the past, according to her ended in the creation of a persuasive rhetoric, shared by the Colonialists and the Nationalists alike—the myth of the Vedic Golden Age of Womanhood, in contrast to the inferior status of women in the present. Each had a different reason to promote this myth. To the British, it gave the psychological right to rule over a country which had degenerated to a present state of superstitious and ritualized Hinduism, where women no longer got the respect due to them. To the Nationalist the myth provided a source of pride in being representatives of a culture which had been organically disrupted by historical circumstance but was capable of revitalization. Raja Rammohun Roy and Mritunjay Vidyalankar epitomize this dominant trend among the native intelligentsia in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. In his arguments for reform Roy used the Maitreyi-Yajnavalkya episode to show that women in the ancient past enjoyed a high standing. Others like Keshub Chandra Sen, Mahesh Chandra Deb, Peary Chandra Mitra, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Mahadev Govind Ranade popularized the names of Gargi, Leelavati, the Tamil Bhakti poetess Avaiyar, and Kalidasa’s plays to show the esteem with which women were held in the past. The Orientalists too contributed substantially in the ultimate crystallization of a “national” feminine identity based on “high” culture. Later Max Muller vastly propagated a racist Aryan version of the
Orientalist Hindu golden age which became very influential in Indian thought. In Chakravarti’s words:

The contribution of the second round of the Orientalists and their feminine counterparts may be summed up as the transformation of the Hindu golden age into an Aryan golden age wherein the men were free, brave, vigorous, fearless, themselves civilized and civilizing others, noble, and deeply spiritual; and the women were learned, free, and highly cultured; conjointly they offer sacrifices to the gods, listening ‘sweetly’ to discourses, and preferring spiritual upliftment to the pursuit of ‘mere’ riches. Additionally they represented the best examples of conjugal love, offering the supreme sacrifice of their lives as a demonstration of their feeling for their partners in the brief journey of life. This was to be *an enduring legacy*. (46. Emphasis added)

What matters to our study are the last two words “enduring legacy.” It is another fact altogether that the reality situation of women might have been different, as not every woman was a Gargi or Avaiyar yet the combined efforts of as diverse thinkers as the Orientalists, the Nationalists, the Colonialists, the Missionaries, the Evangelists, the Hindu Liberals and the Conservatives converged into the solidification of the fundamental characteristics of Hindu womanhood which cut across all the divides to become in the words of Chakravarti “an enduring legacy.” What was gradually and carefully constituted, brick by brick, in the interaction
between colonialism and nationalism is now so deeply embedded in the consciousness of the middle classes that ideas about the past have assumed the status of revealed truths and women in India clearly grow up with this myth.

Writers too sought to promote the myth. Novels by Bankim Chandra Chaterjee and the historian R. C. Dutt heaped panegyrics on women, all of which percolated through into the psyche of the ordinary women in India. None of the believers in the myth however are able to identify the reasons for the decline of the status of women. No one is quite sure why, but over the next two thousand years, the position of women gradually eroded. Padmini Sengupta relates how girls were married off at a younger age and were barred from religious rituals. Widows were not permitted to remarry (67). Sometime between the years 200 B. C. and A. D. 200, the upper-caste law codifier known as Manu produced the first compilation of Hindu law in which a woman was seen to have no hope of an autonomous life. Manu is seen by some feminists today as the chief culprit in the history of the subordination of Indian women, but Manu’s compilation of the law does not explain the steady decline in the status of women that had occurred before his time. Many historians have come to believe that what happened to women in India was what happens to all women as a society evolves from wandering, pastoral clans into sedentary groups that make their living by agriculture. In a settled society, where there is relatively more leisure and less fear of the enemies, the roles of men and women
become increasingly demarcated. As the Aryans spread geographically, they came into contact with other cultures, particularly the darker-skinned Dravidian tribes of the south. Elisabeth Bumiller quotes the opinion of Romila Thapar, a highly respected historian and supporter of women’s causes in India:

The oppression of women developed hand in hand with the idea of preserving caste distinctions. Manu’s code of law, which first set down the rules of caste in India, is in her view an illustration ‘of the need to rigidly define caste society,’ to create rules that keep the outsiders, the people viewed as ‘pollutants,’ in their place. Consequently, there are elaborate rules in Manu’s code governing precisely who may marry whom. ‘To avoid pollution, you must control birth,’ Romila Thapar explains. ‘But you lose control over birth if you lose control over women.’ (15-16)

Though not all women would have formally learnt history, they do carry a sense of the past which they have internalized through the transmission of popular beliefs, mythology, tales of heroism and folklore. Formal history also percolates down often in a transmuted form, to a wider range of people through articles in popular journals, discussions and through what may be termed the “dispersal effect,” so that elements in oral history may be overlaid by more serious historical conclusions forming a sort of medley of ideas. Whatever be the reason it is a fact that the modern Indian woman has assimilated the notion of an age where the Indian woman was
honoured and respected by all and considered an equal to the man, only to fall in status during the later ages. Knowing very well that this was not the condition in the West where women had to march on the roads to gain respect, the Indian woman gets a culturally-superior notion of her self in comparison to the Western women.

She is also reminded of the glorious past by traces of it as reflected in the many existing rituals and practices. An example would be the matrilineal community of the Khasis in Meghalaya and Nairs in Kerala, where the property passes from the hands of the mother to the daughter and not the son. Myths, legends and folklore add to the list. The different forms of goddess worship in India too, play a major role. “In India local deities, native cults, gramdevatas are all female” (Krishnaraj “Motherhood, Mothers . . .” 3), which makes it easy for women to be associated with the notion of power. Krishnaraj quotes from Clarissa Bader’s *Women in Ancient India* of how Indians “adored nature, not in its perishable form but in those immortal principles which vivify and sustain her. Nature was represented by Aditi, the common Mother of Gods. She was also identified with Earth, our nurse, our support in life as well as our last home” (Krishnaraj “Motherhood, Mothers . . .” 4). Even portfolios of the utmost significance like wealth and knowledge are in India held respectively by the female goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswathi. Thus the woman in India unlike in the West brings to mind versions of the Goddess making it difficult to demean or subjugate her entirely.
Even if one looks at the mythological figures upon whom the concept of Indian womanhood is modelled like Sita, Draupadi, Gandhari or Savitri one finds that these are not shy, demure women who are helpless but ones who play an active role (though admittedly under constricting conditions) in determining their fate and also have a great deal of self-respect. Sita had the courage to resist Ravana whom the whole world feared. The legend that Sita needed only a proverbial single stalk of grass to help her ward off Ravana reveals her strong personality. Even Sita’s act of calling upon mother Earth to swallow her when faced with more suspicion, need not be seen as an act of suicide by a sad, helpless woman, but rather she makes a loud and strong statement condemning the whole court and questioning the action of her husband and the King of the land, before entering the womb of mother Earth. Draupadi dares to argue in the presence of the whole court that she is not an object but a person with individual rights, a fact which the four younger brothers of Yudhishtira had not dared to voice out when they were pledged first. When even the judicious Bheeshma turns a deaf ear she curses the whole lot and vows to leave her hair untied until she washes it with the blood of the man who had insulted her. In fact, her vow is what triggers off the greatest war in Indian history. When compared to the role of Helen of Troy in the Greek legends, Draupadi plays a much more active role. Gandhari, the wife of Dhritharashtra is not forced to but opts to blindfold herself for life, to tie up her lot with that of her husband and her willpower is so strong that never
once in her life does she rue her decision. Savitri is a woman who has the
courage to marry the man of her choice and enough wit to defeat Yama
with her clever arguments and persistence and single-handedly brings her
husband back to life.

Unlike the fairy tale figures of Cinderella, Snow White, Rapunzel,
and Sleeping Beauty (who form the staple diet of a girl growing up in the
West) who are shown suffering in quiet resignation, all the atrocities
showered upon them, waiting for the Prince Charming on a white horse,
who would save them from their plight, none of these Indian women are
inert, submissive, flaccid, timid or bashful but instead play an active role
and have a voice in what happens around them or enough self-esteem to
articulate her dissent, if she is not given her due respect. This is the third
speciality of the Indian ethos which gives a stronger positive boost to
Indian women in contrast to their counterparts in the West. As Sutherland
writes, “Myths are measures by which a society expresses its underlying
ideologies and indoctrinates members into its moral universe” (34).
Hardcore feminists might raise the objection that all these women are only
acting within the confines of the patriarchal limits, complementing what
patriarchy tells them an ideal wife should do, but one cannot ignore that
what these women did was follow their hearts and minds and that
patriarchy must have had a really hard time stage-managing the legends to
fit their bill. There are many more women within the annals of Indian
myths, legends and folklore like, Ganga, Satyavati, Amba, Subhadra,
Radha, Kaikeyi, and Parvathi, all of whom exercise their rights as individuals, have the courage to trust themselves and the daring to dream and to act to make their dreams and desires come true.

None of these women are the traditional, docile, shy, cowardly versions of women as propagated by patriarchy but ones who show courage to speak their mind and act according to their wills: Ganga a goddess gets attracted to a mortal man, a king and lures him into marriage after laying down conditions like the right to remain unquestioned whatever her actions be. Satyavati, the daughter of a fisherman seeks the boon of a sweet smelling body from a sanyasi who is attracted by her beauty, gets it and later marries the King of the land who is lured by her sweet scent. Amba, one among the three princesses whom Bheeshma kidnaps for his brother dares to declare in the open court that she loves another and receives permission to go to her loved one. However the egoistical prince refuses to marry her stating that she had been kidnapped by another man. Amba does not take things lying down; she goes back to Bheeshma and demands that he should marry her as he is the cause for her present condition. When he says that he is helpless as he is bound by his oath never to marry she curses him, undergoes severe penance, commits sati to be reborn as Shikandi an eunuch in the next birth to avenge her humiliation by killing Bheeshma. Radha, a married woman falls in love with Krishna and follows her heart. Kaikeyi shows courage in the battlefield and is rewarded by Dhritharashtra with the promise to give in to
any of her demands whenever she makes a request. Parvathi the daughter of Himavan, King-Emperor of mountains, falls in love with Shiva a yogimendicant who walks around in rags, with garlands of skulls and live snakes and dances in the graveyards, an altogether fearsome and unacceptable groom in the eyes of the royal family and their subjects. When his reputedly unbreakable meditation comes across faint stirrings he flashes his third eye reducing Madana the God of love to ashes and walks away spurning her love. She however braves the odds and undergoes severe penance to secure his love and rebels against the whole family to marry him.

Moreover as feminism in the form of the Suffragette movement was taking the western world by storm the Indian woman did not feel that she alone was being targeted for inferior treatment as the Indian men too were being ruled over by a foreign authority. Thus another point of divergence which can be seen in the creation of the Indian woman’s mindset was the colonial rule. When the Nationalist movement started Indian men and women were together fighting for the freedom of the country and the Women’s Question was second in the minds of the freedom fighters. The “mother-centered rhetoric of Hindu nationalism” (Borthwick 340) which finds expression in Bankim’s emotional hymn “Bande Mataram” (Hail to the Mother”) had, by its use of women as political symbols of national awakening, created a political space for women. Many like Sarojini Naidu, Sarla Debi, Pandita Ramabai, Ela Bhatt, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Colonel
Lakshmi, and Kasturba Gandhi had the spotlights trained on them. But a point of greater noteworthiness is that the movement influenced women through the length and breadth of India making them donate generously and also to come out in large numbers on to the streets to carry the struggle forward. Borthwick observes that in an ethos of nationalist fervour; bravery and physical fitness were accepted as female virtues if they served a political purpose (340). Novels like those of Tagore and Bankim Chandra Chaterjee exhorted women to educate themselves and move into the public sphere for the cause of nationalism. The media too carried many stories of the courage and wisdom of the women. The role being played by the women was considered in no way inferior. During the post-Independence era these stories of valour continued to add charm to the image of women in India, giving them something to fall back upon, in the face of harsher realities. In fact Partha Chatterjee in his “The Nationalist Resolution of the Woman’s Question” claims that:

... the relative unimportance of the women’s question in the last decades of the nineteenth century is not to be explained by the fact that it had been censored out of the reform agenda or overtaken by the more pressing and emotive issues of political struggle. It was because nationalism had in fact resolved ‘the women’s question’ in complete accordance with its preferred goals. (237)

Growing up in the midst of these myths supplemented by the legends of queens who have led from the front like Razia Sultana, and
Rani of Jhansi, freedom fighters like Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Kadambini Ganguly, Nanibala Devi, Durgabai Deshmukh, Colonel Lakshmi, women of the Tagore family and Kasturba Gandhi, Indian women have never lacked role models of self-respecting individuals. Even politics which in the West is considered a male bastion has seen many famous female names in India, like Indira Gandhi (whose name was at a time equated to India), Fathima Beevi, Najma Heptullah, and Ela R. Bhatt who have held positions of great power; and the current crop of power centers like Pratibha Patil, Sonia Gandhi, Sushma Swaraj, Brinda Karat, Mamata Banerjee, Meira Kumar, Vasundara Raje, Mayawati, and Jayalalitha. Industry too, is similarly positioned with names like Indra Nooyi, Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Chanda Kochhar, Vinita Bali, Neelam Dhawan, Swati Piramal, Chitra Ramakrishna, Preeta Reddy and Naina Lal Kidwai. Other famous Indian names include Kiran Bedi, Aruna Roy, P. T. Usha, Indira Jaisingh, Ruth Manoroma, Kalpana Lajmi, Anjolie Ela Menon, Sonal Mansingh, Sania Mirza, Saina Nehawal and Gayatri Devi. Even among the notorious figures, we find that the most famous/notorious dacoit in India is a woman, Phoolan Devi. Thus Indian women are surrounded by too many examples of empowered women who have a strong role in sculpting their fate, to believe that women are entirely helpless.

Even in the use of “interior colonization” to achieve its aims, one comes across many differences in the Western and Indian milieu. Kate
Millet identifies religion as one of the eight crucial weapons that patriarchy universally uses for conditioning. In India, along with myth and tradition, religion forms the most important tool used by patriarchy as Indians are basically deeply religious and hence find the hold of religion impossible to breach. As Sudhir and Katharina Kakar point out “even the most modern Indian’s inner terrain is liable to be imbued with a matter-of-fact religiosity” (134). Indian women are taught by patriarchy to accept the man as a demi-god. But the crux of the Indian version of feminism lies in the fact that ideally the bond between God and his believer is much beyond that of a mere master and slave. In all Indian prayers one finds an element of equality and familiarity between God and his believers, the finest example being Tagore’s *Gitanjali* (1913). It is true that India is a land of many religions however as the Kakars observe, “Indianness . . . is about similarities produced by a . . . pre-eminently Hindu civilization” (4-5). And in the practice of Hinduism the Indian believer gets a greater role in who, his/her God is. Unlike in the West it is not just one supreme God who dictates all your actions but the believer chooses his/her favourite God from the pantheon of innumerable Gods as per his/ her personal preferences. Moreover, to the Indian, gods are not infallible. They can commit mistakes, display pangs of temper, jealousy and passion, and even have biases. The Indian believer is the one who showers love on them thus deifying them, without which they cannot be gods. Whereas in the West God is inherently God, in India it is the believer who makes Him a God
out of his love for Him. Thus when patriarchy attempts to wield the weapon of religious dictums to make women submissive, in India it is at the same time giving women the power to stand in judgment of each individual man or god-designate and decide whether or not to love him and thus deify him.

Tied to these facts, is the sixth difference that if women lack individual freedom in India they do not see the men enjoying much of it, either. Kate Millet identified two basic rules upon which patriarchy works, “(a) Male shall dominate female and (b) Elder male shall dominate over younger male” (25). To a far greater extent than in the West, India follows these rules to the letter and hence younger men too do not have much freedom and usually remain behind the powerful figures of their fathers or some older male. Sudhir and Katharina Kakar propose a line of reasoning for the phenomenon. They contend that the Indians possess “a deeply internalized hierarchical principle, a lens with which men and women in India view their world” (8). According to them, Indians have a “highly developed antenna that makes an Indian almost anticipate the wishes of a superior and adjust his behaviour accordingly” (14). This makes them assign the by-now-famous designation “homo hierarchicus” or “the Hierarchical Man” to the Indian (21). India being both strictly patriarchal and hierarchical, women in India seldom see the men exercising individual freedom either. As Vrinda Nabar states, “Such freedom is in any case limited for men as well as women” (Caste as Woman 180).
The seventh and final major difference which affects the conditioning of women in India is related to the twentieth century social counter-resistance in the West which was termed a backlash to feminism by Susan Faludi. She pointed out that there seemed to be a revolt within the ranks of feminism during this time (320-321). In her comprehensive brief summary in *The Backlash* (1992) she points out that Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1970) gave way to *Sex and Destiny* (1984) and Susan Brownmiller’s *Against Our Will* (1975) was followed by *Femininity* (1986). Just as the Renaissance was not as pervasive in England as in the rest of Europe the situation in India was such that even before the feminist revolution could radically spread to India the feminist movement itself came across a social counter-resistance and revolt from within and hence failed to have much of an impact in India. The germ of the revolt against the notions of feminism which was embedded within the minds of Indian women, because of their strong roots in tradition and the new theoretical outpourings in the field being of a similar content the Indian version of active feminism got stuck like a bud which was about to bloom, but which never really did. As Nabar says, “It is for this reason that even among the literate middle class, ignorance about the basic issues of the women’s movement vitiates its more positive advances” (*Caste as Woman* 27).

Indian literature which like any other literature mirrors the culture which it originates from, cannot hence contain any radical notions of
feminism. In fact it would be better to state that women’s writing in India moved straight from the feminine into the female phase as identified by Elaine Showalter instead of passing through the feminist to reach it. Hence a slavish application of Western theories must certainly be avoided. Susie Tharu commented in an interview, “When you deal with Indian women’s writing you have to break out of essentialist paradigms of aesthetics. One has to search out other frames and contexts of reading” (“Powerful Interventions” 5). However, they can be judiciously used to highlight the basic principles of patriarchal ideology. Maithreyi Krishnaraj points out that regardless of differing socio-cultural contexts, “patriarchy has emerged as a dominant analytical concept for re-planning structures of male domination and female subordination. Patriarchy as an analytic framework encompasses all the others” (*Feminist Concepts* iii). One has to admit that what is required in the study of Indian English women writers is not a rigid application of any particular feminist ideology but the creation of a flexible theoretical framework using those aspects of feminist theory which have universal applicability.

In applying the other major component of Women’s Studies, psycho-analysis, too, one has to be wary. The number and content of western theories far outweigh any studies conducted in India and in the application of these one is bound to be stepping on thin ice. The multiplicity, complexity and the intersection of apparently conflicting orientations of the Indian woman writer’s and woman’s psyche must
definitely be taken into account. Elements of women’s experience peculiar to the Indian context have to be accommodated in the theoretical framework.

Thus when we talk about Indian feminist criticism and theory it should as P. K. Rajan points out in the context of Indian literary theory in general (1) employ western tools and methodologies as an essential part of critical practice; (2) engage with indigenous classical traditions, especially the Sanskrit heritage; (3) attempt to forge a common Indian poetic in terms of synthesis of Western and Indian critical traditions; (4) search for an alternative aesthetics through an intensive inquiry into the regional indigenous-popular-folk traditions; and (5) look-out for a larger space for critical engagement beyond national boundaries (xii).

The introduction of Women’s Studies as elective modules into the syllabi of the major Indian Universities has given rise to many studies which take into account most of the aforementioned characteristics. Much has been written on Indian English women writers in the form of seminar papers, articles, dissertations and theses. Though the social and economic condition of women formed its focus, close attention was also paid to caste, class, religion and regional differences. Today several extensive bibliographies document the explosion in research about women. They also reveal the interdisciplinary nature of Women’s Studies and the difficulty of mastering the field which explores all aspects of gendered identities. In every field feminist scholars began to show the inadequacy of
previous research, which had failed to ask appropriate questions about women because of the predominantly male frame of reference. Linda McDowell’s and Rosemary Pringle’s observations regarding women studies can be considered universal:

Women’s studies, of which feminism is a specialized branching out, originate in the emphasis on women’s experience and women’s standpoints which were felt to have been excluded from what passed for ‘knowledge.’ Women’s Studies also had to build on existing disciplines. It is unusual in the range of disciplines it uses—just about everything is potentially relevant and in the ways in which it deliberately sets out to challenge and reconstruct the existing organization of knowledge. (7)

Women’s Studies has drawn on many disciplines in the process of itself becoming a discipline offering a fundamental challenge to existing paradigms. Women’s Studies is not unusual in building on existing disciplines. Chief among them are Sociology, Psychology, Literature, Anthropology, Economics, Law, Philosophy, and Politics.

In tandem with the introduction of Women’s Studies into University syllabi, the development of many libraries of international standards like the Dhvanyalokha in Mysore, CIEFL in Hyderabad, and SCILET in Madurai, devoted mainly to Indian English literature studies too has contributed much to expeditious advances in the field. Also one can find sections devoted to Indian English literature in all major libraries. Other
than these, Indian Women’s Writing got an impetus when international recognition in the form of awards started pouring in for Indian women writers. As Viney Kirpal points out, “If international acclaim is any measure of literary merit, then it is fascinating to note that almost every second novel of the 80s has either been awarded a prize or has been short-listed for it” (The New Indian Novel xiv). Anita Desai’s Clear Light of Day and In Custody were short-listed for the Booker the year in which Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children received the same. Nayantara Sahgal’s Rich Like Us won the Sinclair Fiction Prize while Plans for Departure was awarded the Commonwealth Prize (Eurasian section). By the nineties international focus had shifted to young Indian women writers as many of them like Githa Hariharan, Manjula Padmanabhan, Arundhati Roy, Anjana Appachana, Jhumpa Lahari and Kiran Desai won much-coveted awards like the Commonwealth Award for the best debut novel, the Onassis International prize, the Booker, the O. Henry Festival Prize, the Pulitzer and the Man Booker respectively. Many critical pieces appeared on these award winners yet they remained inadequate both in quality and quantity. There was a certain imbalance in the distribution of critical attention.

While some writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy appear to be the repeated focus of critical attention most of their contemporaries including other award winners did not have much written about them.
In criticism, even the writers who were well received had to work twice as hard to prove their worth due to the existence of deeply ingrained prejudices. Admittedly Anita Desai and Gita Mehta have been received with enthusiasm in the West but it is worth thinking whether on the whole, they have been given the same critical respect as their male counterparts, even in their own country? In order to establish their claims as significant writers, they have to battle with certain critical prejudices; one of which is prominently gender-based. Patriarchal assumptions of the superior worth of male experience have contributed to a systematic devaluation of their work, in common with that of women writers all over the world. Since most of the Indian women writers write about the enclosed domestic sphere and a woman’s perception of experience through her position in it, patriarchy assumes that their work will automatically rank below the works of male writers who deal with weightier themes. Sarah Joseph in her fictional presentation of feminist theory “Inside Every Woman Writer” makes her writer-protagonist speak out about this discrepancy, “Till now I have been writing a lot about love . . . Yet my works were rejected by the male writers whenever they assembled for serious literary discussions. They screamed that when the world was hungry, love was an extra expenditure” (67). Many more Indian women writers have protested against this prejudice, with Shashi Deshpande, one of the novelists being studied in this thesis, devoting an entire article titled “The Dilemma of the Woman Writer” to this predicament. The prejudice becomes particularly
strong in India with women writers using the realistic narrative mode, as most of them continue to do. Their close approximation to reality can easily create the impression of social documentaries deficient in imaginative reach and artistic sophistication. Shashi Deshpande writes of her own personal confrontation with the sexist bias:

For quite a while, I believed—a belief that came from all around me—that men’s lives are more important, more significant. And therefore, that, serious writing is done by men and is about men. That women’s writing, like their lives, somehow lacks weight and substance. (“Of Concerns, of Anxieties” 107)

Moreover living in India and writing in the language of the colonizers poses more obstacles in the path of easy acceptance. Since the cultural class and levels of economic affluence largely determine proficiency in English, the general impression is that the writers in English, and their works, belong to an esoteric social stratum. As Aijaz Ahmad has pointed out, even in India there seems to be developing a new urban culture “for whom only the literary document produced in English is a national document. All else is regional hence minor and forgettable, so that English emerges in this imagination not as one of the Indian languages which it undoubtedly is, but as the language of literary sophistication and bourgeois civility” (In Theory 75). These writers are hence in popular imagination cut off from the reality of the Indian existence. This presumed deficiency is supposedly even more prominent in the case of women writers. The
depiction of psychological traumas of the frustrated housewife that we have in Anita Desai or Shashi Deshpande might seem amusingly superficial when compared to the depiction of the repressed and suppressed lives of women of the lower classes that we find in Mahashweta Devi. What is required is an acknowledgement that the former also represents the reality for a considerable section of Indian womanhood. As Meenakshi Mukherjee points out, “To ignore this element of cultural class [the Indian women writers in English] in their perception of life and processing of experience will be to willfully anaesthetize and universalize them” (“Women Creative Writers . . .” 18). This would destroy the variety necessary for a healthy literary climate in any country.

Since Independence, far-reaching changes in cultural, social, political and economic patterns have significantly stretched out and altered the nature of reality for Indian women. This has raised some of the most radical questions regarding the foundation of cultural assumptions and attitudes. It is inevitable that these questions are reflected in women’s writing of the period. The turmoil, the triumph, the accommodations and the anguish of these new circumstances have become the subject matter of some of the most significant novels by Indian women writers in English. One of the major areas of focus of Indian women writers has been the conflict between the forces of tradition and modernity. Though men experience these conflicts too, women being conventionally considered the “upholders of tradition” suffer more. The crisis of reception of new ideals
or methods of living and attachment with family and home has pulled them apart. Though these form the main areas of interest for all women writers, each has dealt with them in her own way. However, as Meena Shirwadkar points out, “Writers and critics appear not to have paid much attention to the recent phenomenon of the educated earning wife and her adjustment or maladjustment in the family” (18).

Attempting to rectify the situation by focusing on the writers who have written about the trials of the middle class, educated, working woman the many similarities in the oeuvre of the ten writers who have been included in this study strike us. The similarities between these writers are structural as well as thematic. Structurally speaking most of the narratives like the epics of yore seem to start in-media-res. For example, Shashi Deshpande’s novel That Long Silence (1988) begins with Jaya the protagonist’s life about to shatter as she accompanies her husband to a small Bombay flat when her husband is asked to leave his job while allegations of business malpractice against him are investigated. All the other five novels of Deshpande too start midway through the events. Jaishree Misra’s Ancient Promises (2000) begins with the sentence “My marriage ended today” (3) and goes on to describe the events, which led to it and how the protagonist manages to deal with the changed equations. Rama Mehta’s Inside the Haveli (1977) commences with the birth of a child to the heroine and her past and future form the rest of the text. Manju Kapur’s Difficult Daughters (1998) opens at the point where the narrator
has just cremated her mother. The daughter then goes on a journey back to her roots to discover the true story of her mother’s life. Kavery Nambisan’s *On Wings of Butterflies* (2002) kicks off in the middle of a Women’s revolution and then goes on to explain the events that lead to it and the consequences too. Thus all these works begin with a shock of recognition, an abrupt awakening to the disintegration of a familiar, familial world. This is followed by a pendulum of intense introspection, which oscillates between the past and the present.

The second structural similarity lies in the rampant use of narrative techniques like flashbacks and dream-sequences. The narratorial voice is almost always indistinguishable from the authorial voice as most of the accounts are in the first person. Monologue often becomes a prominent narrative technique. The narration is multi-layered, multi-fibered and has a whirl-pool like quality. The narrative draws its loose, circular structure not from the cyclical structure of the modern novel but “from the structure of traditional Indian narrative—the story looping itself, repeating itself, going back to an earlier point,” the form seems random but it isn’t so “because that form is part of the enjoyment of the story in India” (Rushdie 5).

The language used by these women writers is almost always poetical with abundant use of symbolism, metaphors and imagery. Landscape and nature, city and houses or rooms, are all sources of symbolic enrichment of their narrative, and often almost become central characters, or at least embodiments of the heart and soul of a central
character. The house in Shashi Deshpande’s *Roots and Shadows* (1983) and the city of Jaipur and the Haveli of Bhagawat Singhji in Rama Mehta’s *IH* illustrate the point. A fine example of the rich use of metaphors lies in the journey metaphor which has been exploited by most of the Indian English women writers. Travel is also a metaphor for the passage from childhood to adulthood, from life to death, and from sanity to madness as in the various works of Anita Desai. The metaphor of the journey also expresses the process of the discovery of love and sexuality, their relation to art and culture, energy in general, and its role in violence and in loving relationships as in the works of Rama Mehta and Jaishree Misra. In Manju Kapur, Namita Gokhale and Kavery Nambisan the journey metaphor becomes an exploration of the nature of the self, emphasizing the multiple, ever-changing selves which inhabit the mind.

Another aspect of similarity in the language of these women writers is that of semantics. The problematic relationship between destruction and creation often becomes the pivot for the effort to express the inexpressible. Meanings often elude us. Allusions proliferate, sources enrich to excess the content of the text, value judgments are suspended, and events, characters and dialogues have multiple, indefinite interpretations which characters are shown straining to pin down. All the writers discussed here and many of their contemporaries try to dissuade the reader, through irony and indirection, from expecting to be able to dissolve mystery and indeterminacy into univocal, rational, logical, known, visible or concrete
definities. They try to teach us to respect the inherent mystery in life. The endings of Deshpande, Mehta and Appachana illustrate this point. Though the readers get an inkling as to the probable step that the protagonist might possibly take the writer does not show the protagonist taking it or stating her intentions clearly. In other words, true to real life, loose ends are left untied.

However, the most striking similarity between these narratives is two-fold, first that almost all are not action-oriented but inward-bound psychological novels, and second that there is a predominance of mothers and mother-figures in these novels. Even their absences are all pervasive and their silences pregnant with meaning. It is the nature of the role of mothers in the lives of their daughters that forms the central core of this thesis. An attempt is being made to address what Maithreyi Krishnaraj calls “the feminist dilemma” of how:

. . . to retrieve motherhood as a source of liberation, not by eliminating it as an obstacle but by redefining appropriate terms and conditions and a social structure that can make motherhood a conceivably creative experience, merging as it does the boundaries between child and mother, mediating as it can between nature and history, between the universal and the particular. (“Motherhood, Mothers, Mothering” 1)

The Introductory Chapter discusses the need for women to write about female bonding, traces the evolution of women writing in India and
then gives an explanation of the title of the thesis. Any such study on women or talks of female bonding, in effect directs one towards the world of feminism and feminist criticism. Yet one has to be wary as this study finds proof for the claim by Indian academicians that feminism has not yet arrived in India. The factors which have influenced the notions of feminism in India colouring it differently are discussed in detail. The myth of the Golden Age of women, the Independence movement, the role of women in Indian myths, the difference in the core concept of God as practiced in Hinduism, Kakar’s identification of the hierarchical nature of Indians, etc. being some of them. Under such circumstances women in India are definitely different and feminist theories which have by and large been formulated in the West, based on a Euro-American social reality cannot be applied indiscriminately to the evaluation of works by Indian women. The chapter also points out that the most visible similarity between the works written by Indian women who have female, educated, middle-class, protagonists is the importance given to mother-daughter bonds. It then concludes by laying down the path to be followed in each of the future chapters.

The Second chapter, **Theorizing the Umbilical Cord** consists of two parts, the former, focuses on feminist and psychoanalytical theories, which deal with mother-daughter bonds. The theories of Sigmund Freud, C. J. Jung, Maslow, Bowler, Simone De Beauvoir, Marianne Hirsch, James Frazer, Karen Horney, Melanie Klein and the case studies of Nancy
Friday, Jean Baker Miller, Sarah Ruddick and Betty Frieden are taken into account. Mothers play a key role in the development of the personality of a daughter but the whole burden of character formation cannot be placed on the mother as in patriarchy motherhood as an institution rests on responsibilities and duties, while women’s power and influence remain limited. Moreover, the adult alone cannot be held responsible for the formation of the personality as infant temperament and perception too is a very important co-determinant of the formation of the bond. The onus thus needs to be shifted partially from the mother to the daughter. The latter part of the chapter complements the theories with the reality situation of Indian mothers and daughters using studies conducted by Indian sociologists like Sudhir Kakar, Gitanjali Prasad; critics and theoreticians like Vrinda Nabar, Madhu Kishwar, Ritu Menon, Urvashi Butalia, Shormishtha Panja, Malashri Lal, and journalists like Elisabeth Bumiller, Anees Jung, Sarah S. Mitter, and Shobhaa De.

The Third chapter, *The Shield of Mother’s Love* talks of the many novels where we find daughters openly acknowledging the importance of their mothers in their lives. Jaishree Misra’s *Ancient Promises* and Rama Mehta’s *Inside the Haveli* are the works analyzed in detail in this chapter. Kavery Nambisan’s *On Wings of Butterflies*, Namita Gokhale’s *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* (1994), Anjana Appachana’s *Listening Now* (1998) and Gita Aravamudan’s *The Healing* (2008) too are used to supplement the findings. The protagonists in these works though faced
with many traumatic situations find solutions and peace of mind through other women and no problem ever seems to them insurmountable.

The Fourth chapter, *Phoenixian Bonds* handles five works in detail. In these works we find that the daughter openly reveals her intense hatred for the mother. Mothers in these works are usually read by their daughters as negative forces yet the protagonists are not shown succumbing to the initial negative relationship. Githa Harihara’s *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992); Shashi Deshpande’s *Roots and Shadows*, and *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980); Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* and Namita Gokhale’s *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (1984) all fall into this category. Towards the end the protagonists make an attempt to reach out to their mothers with an intention to sweeten the soured relationship. With this attempt at reconciliation, the protagonists seem to achieve an exorcism of all negative feelings gaining a better mastery over their own life.

The Fifth chapter *Caught in the Vortex* deals with the texts where daughters seem to ignore even the presence of their mothers. They remain silent about their mothers and in talking of their childhood focus more on the masculine world. The resultant loneliness of spirit and disillusionment with life leading to irresolution in narratives is scrutinized carefully. Anita Desai’s *Cry, the Peacock* (1980) and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1982); and Shashi Deshpande’s *That Long Silence* are the works analyzed in detail in this section.
The final **Concluding Chapter** sums up the findings of the investigation based on mother-daughter bonding in the foregoing chapters. The chapter evaluates the importance of mothers in the lives of their daughters and addresses the assumption that the bond between the mothers and daughters decide the way in which the plot of the novel will unfold. Love, hatred or indifference the three possible bases to a bond, its effect on the temperament and resultant personality are discussed in this chapter and the findings listed out.