Chapter Three

The Shield of Mother’s Love

The complexities and intricacies in the nature of the bonds between mothers and daughters is indeed immense, but for the purpose of analysis one can visualize mother-daughter bonds as a broad spectrum with three major brands—love, hatred and indifference—though one has to admit to the existence of whole worlds in between. The protagonist in each of the novels included in this study has been placed, according to the nature of the bond she shares with her mother, into one of these three broad categories. This chapter will deal with those works in which the bonds between mothers and daughters is characterized by love and understanding.

Daughters growing up in a country where women are discriminated against, naturally ought to develop hatred for the society and sometimes even disgust of the self but in India as observed by Kakar, one often observes the existence of a particular deep “intimacy and collaboration with other women” (“Feminine Identity in India” 48) which helps to mitigate the discriminations and inequities of patriarchal institutions. Discussing in detail what she terms the “Mere paas Ma hai–complex” of the average Indian, Shobhaa De observes that unlike the son:

A daughter never ‘possesses’ her mother, because a daughter is considered to be ‘in transit’—like she is in a railway station’s
waiting room, ready to hop on to the train that will carry her to her real and final destination—the sasural, or husband’s home. This successfully prevents mother and daughter from investing too heavily in each other. And yet, most mothers will confess if prodded that their ties are so much stronger with daughters. More than we are ready to admit. (Superstar India 181)

Keeping in mind the many anthropological studies by the likes of T. N. Madan, S. C. Dube, M. N. Srinivas and Pramila Kapur, Kakar echoes the sentiment, “There are, for example, in anthropological accounts, both a consistent indication of the marked preference for sons all over India, and at the same time, somewhat paradoxically, abundant allusion to the warmth, intimacy and relaxed affection of the mother-daughter bond” (“Feminine Identity in India” 45-46). Folk songs from all over India also bear witness to the close mother-daughter tie. Innumerable songs on the pain of parting from the mother at the time of marriage, and the joy expressed in the visits to maika (mother’s home) reveal the depth of a daughter’s attachment to her mother. Gauri Deshpande hints at the ease with which Indian women relate to each other in one of her shorter poems, “The Female of the Species” stating that the very act of gathering specific women around—one’s mother or sister, or the girl friend one went to school with—is enough to give shape and visage to one’s innermost desires and yet keep them non-articulated. In Shormishtha Panja’s words conversations between women “find expression, not in words, but in
silences between them” (96). In comparison to that of other women the company of men fails to evoke satisfaction during trying times. Female bonding can indeed be a source of power for women in their struggle against the odds of life. Robinette Kennedy endorses the sentiment: “Women friendships are both a powerful coping mechanism and a unique expression of a special energy” (127). The evidence of the Hitt Report is compelling: 87% of married women and 95% of single women reported that their deepest emotional relationship was with women.

There are many Indian English novels by women where such strong bonds between women, especially mothers and daughters of the middle class have been picturised. One among them is Ancient Promises by Jaishree Misra which is a semi-autobiography. The story is that of Janu a young Malayali girl born and brought up in Delhi who falls in love with a Delhi boy, but bows down to the pressure of her parents, marries a boy they have selected for her, settles down in Kochi, finds herself an unloved, misfit in the joint household, gives birth to an autistic daughter, decides to break free from the unloving and harsh surroundings, finds love once again through her old boyfriend Arjun but is sent to a mental asylum by her husband, escapes, moves to London and finally gains custody of her daughter as well.

This story is definitely that of a very courageous girl who dares to dream and succeeds in giving wings to her dream. But one wonders how a girl brought up in a strict patriarchal family where even talking to boys is
frowned upon, gains the courage to challenge the whole society. In the Indian society where even films dare not suggest that a married woman can dream of getting out of an unhappy relationship, here is a girl daring to be different. In typical Indian films the mangalsutra is always shown to be the strongest force governing a woman’s life. No woman would dare to disrespect it. Audience in India empathize with a woman who has to put up with an ill-treating husband but would never accept her in the role of trying to take things into her hands to bring about a change. In India the man who ties the mangalsutra around a woman’s neck is shown to be of greater importance than any other relation she might have had in the past or has in the present. In the strict sense women in India never even take off their mangalsutra while bathing or undergoing a surgery as they consider it a bad omen. “Bear with his atrocities as he is the one who keeps the kumkum on your forehead and the mangalsutra on your neck,” is a refrain young wives hear from all and sundry. In a culture where women are taught to bear any torture for the sake of being allowed to wear the symbols of marriage her mangalsutra and kumkum, how does Janu manage to escape this stereotype?

A closer look will show that though this is a survival-of-true-love-against-many-odds story, it is the strong bonding between mothers and daughters which form the pivot of the narrative. Though it is the patriarchal society which is the setting for the story, it is the bond between the women that makes survival possible and hence looms large. Clearly
what helps Janu in the fight for her sanity is her strong bond with her mother and later her own experience of motherhood.

The very opening scene of the novel communicates the notion. The novel begins at a critical juncture in the life of Janu—the completion of her divorce proceedings. The very first sentence, “My marriage ended today” has a strong spellbinding value, grabbing one’s attention and keeping it riveted on the events to follow, with speculations on the events which preceded it. The next sentence makes it clear that it is her mother who has come to the court with her. The mother-daughter pair, as they leave the premises of the court where the daughter’s marital life has come to a culmination would touch any reader’s heart, especially in the Indian context where the word divorce is still considered a dirty word, and the life of a divorcee is filled with innumerable trials and tribulations. However Janu comforts her mother telling her that endings are only beginnings in disguise. In fact, it becomes very clear that they draw comfort and courage from each other. Janice Raymonds uses the word “gyn” to describe such close bonds between women. She defines it as “. . . a loving relationship between two or more women . . . a freely chosen bond which, when chosen, involves reciprocal assurances based on honour, loyalty and affection” (18).

The narrative which progresses through the flashback technique makes it amply clear that this togetherness has been achieved after having gone through much ordeal. Her early childhood is remembered by Janu as
a period when she used to share her life openly and completely with her mother. She even, “... never needed to have secrets from my parents before, not even too many secret thoughts, most of which Ma was treated to as she went around the house doing her chores with me bobbing about in her wake” (AP 23). However, as she grows up a few secrets creep into the bond. The first secret that Janu keeps from her mother is that of falling in love with a boy named Arjun at the age of eighteen. She knows that her parents would not approve as her mother had earlier made things very clear by stating, “We aren’t that kind of family that can encourage its girls to have boyfriends” (AP 26). Bumiller notes, “One of the Indian mother’s biggest fears is that her carefully penned-in daughter will make a getaway one day and fall for the first rogue who comes along and hence she makes it very clear that a love marriage is not one which the family will tolerate” (32). It is this knowledge which makes Janu hide her feelings. The second secret that Janu keeps from her mother is that of the rottenness of her marriage. There is a common pattern in both the situations—she is secretive because she understands her mother so well that she knows her mother will feel hurt on knowing these facts.

The way her mother reacts to the revelation of either of these secrets reveal that the mother clearly is not one who instinctually almost psychically gathers the truth. To her the news that her daughter has a boyfriend comes as a shock and she actively takes part in emotionally blackmailing her daughter into a hasty arranged marriage. Unlike the
mother who sacrifices everything for the happiness of her children here is a true picture of an Indian mother who pressurizes her daughter into conforming to the rules of the society they live in for the sake of their family prestige. The writer “displaces the mother from the hallowed altar of worship and installs her among us not as a deity, but as a woman, living and facing the realities of existence. She is one of the erring humans, liable to be charged, impeached and discarded in life as well as after death” (Bande Mothers and Mother-figures 135). However there occur many moments during the tense period when Janu gets a glimpse of her mother’s love for her. The day her boyfriend is supposed to leave for England, to be followed soon after by her own departure to Kerala and a probable marriage, Janu asks her mother’s permission to go out, “Ma looked at my face, something must have told her of my unhappiness and, unexpectedly, she nodded a yes” (AP 51). Though the mother realizes the danger of letting her daughter go, she shows her love and trust in her daughter. It is this trust which makes Janu give the final nod to the marriage proposal on reaching Kerala. In her letter to Arjun announcing her marriage she writes:

    But to answer the question that must be uppermost in your mind . . .
    because, because, because I’m tired of fighting off my family,
    they’ve proven their love for me in the eighteen years it’s taken to bring me up. And I just can’t believe they’d push me into something that would be wrong for me. (AP 63)
The eighteen years of togetherness has clearly created a bond of absolute trust in the daughter. Sudhir Kakar observes that it is almost impossible for an Indian girl to rebel against her mother, “Little wonder that for an Indian girl rebellion against the fearsome constraints of impinging womanhood, with its singular circumscription of identity, becomes impossible. She internalizes the specific ideals of womanhood and monitors her behaviour carefully in order to guarantee her mother’s love and approval” (“Feminine Identity in India” 53). The close proximity which mothers and daughters share in India naturally leads to a situation where the daughter feels hesitant to break a mother’s dreams. The moment when Janu is asked to make the final decision she looks at her mother and thinks, “It would be so easy to make them all happy” (AP 62). Elisabeth Bumiller in her study on India talks about how Westerners have always been curious to know how arranged marriages in India work. And in the course of her search she came across the answer while talking with a woman named Rama Rajkumar who tells her how, “from the beginning, my mind was set that my parents were going to choose the right person for me” (32). Bumiller rationalizes that since most teenagers are still not allowed to date in India, parents think their children will have no experience on which to make an intelligent decision about a life-long mate. Janu too, like most girls in India has clearly come to believe what she has understood of the institution of marriage in India, that young brides will love the husband their parents select.
This is not the first time that she expresses absolute trust in her parents’ judgment. Earlier when her boyfriend had asked her not to go away to Kerala for the vacation she had told him in no uncertain terms that her parents doted upon her and she trusted them to take the right decisions for her, “There was no doubt in my mind that anything my parents wouldn’t allow me to do sprang firmly from their love for me. Even Arjun couldn’t convince me otherwise” (AP 34-35). Even during the period that she had been secretly meeting Arjun her constant prayer to her favourite deity Mullakkaldevi was to allow her to be a good daughter to her parents even as she loves Arjun. Unlike the usual teenage rebellious spirit what we get to see in Janu’s prayers is her deep need to be true to her love yet never lose her status as the beloved daughter of the family. We can see Kakar’s reading of the Indian girl’s psyche being fittingly reflected in Janu’s case. He writes, “In order to maintain her family’s love and approval, the ‘narcissistic supplies’ necessary for self-esteem, the girl tends to conform, and even over-conform, to the prescriptions and expectations of those around her” (“Feminine Identity in India” 51). The choice of another mother-figure, the Goddess Mullakkaldevi, of her much loved native land reveals the deep trust in mother-figures existing in Janu’s subconscious mind. Janu’s umbilical link appears strong and deep as two of the major symbols, talked about by C. J. Jung in his Symbols of Transformation as variant forms of the mother archetype, the Goddess and the motherland play a definite role in her thoughts. Throughout her troubled marriage she
keeps finding solace in her native home at Alleppey and thoughts of Mullakkaldevi rush to her mind and her lips whenever she is traumatized. Throughout the absence of her mother—who in Delhi seems too far away to her—it is these two symbolic mothers who keep her sane and whole.

The reason for Janu’s keeping the pain of a broken marriage from her parents reveal the deep concern she has for her parents especially her mother. Though from the very first moment of her stepping into the new home she feels singled out for cruel taunts she suffers the comments and coldness in silence. She writes, “I desperately needed to see my parents and tell them their dream wasn’t panning out too well for me” (AP 17). However, she “didn’t have the heart to tell Ma though. She looked so happy and proud” (AP 93). Among the many taunts it was the pointed remarks against her mother that Janu found hardest to ignore. Her mother’s lowly schoolteacher status in the eyes of the high-society Maraar’s and her mother’s failure to have taught her any of the worldly ways of housewives seemed to be a favourite topic of conversation in the new household. She continued to bear the taunts, sarcasm and hints as she “couldn’t bear to let my [her] parents know what an awful mistake they had made” (AP 95). Once after seeing the indifference of the Maraar family to her daughter Riya, Janu does talk herself into speaking to her parents but her plans are foiled by the unexpected death of her father. “I could not of course unload my problems on to Ma now. One look at her sad face was enough to quell the tiniest complaint that might bubble up from inside of me. I was not
going to put her through any more pain” (AP 124). These illustrations shed greater light on the mother-daughter bond. Curiously Janu’s trust in her parents’ ability to choose the right partner for her proves unwise, yet never once do we see her blaming them even in her private thoughts. Her belief and absolute trust in her mother’s judgment though proved false does not make Janu turn her back upon her mother. Instead she realizes and believes without any doubt that her mother had done only what she had thought was for her best. Janu believes her mother to be the example of the one identified by Beauvoir as “the generous mother, who sincerely seeks her child’s welfare . . . think[ing] that it is wiser to make a ‘true woman’ of her, since society will more readily accept her if this is done” (309).

Her trust in her mother however proves true later. Though her mother had always acted as the voice of the patriarchal society till then, the intensity of the pain that Janu had borne, to keep her mother blissfully unaware of her meaningless marriage shocks her mother. This breaks her out of the mould of the conforming mother and moves her into supporting her daughter in her attempt to escape. The Maraars had accused Janu of madness and sent her to a mental asylum where she was kept under constant medication. Realizing that Janu needed her, the mother became Janu’s voice and begged with the doctor to let her take Janu away. Back home she instinctively stopped the heavy medication which accompanied by her tender nursing, brought Janu back to her earlier self. The mother and the daughter achieve a greater understanding of each other through the
shared pain. This becomes a momentous point in the narrative. Caught between the conservative society and the modern thoughts of her daughter who has the daring to dream of something better, the mother takes the radical step of supporting her daughter through a divorce. Mani, Janu’s mother fights with her notions of the “bhadramahila” (the respectable, middle class or upper class Indian lady) to help her daughter. And it is this unquestioned support which provides Janu with “the courage to fight the mental battle to secure her own identity and space beyond the constraints of a painfully oppressing marital relationship” (Sengupta, J. 231). Though it turns life into hell, Mani, Janu’s mother goes through the ostracisation by the society for the sake of her daughter’s happiness. Even Janu’s grandmother who finds that she cannot even go to the temple without listening to trail ends of careless or deliberately cruel remarks stands by her in her fight on realizing the extent of Janu’s sufferings. What Shobhaa De calls, “an instinctive, almost protective bond between women, a subliminal understanding of marital problems that leads to spontaneous sympathy and affection” (Shooting from the Hip 115) is seen to manifest itself when most required. Modelled on the “the most enduring of Indian concepts—the concept of woman as shakti or power, evoked and released at moments of crisis by the very Gods themselves” (Lal, L. 105) mothers are seen to wax in power in their battle for their daughter’s happiness. Mothers and daughters are thus shown to stand by each other during trying times. The four women drawing courage and love from each other survive
the lashings of a patriarchal society eager to punish the ones who dare to rebel.

The depth of Janu’s bond with her mother is also, as suggested by C. J. Jung seen to influence her own capacity to mother positively. Helped by her mother Janu takes to mothering like a duck to water. In many parts of India, the expectant mother goes back to stay at her mother’s house a few months before the delivery. This stay helps her according to Kakar, “to strengthen her identification with her mother, a prerequisite for her own capacity for motherhood” (“Feminine Identity in India” 66). For Janu:

It was almost like going back to being their daughter again and not someone else’s daughter-in-law only on temporary loan to them . . . I occupied my parent’s house in a way that only a daughter can, without feeling I had to skulk about trying to look useful and unobtrusive at the same time. (AP 116)

The birth of Janu’s daughter Riya brings Janu and her mother even closer. Her mother’s words, “Before you know it, she’ll have grown up and left home and then you’ll be longing for her to be a child again!” (AP 117) prepares her for motherhood. Snuggly wrapped in her own mother’s love for her, she turns to her daughter Riya finding new ways to express her love for her daughter. The birth of her daughter brings back hope into her life. She hoped that the child would, “be my [her] Transformer of Bad things to Good. My potential best friend” (AP 116). But back at her husband’s home more mental cruelty awaited her. She learnt not to expect
any help in bringing up Riya and is appalled when she is struck by the news of her daughter’s autism. Janu and her daughter become a close unit which only “a crowbar could separate” (*AP* 117), a single team against the whole of the Maraars. The unvoiced pain within Riya is sensed by her mother and they cling to each other through a sea of despair. Clearly it is the shared pain and torture that brings them closer to each other. The predominant element in this identity, the ideal core around which it is organized, is what Helene Deutsch has called “motherliness”:  

Its central emotional expressions are those of tenderness, nurturing and protectiveness . . . Many of the other psychic tendencies generally associated with the young woman’s life-stage now become subordinate. The need for emotional closeness with her ‘pre-Oedipal’ mother and the wish to be loved can be transformed into the wish to love; hostility, especially towards her new surroundings, can be directed towards the protection of her child from the environment; the longing of her reawakened sensuality can be temporarily sublimated, given over to the physical ministrations of her child. (206)  

It has to however be noticed that it is the common state of being outsiders stuck within the huge Maraar family where no one loved either one of them which brings them even more closer. Shared pain definitely seems the best adhesive for a bond. Janu makes up her mind to fight for her daughter’s right to be loved. Her determination to provide a better life for
Riya makes her take a private M. A. in literature and apply for an overseas scholarship which would take them away from the morale diminishers, the Maraars. To her it was amply clear that no treatment could cure Riya, yet she hoped that in America she would get a chance to go to a well-equipped school, get speech therapy and occupational therapy, and quite simply a better deal in life. But in Delhi to attend the interview for the scholarship Janu gets a second chance at love. She meets Arjun who offers to take her away to London right then. Though she is eager to take it, her love for her daughter and her knowledge of the pain such an act would cause to her mother and grandmother make her keep the offer of escape, pending. Back home she instinctively realizes that she had made the right choice:

I buried my face in her plump body, feeling a sense of utter relief that I had not succumbed to the mad, momentary temptation of leaving India without her, she wriggled out of my arms now to twirl around showing off her new pink dress . . . Oh my darling, I cannot believe how close I came to leaving you. What sort of madness must have been possessing me? Never, never, never any happiness at your cost, that I promise. (AP 208)

Clearly the mother-daughter bond is to Janu more important than even her regained love. Later too we find the first tiff between the lovers while in England arising out of Janu’s blunt statement to Arjun that Riya was the most important thing in her life, “Nothing else matters really” (AP 285). The bond of love and support provided by Janu’s mother, at the most
crucial moment of her life is seen to have been transferred intact into her own bond with her daughter Riya. As Ann Sexton writes: “A woman is her mother/ That is the main thing” (“The Housewife”).

The very title focuses on the aspect of female bonding. Janu believes that the reason she gives birth to Riya, her mentally challenged daughter, is because she must have made some ancient promise to her:

Somewhere in my distant past, perhaps even a thousand years ago,
I’d done something that committed me to dedicating this life to Riya’s care. Had I been a thirsty traveller at her door and had she taken me in, washed my feet, fed and watered me? . . . But, somewhere along the way, we had both lived many lives that linked us together now . . . (AP 160)

True to the Indian belief in destiny and fate Misra connects Janu’s thought processes to some unseen bond and strongly believes in it. Sudhir and Katharina Kakar in their *The Indians* talk about the innate notion in every Indian who need not necessarily be a Hindu to believe in “Samskara, a heritage of previous life with which a newborn is believed to come into the world” (194). He adds, “The karmic balance from a previous life and thus the innate dispositions with which one enters the present one serve to make a Hindu more accepting of the inevitable disappointments that afflict even the most fortunate of lives” (195-196). In the novel Janu effectively deals with what the Kakars would have called a “disappointment” and begins to believe that it is her greatest asset—her daughter.
The depth of the bond between a mother and her daughter is clearly revealed in this novel where mothers and daughters are willing to undergo any amount of pain and sacrifice for each other once they realize that the other is in need of her support. The bond is not one which has developed overnight but one which has been shaped in the fire of trials and tribulations experienced together. Janu sacrifices her first and only love, initially endures the unhappiness in her marriage without so much as a whimper because she knows that even a look of sadness on her face can mar the happiness of her mother and goes through much mental torture for the sake of her mother. But once she becomes a mother and finds that the Maraars are not going to accept Riya into their household, she begins to rethink her position. It is not for herself but for the rights of her daughter that she seeks to escape from her unhappy marital life. Till then she had borne her pain in silence for the sake of her mother but once she becomes a mother she is willing to face and challenge a hostile society for the sake of her daughter. Even Janu’s mother who is extremely traditional does not hesitate to take a decision which would rock her world and tarnish the family name when her daughter’s happiness is at stake. The core of the novel thus is undoubtedly the mother-daughter bond. Janu philosophizes the position of Indian women stuck within unhappy marriages thus, “And so women hang on in unhappy marriages to be able to give their daughters away respectably into hopefully not-unhappy marriages. And the daughters
went on to have, if they were lucky, just *slightly* unhappy marriages but soon had daughters they would need to get married off one day” (*AP* 303).

Respectability was a core requirement in the Indian marriage market where arranged marriages are the norm. And no mother who contested the rules of the society would be able to get her daughter married off. Riya’s disability proves a blessing in disguise and removes from Janu’s shoulders the burden of living in unhappiness for the sake of her daughter’s future. In her words, “She is freed from that circle of forced happiness” (*AP* 303). The strength to face the challenges of life and change her circumstances in spite of many setbacks by taking things into her hand definitely has its origin in the mother-daughter bonding depicted in the text.

Janu, on looking into the mirror finds a replica of her mother who loved and supported her and this strong positive image gives Janu the courage to take on the whole world for the sake of her daughter. Until Riya comes around she appears resigned to her fate but the moment she realizes that the Maraars are ashamed of and have no qualms in snubbing the presence of Riya, she rises up in all fury like a mother eagle screeching to guard her nest of eggs from predators. It could be argued that this novel in fact can be seen reinforcing the concept that women are predominantly mothers and act only in defense of their children, but it must be remembered that divorce, extra-marital affairs, and elopements have too great a stigma attached with them in the Indian society to be taken lightly.
Rama Mehta’s *Inside the Haveli* deals with the mother-daughter bond in an entirely different tone. Unlike Janu its protagonist Geeta gains strength from the mother-daughter bonding, not to change her circumstances but to adapt to them. As a fictionalization of Mehta’s sociological study “Purdah among the Oswals of Mewar,” it represents a way of life through a plethora of details, including the minutiae of domestic life. Viney Kirpal finds it a memorable book and ascribed to Mehta a Chinua Achebe-type of mission of resuscitating a denigrated past. The architecture, the rituals, the customs are all narrated with an exactitude which does credit to a sociologist’s painstaking research.

The work is an inside story of how women find degrees of freedom and happiness within the limits allotted to them. A girl born, educated and brought up in Mumbai would hardly seem the right choice of bride for a conservative, purdah-practising aristocratic family in Udaipur. *IH* is the story of how change comes over Geeta and she finds happiness, gains respect and acceptance in her own way.

In the very opening scene where she has just given birth to a baby girl, we find Geeta, the protagonist squirming under her inability to understand the customs, practices and traditions of the household. The innumerable do’s and don’ts, the constant warning to keep her face covered, the obligation to never voice out her opinion so that even the questions addressed to her had to be answered by the mother-in-law and the extremely formal behaviour between relatives to such a great degree
that “even her husband talked to his parents as if they were visiting
dignitaries with whom he could take no liberties” (IH 32) all at first choke
the girl who had always been encouraged by her parents in Mumbai to
speak her mind. Geeta lives through each day dreaming of the time when
her husband would, as promised to her earlier, move to Delhi. Yet, in due
course, when the argument with her husband over their leaving Udaipur
leads her to realize that he is having second thoughts; her reaction
astonishes the readers and even herself:

. . . the dream of leaving Udaipur died in her heart. She realized that
her husband was too rooted in the traditions of Udaipur. To leave his
parents would be impossible for him at a time when his father
needed him. And yet, deep down she felt relieved. At last she was
sure her life was to be in the haveli. (IH 54)

The relief that she claims to feel deep down seems curious, yet when one
observes the strong bonding between the women inside the haveli one
cannot but understand that Geeta’s reaction is a natural outcome. In fact
one can argue that Geeta finds a mother’s love and care in the haveli and
this helps her to adapt to her surroundings and find true happiness. As in
the biological mother-daughter tie the development of the strong bond with
the mother-in-law does not happen in a single day. Leela Dube observes
that:

. . . gender roles are conceived, enacted and learnt within a complex
of relationships. In the Indian family, there exists, despite its
patriarchal character, an independent community of women which evolves as a result of the taboo on interaction between the sexes. It is here that the female child is accultured into her social roles of daughter/wife/mother. (qtd. in Atrey 247)

The gradual acculturing of Geeta into her role of a proper Udaipuri daughter-in-law which the novel talks of is definitely a product of the bonding between the women. It is here within a household of mothering women that Geeta learns to adapt to “the lifelong ignominy of the purdah” (Millet 46) and conversely find happiness, love and the meaning of her life. There is an old English saying, “Doing what you like is license, liking what you do is happiness.” Geeta moves towards happiness after having learnt from the women around her, how to like, what she is in the midst of. Geeta is not the first or only one to undergo this experience. As Gitanjali Prasad observes, in India, “Every son walked in the footsteps of his father, every daughter-in-law faced the same challenges as her mother-in-law had before her” (11). Her own mother-in-law had arrived as a new bride to the haveli at the young age of twelve and had for fifty years been taunted and scolded by her mother-in-law who would always find fault with her. She had slowly got used to the sarcastic words so much that when a kind word escaped the old lady she was amused. However in spite of everything she was totally devoted to her mother-in-law and the shared joys and sorrows of the family bound them together. She says, “Nothing could break such a bond” (IH 47). And when the old woman died she discovered that there
was no one to make impossible demands on her only to find this new found freedom irksome. It is this very same process that we see being re-enacted in the case of Geeta. A microcosmic prophecy of the change we later witness in Geeta can be seen in the first few pages of the novel. Geeta recalls the events of her wedding day:

Bombay seemed so far away; her mother was not within call, and she was alone in the compartment with a man she hardly knew. But her tears had dried up and the thoughts of her mother had vanished the minute she had put her foot on the platform. She was immediately encircled by women singing but their faces covered.

(∗IH 16-17∗)

The incident can be seen as a metaphor of how the single mother concept is replaced by a kind of “group mothering.” Within the haveli it’s not one woman but many who share, and care for each other bringing about the said changes in Geeta. The haveli is pictured as a huge joint family where nothing is private. Everyone knows of what is going on everywhere and all contribute magnanimously to make the system work because they strongly believe that in the greater good of the haveli lies the happiness of each individual. Sudhir and Katharina Kakar makes note of this curious feature when they write, “The high cultural value placed on connection is, of course, most evident in the individual’s relationships with others. The yearning for relationships, for the confirming presence of loved ones and the psychological oxygen they provide, is the dominant modality of social
relations in India, especially within the extended family” (*The Indians* 197). From hence on Geeta’s life is a continuous melting down of her earlier self and moulding into a daughter-in-law fit for the family. Though the process is not without its set of pain, suffocation and torture, the many mother-figures help her through. She mostly accepts the discipline of the haveli. Often enough she feels the crushing weight of the walls that shut off the outside world, yet her protests and protestations become milder and milder as the narration progresses and the reader soon realizes that Geeta has slowly become enamoured of the traditions and the residents of the haveli:

I don’t want to leave Udaipur now. The haveli has made me a willing prisoner within its walls. How stupid I was not to see all that it holds. Where else in the world would I get this kind of love and concern? The children must grow up here. They must learn to love and respect this ancient house. (*IH* 170)

The change in the tone is brought about because she gets a chance to closely observe the equations within the system. She calls herself “a willing prisoner,” an oxymoron which reveals her comprehension of her status as a prisoner within the four walls yet . . . Geeta realizes that within the haveli the bonding is so strong that each woman gets total support from within and hence she claims to be a willing prisoner now.

At first Geeta has to face many a cruel comment about her appearance and even complexion. The women in the extended family are
highly critical of Geeta right from the first day predicting ominously “She will never adjust. She is not one among us.” (IH 29) and her mother-in-law’s remark, “Do not talk too much to your young cousins-in-law, it is not becoming. You know, the women are critical because you are still clumsy. I want to show them that even an educated girl can be moulded. That I was not wrong in selecting you as the wife of my only son,” (IH 30) only serves to infuriate her all the more as the insinuation that Geeta is not the perfect bride but has to be moulded into one is inherent in the statement. “No one thought her worthy of the family. Everyone was afraid she would embarrass them by an indiscreet word or a faulty move” (IH 31), Geeta cries in frustration. Instructions and pieces of advice on how to act flow from many a mother-figure to help Geeta out. This keeps Geeta constantly on the toes but slowly she realizes that behind the highly formal customs and strict adherence to the demands of etiquette there is a genuine concern for each other and a sense of belonging to the haveli which leads to a sincere desire for its welfare—and the new bride’s adaptation to the customs of the haveli is mandatory for its welfare. Everyone pools in but more than her husband or any other so-called masters it is the women who help her to adapt and later to find happiness within the haveli.

Her mother-in-law exhibits an in-depth understanding of Geeta’s personality and many a time initiates a compromise between the requirements of etiquette and Geeta’s needs. This according to Geeta was, “the kind of concern and affection that made Bhagath Singhji’s wife so
difficult to fathom” (*IH* 31). The way in which Geeta is moulded is a fine balance of words of censure and acts of love. The old maid Pari helps her appreciate the glory of the past by telling her many stories, and developing a sense of pride in Geeta. The situation which arises from Geeta’s attempt to start a school for the illiterate within the haveli can be seen as a microcosm of how the women stand by each other to make life better and happier for everyone. The classes had started accidentally when Geeta had offered to teach Ravi, the newly arrived nephew of a servant Gokul who had lately been orphaned. Ravi was eager to learn and he was soon followed by many children and even maids from other havelis. Geeta’s mother-in-law looked upon the classes with benign indulgence, confiding in Pari that she did not expect Geeta’s enthusiasm to last long. She tolerated the classes mainly because “they gave Geeta a great deal of joy” (*IH* 162), and when the mistresses of the other havelis come complaining that their maids are shirking work to attend the classes she sympathizes with their complaints but makes it clear that, “she was not going to say anything against her daughter-in-law” (*IH* 163). She refuses to let the others know that Geeta had begun the enterprise without consulting her because that would have given the traditional Udaipur society a rude shock and made people talk ill of Geeta, giving her a bad reputation. On her part Geeta, upon learning of the complaints is filled with remorse for having acted impetuously. She had had “no desire to humiliate her mother-in-law” or “compromise the name of Jeewan Niwas . . . because from them she had
received nothing but love and understanding” (*IH* 170). In this confused state when her husband offers her help to continue the classes she refuses telling him bluntly that, “She did not need anyone to fight on her behalf or give her moral support” (*IH* 169). She arrives at a decision on her own saying to herself, “How dare anyone say a word against the haveli, these classes are not worth continuing. I will stop the girls from coming” (*IH* 170). There was a new fervour in her which she had not experienced before. She apologizes to her mother-in-law declaring that she will stop the classes but her mother-in-law stands by her refusing to let her sacrifice her joy saying that she should not let the words of the outside world upset her. Geeta thus continues her classes and later when many of the girls begin to get better jobs and marriage proposals the whole community appreciates her fore-sight. The depth of understanding and support that the mother and the daughter give each other is what leads to the success of the endeavour. Moreover the incident makes it clear that more than the support of her husband it is the support of the mother-in-law that Geeta seeks and what empowers her.

This level of understanding and support grows deeper and deeper as the years progress. However, it does not mean that Geeta accepts the dictates of the society at every instance or that the haveli expects her to. When at the age of thirteen a proposal arrives for Vijay the daughter of Geeta, she realizes that her in-laws are extremely eager for the marriage. In a traditional set-up the opinion of the daughter-in-law need not even be
sought but the mother-in-law knows that Geeta would not be very happy about it and so attempts to convince her. This clearly reveals that the mother-in-law is more concerned about Geeta’s feelings than the pride of the haveli. She tries to explain to Geeta why this is the best proposal that a girl like Vijay could get and how the boy is suitable in all respects but upon Geeta’s initial vehement rejection of the idea she stops persisting. Even her husband shows that he is not entirely against the idea when he says that no steps will be taken until Geeta gives her green signal. The fact that the decision is left entirely to Geeta, who though confused has still not made up her mind when the novel ends shows how much Geeta is respected in the haveli. In spite of the ailing health of the master of the house who is given a demi-god status, his wishes are not shown to be immediately executed taking into account Geeta’s opposition to the marriage.

The death of the master of the haveli is another event which brings the mother and the daughter closer to each other. When Geeta finds it hard to control herself on seeing her mother-in-law in black devoid of all ornaments, her mother-in-law consoles her, “Don’t weep. If you don’t show strength now, to whom shall I look for comfort? You are all I have. Everything else is gone” (IH 264). It is to be noted that unlike the stereotypical Indian belief, it is not the son who forms the crutch for the widowed mother but the daughter-in-law. At these words Geeta struggles to control herself and the final scene shows the two together walking
towards the verandah of the courtyard, as the sound of wailing women
engulf the whole haveli. In joy and sorrow the women of the haveli are
seen walking together and gaining strength from each other.

Sita’s case however is a better example of how the independent
community of women that Leela Dube talks of takes care of each other.
Sita’s mother the maid Lakshmi abandons her soon after her birth within
the haveli because of certain false aspersions on her character. Though the
mistress of the haveli tries to get her back she in her pride refuses even
stating coldly, “Let my child starve, let her die, but I will not return to the
haveli” (IH 82). But the women in the household take over and instead of
one mother Sita grows up under the indulgence and sharp eye of many. “It
takes a village to raise a child” goes an African proverb that inspired the
name of Hilary Clinton’s best-selling book, It Takes a Village. In the
haveli too each member of the women’s inner circle is seen vying with
each other to nurture Sita. Right from the mistresses of the haveli to the
maids everyone pools in to bring her up, so much so that when she gets to
know that the old woman who had been bringing her ladoos was her real
mother, to her:

. . . she remained the woman who gave her ladoos. She could not
believe that the woman was her mother, she had not known a
mother’s love and she did not miss it. Her world remained secure.
Nothing had changed in it to disturb her peace of mind. Pari, Dhapu,
Ganga and Champa were all there. It was from them she had received love and to them she continued to look for love. (IH 231)

The concept of “group mothering” studied in detail by Robert Briffault in his *The Mothers* find an example in the novel. Developing a matriarchal theory of social evolution Briffault refers to a period when “there were group mothers. The term mother was applied equally to all women of the same generation and sons and daughters of the same generation of mothers belong to all mothers” (2: 234). Stanley Kurtz who did field studies in India points out, “Many of you will recall this practice still exists in India. We grew up with aunts who were elder mothers and younger mothers who had authority to look after us, discipline us” (48). Within Mehta’s haveli we come across one such community of women living together, sharing its joys and pains and looking after each other. Each woman in her turn gathers strength from this source, leading to a better life for all. The only one who fails to understand the strength hidden within this collectivity is Lakshmi. She can be seen as the foil to Geeta. From the very first chapter similarities between Lakshmi and Geeta are traced by the novelist, proving that this is what Lakshmi is intended to be. Both are finding it tough to make sense of the power inherent in mother-daughter bonds however, Geeta does and Lakshmi doesn’t. The innumerable hardships she has to face for this act of denying the source of love and strength when compared to Geeta’s slow but steady learning highlights the message given by Mehta.
The two novels discussed are in fact entirely different. The first one deals with how a girl gets out of a bad marriage and finds love, confidence and a new self once again. The second one talks of how a girl changes herself to suit her circumstances losing her old self, undergoing a sea change but finding a new version of happiness at the same time. Janu changes her circumstances to suit her needs and Geeta changes her needs to suit her circumstances. Though diametrically opposite in tone and content what helps each woman move towards happiness is the strength of the mother-daughter bond. This is what the thesis focuses on. One cannot but conclude that if the female bonding especially that between mothers and daughters is strong, the daughter gains the confidence and ability to take control of her life and achieve a moderate sense of success. Or in other words the protagonist will definitely find happiness or arrive at a favourable resolution to the dilemma which had formed the centre of the novel. Happiness need not lie in the vigorous feminist stance of total independence and self-reliance. This is rarely seen in Indian novels. Yet, if by the end the protagonist comes to a better understanding of the self and arrives at a resolution as to future action then one can say that there is definitely the creation of an empowered self.

But some might question why it has to be the mother’s love and support which brings female protagonists out of the rut they are in. Why cannot any others—fathers, brothers, husbands or even male friends—provide the necessary way out for them? In the two texts discussed at
length in this chapter we learn that Geeta’s husband Ajay had offered to present her case to get the necessary sanction from her father-in-law to continue her informal school in the haveli. But she rejects his offer telling him bluntly not to get involved, deciding to stop the school but changing her mind later when her mother-in-law gives her approval and support. Similarly in *Ancient Promises* though the route for escape to London is provided by Arjun the boyfriend who is willing to accept both Janu and Ria, it is not his support but her mother’s decree which makes her take the bold step into un-navigated waters for a married woman in her family.

There are many more such cases in English novels by Indian women where the mother-daughter bonds prove to be a succour, the crutch with which a woman pulls back into life. In Namita Gokhale’s *Gods, Graves and Grandmothers*, Gudiya is shown time and again saving her life through the active interference of mother-figures, first by her grandmother ammi, then by the sterile but caring educator Roxanne Madam and later by the voracious, voluble, loving, Phoolwati. It is these mother figures who take the girl under their patronage and make survival possible for her. Though a major part of her life is lived literally on the streets, the older women look after and provide her with comfort and solace. The last few lines of the text reveal the deep satisfaction inherent in the protagonist and due acknowledgement is given to the women in her life:

Rendering the past acceptable, if not accountable, is a talent I inherited from my Ammi. It is easy to live in the present. Life in
Phoolwati’s house—poetically called ‘The Ashiana’—has a soothing sameness in its rhythm. Phoolwati is invariably gentle with Mallika and me . . . Grandmother is dead, Roxanne is dead . . . but the end of the world is nowhere in sight. (GGG 240)
The positive note, the absolute sense of being in harmony with the world, these parallel what Gauri Deshpande had in her poem announced as the essence of female bonding. In another similar work, Anjana Appachana’s Listening Now, we get to see the unfolding of the worlds of seven female characters. The world of these women is one “where secrets grow like fungus, where guilt roots and ripens, where anger burns and smolders” (blurb). Every one of them carries the burden of secrets that may or may not be known by the others, yet each one unquestioningly stands by the others giving and gaining support from each other. Though the story is basically that of Padma, the novel begins with a narrative by her daughter and later supplements the gaps and clarifies the doubts rising from the narrative by adding the narratives of four other women—Padma’s sister Shanta, her close friends and neighbours, Anu and Madhu and finally her mother Rukmini. As each woman picks up the tale and tells it from her point of view, the kaleidoscope turns, blowing away earlier patterns and creating newer and more colourful patterns which are at once a continuation of the past narratives and at the same time entirely different too. Anjana Appachana with exquisite dexterity slowly disentangles the
knots one by one and by the end what stands out is the strength and beauty of the bonds between women especially the mothers and daughters.

Mothers are conceived of as cast in “the mould of God” (LN 51). To the daughters they are omniscient and possess a bottomless pit of love. Yet they are very much human and each possesses special quirks, secrets, and resort to lies and half-truths to deal with the world. Enclosed and enveloped in “the kind of love that only a woman can give to another,” (LN 154) they suffer for and stand by each other at all times. Often these mother and their daughters are seen to instinctively understand each other giving answers without the questions being asked and knowing even the shape of each other’s thoughts. It is this strong support-system which helps Padma survive through the most excruciating early stages of single motherhood. When her lover comes back into her life offering a new life and financial security she spurns his offer stating that she is not willing to “give up everything she has now. Her house, her friends, her independence” (LN 490). Though quite radical for the ordinary Indian mind-set this novel brings to the fore the deep strength that women derive from each other.

Kavery Nambisan’s On Wings of Butterflies too runs along the same lines. It tells the story of a young girl, Evita who gathers women from all over India to get together for a mass women’s movement to fight for equality, including in its charter of demands; payment for housework. The movement which begins with only her mother for a member, other than
herself grows to gigantic proportions, stunning the whole world. Each member of the core committee who are from different walks of life are seen wondering at the courage of this “pit of a girl” (OWB 36) to visualize such a huge project . . . but she makes it clear that her main source of strength has always been her mother—“her best friend” (OWB 3). In fact Maria, her mother too wonders at the girl’s courage:

Oh the idealism of youth. Her little girl, her own Eva, the only one among her six children who could get tangled in such big dreams. Maria had known all along that it would be so. When the girl was still an infant and Maria sprawled her across her feet to soap her baby limbs, she used to croon: “My brave little Eva . . . My brave little Eva,” without knowing why she said it. (OWB 4)

This act infuses more courage in the girl than even the mother had bargained for. Maria finds the idea of the women’s movement “incredulous . . . audacious . . . shocking . . . exciting . . . a dizzying, majestic plan” (OWB 6). In fact, the movement itself is something which Evita envisages for her mother’s benefit, to show the world that, “We are somebody. Maria and Evita” and Maria on her part is “the first to enroll” (OWB 6). This mother and daughter throughout the novel are presented as one single unit. They might have their set of arguments but when it comes to being there in times of need, each can count on the other.

In fact the account of the birth of Evita shows how deep their intuitive understanding of each other is. Unmarried Maria who had been
time and again duped by the sweet words of many a man found herself pregnant for the sixth time only to realize to her horror that she was going to have twins. It makes her desperately take up a knitting needle to insert into her vagina to break her water. She reaches the hospital distraughtly praying for dead twins, only to find that of the two, the gaunt daughter arrives holding fast to the throat of the healthy boy killing him in the process. The girl seems to have understood her mother’s need and commits murder to fulfill her wish. Upon her arrival the doctors and nurses crowd around her while the baby keeps crying out to them to take care of her mother as she instinctively feels that there is something drastically wrong with her. Her instinct proves to be true as Maria begins to bleed causing her “thinned and frayed womb” to be removed. From that day Maria develops a deep gratitude “to her newborn for having caused it [her womb] to come out so she would no longer have to bear the children of men who did not love her” (OWB 19). The depth of their understanding is so great that though they recognize each other’s faults neither one blames the other for it. They accept each other completely—faults, blemishes, defects, flaws, and all. Each looks after the other unable to bear even a frown in the brow as the other sleeps.

There are many more mother-daughter bonds pictured in the text, each one exemplary in the depth of love and understanding they reach after having gone through life’s harshness together. Absorbing courage from her mother Heera, Panna leads the women of Dharavi into the women’s
movement conceived by Evita. The newly found courage of the women leads them to take the parliamentary elections head on and even attend the convention in Delhi. Thus a mother and her daughter who inspire each other form the base for many more of the under-privileged women of Dharavi to enter into the mainstream. Tara another important figure in the novel, a self-confident, independent police officer who elects to stay single too is shown to be closest to a mother like figure that of her Aunt Foot. It is to Aunt Foot that she turns whenever she wants real companionship and advice. She is the only one who can see through all “her farce” and Tara openly divulges that it is only with Aunt Foot that she is “totally, utterly comfortable . . . because of your [her] sex” (*OWB* 150). The climax of the novel too highlights another mother-daughter bond. The radical, hard-core man-hater Lividia who tries to sabotage the convention can only be persuaded to change her mind by her daughter.

The title too is significant to female bonding. Jyotika, “the lightning-touched” grand daughter of Meghadasi, remembers her mother as a “butterfly with sodden wings” (*OWB* 135). Orphaned at birth, and brought up, on the kindness of neighbouring women she is always pleasant. It is this sisterhood of women, who willingly take care of the waif (though they themselves do not have much to spare) that forms the core for whom the likes of Evita are working. As Jyotika keeps painting “butterflies and women” (*OWB* 136) Evita, a few hundred kilometers away envisages an uprising of the women all over the world on the wings of these butterflies.
Though the movement fails, it succeeds in uniting many strong women and also in convincing the women all over the world that they deserve more. All this is achieved through shared narratives. From the beginning to the last the many women who fill the pages share each others stories, live and act together for the greater benefit of womankind. As the first novel which calls upon all Indian women to join their forces for a better deal, it is but natural that at the core lies the strength of mother-daughter bonds.

Another work where the bond between mothers and daughters is depicted is Gita Aravamudan’s *The Healing*, a family saga spanning seven decades and four generations of women. Living within a strict patriarchy during the tumultuous times of the Independence struggle and the wars with China to the twenty-first century’s predicament of communal disharmony these Tamil Iyengar mothers and daughters make living worthwhile by supporting each other through thick and thin. The attacks on the smooth running of the family from the outside world are dealt with collectively. Mythili the grandmother talks to Bharati the protagonist, of the period during the Independence struggle when the men were immersed in the struggle and the women were left to fend for themselves, “The Lord gives strength for everything, child. We were not alone. There were others like us in the village. We helped each other” (*TH* 56). It is the solidarity of the women which helps them to survive. These women manage to survive the odds and it is this core of steel that is transmitted from each mother to her daughter. The confidence perhaps comes from their high educational
status. Even during the period prior to Independence the women of the family gain an education for themselves. Mythili Patti is a Sanskrit scholar; the mother Lakshmi has passed the SSLC, and that too with a first class “even though I [she] was married and living in my [her] in-laws’ joint family” (TH 57); and the sister Alamelu even goes to college for a year. Their confidence and their desire to do something worthwhile with their time and intelligence is revealed in their deep desire to “have joined the freedom movement” (TH 57). These women do not lack courage of any form. The next generation of women take their educational standards to the next level and in the process the greatest inspiration is clearly their mothers. Mythili, on hearing that her granddaughter Bharu wants to be a doctor identifies the connection with her own suppressed desires, “Bharu wants to be a doctor. So did I. My mother knew Ayurveda. She could heal anyone with her herbal medicines. She learnt it from her mother. But before I could learn it from her, she died” (TH 86). Though Bharati fails to become a doctor her daughter Jayanti chooses the profession showing how deep the undercurrent of female bonding flows. Bharati can be seen reflecting this understanding of the essential link with the mother when she begs her mother Lakshmi in another context to “teach me to be like you” (TH 12).

If the first generation of women were hemmed in by the Lakshmanarekha of patriarchy the future generations do not hesitate to explore further. The tragedies which visit the family as a result stand out in
the way in which it brings the women of the house together. Rather than
the men it is the support of the women which is seen to matter. The men of
the household are driven by the rules of the society, while taking decisions
which cut off the ties which bind so as to retain the good name of the
family. The women, however, are more willing to bend and even break the
rules for the sake of the beloved daughters of the family. Just as in the case
of Padma in Anjana Appachana’s LN even when the fathers cast the single
mothers out of the household the mother sees to the financial security of
her child despite knowing that it is an act against the dictates of the father.
The mothers find it easier to understand their daughters and forgive them
much more easily while the fathers do not speak to these daughters as long
as they live. Throughout the text mothers are seen hovering protectively
around their daughters and the daughters too respond with love. Das’s
comment seems relevant in this context, “. . . daughterhood in India is not
without its rewards, precisely because the conditions of womanhood are
normally so forbidding” (22). It is this love that helps the buds to bloom
into flowers. There are many instances throughout the novel where the
women are seen to solidly stand by their daughters comforting them as the
society lashes against them—Mythili and Sita; Lakshmi and Bharati;
Bharati and Swapna; Bharati and Jayanti; Sita and Revati; and Rukmini
and her twins Sridevi and Sumathi. Buffeted by the winds of cruel words
they stand with their arms around each helping the other “stand upright”
(TH 233). The way the daughters Sita and Jayanti stand up with their head
held high clearly comes from the love, understanding and courage that their mothers have given them. Sita in turn provides the same to Revathi proving the statement, “In her relation to her own child, a woman repeats her own mother-child history” (Deutsch 205).

The husband Krishna too is shown to be very supportive but in spite of it Bharati lives in constant fear of the many accusations of her mother-in-law. The reason perhaps lies in the fact that her husband prefers to deal with each new situation by sweeping it under the carpet not by settling it once and for all. Repeatedly we find that each time his mother ill-treats his wife Krishna runs to the rescue and takes his mother away, pacifies her and returns to tell Bharati to forget it all. The way she finally gets over her fear and guilt is a prime example of the power which can be derived from the mother-daughter bond. It is only when Jayanti her daughter reaches marriageable age that Bharati reveals her past and the reason for her mother-in-law’s harsh comments to her. Unlike her husband her daughter however teaches her to stand up for herself. By the complete understanding that her daughter gives her, Bharati gains back her self-esteem and finally manages to deal with her mother-in-law. In the final confrontation with her mother-in-law she does not break down into tears as is her habit but announces very peacefully that she wholeheartedly accepted her daughter’s choice of husband and feels proud rather than guilty, of being her mother. The final lines where Bharati declares to her husband that for the first time the harsh criticism by her mother-in-law has not hurt her reveal to us that
Bharati has finally broken free. If the predicament faced by Bharati finds a “healing” the complete credit has to be given to her daughters Jayanti and Swapna and of course the memories of the sufferings of her mother and grandmother and how in spite of all hardships they had stood together united in their love for each other.

One aspect which stands out more clearly than the rest in these novels, is that the mothers are coloured in more realistic hues. They are not perfect or in any sense free from blunders. The daughters are also aware of the failings of their mothers but this does not reduce the love between them. It is the understanding given by their daughters which take the mother-daughter bond towards its natural end. These daughters when they look into the mirror are able to see themselves as the product of the love of their mothers. The confidence derived from this knowledge is what helps these daughters to survive. The dilemmas they face then find satisfactory resolutions. Mother-daughter bonds of love can indeed act as the shield which keeps women protected from all the hardships which they normally face in a patriarchy.