Chapter Four

Phoenixian Bonds

Greek mythology tells us that Electra instigated her brother Orestes to kill their mother, Clytemnestra as she held Clytemnestra responsible for their father Agamemnon’s death. However, psychologists tell us that her sexual jealousy of her mother and her intense love for her father had an important role to play in making her take up the cruel agenda of matricide. Freud believed that girls have an inborn love for their fathers and hence a resultant jealousy of their mothers’ close bond with the fathers. According to Freud and his followers most girls naturally overcome such emotions as they mature but some carry such feelings in their hearts for a long time leading to what has been famously termed by C. J. Jung as “Electra complex.” Though Freud was the first to suggest it (he preferred to use the terms “feminine Oedipus attitude or negative Oedipus complex”), psychologists all over the world have lapped it up, to the extent that counselling sessions for women all over the world invariably have questions related to their relationship with their mothers.

Though psycho-sexualists, believe that hatred between mothers and daughters rise out of the inherent variant of Oedipus complex a closer look will reveal many other reasons for the scattered instances of hatred within the bond. Mothers are often the unacknowledged executors of the will of the patriarchy. The mother thus becomes the upholder of tradition and the
first pedagogue of “do’s” and “don’ts” flow from her lips. As according to patriarchy there should be more restrictions on women than men the “do’s” and don’ts” are usually more in the case of a girl child. Very often children are unable to grasp the greater social realities and hence young girls fail to understand why there are more restrictions on them compared to their brothers. Accusations of preference for the male sibling can be seen to repeat itself time and again in the minds of girls. This often converts the mother into a villainous figure in their psyche. Many girls never overcome this stage, or remain in the influence of this stage for a long time.

Literature, mirroring life presents plenty of such examples. In this chapter the texts which appear to deal with daughters who hate their mothers are analyzed in greater detail. The texts dealt with in-depth are—Shashi Deshpande’s The Dark Holds No Terrors and Roots and Shadows, Namita Gokhale’s Paro: Dreams of Passion, Githa Hariharan’s The Thousand Faces of Night, and Manju Kapoor’s Difficult Daughters.

All five of the female protagonists in these texts—Saru, Indu, Priya, Devi and Virmati respectively hate their mothers vociferously. When told of her mother’s death Saru in DHNT for a moment remembers her mother and states that “the memory was as violent as an assault and angrily she rejected it” (DHNT 15). She voices her hatred for her mother in the clearest terms, “I hate her, sapping me of happiness, of everything. She’s always done it to me . . . taken happiness away from me. She does it even
now when she is dead” (*DHNT* 109). Indu in *RS* who has lost her mother hates the matriarch of the family Akka so much that she calls her “an old ghoul” (*RS* 184) and constantly rebels throughout her stay at the family home picking up fights for silly things. The way in which the bond between Priya and her mother is described, in *PDP* reveals beyond doubt that there is no love lost between the two:

In actual fact I barely existed for her. Family circumstances had more or less forced me to take up a secretarial course rather than complete college; all our family savings went into making my brother a doctor. As there was no prospect of our being able to shell out any dowry for me, my mother forebode a bleak spinsterhood. ‘Perhaps she will find some deaf-mute to marry her, ’ she would mutter with gloomy relish. And yet she was full of venom at my ‘Fastness’; it was not in Raipur as it was in Bombay, ‘and even a deaf-mute would expect his wife to be respectable.’ I was, of course, the only earning member of my family. (*PDP* 8)

The caustic nature of the bond is clearly revealed in the mother’s predictions of a bleak future for the girl and the relishing tone which Priya ascribes to the statement. The daughter who actually does fit the definition of a “fast” woman (Priya does not think twice before getting into bed with her boss either before or after her marriage) however feels that her mother is venomous in pronouncing her so. Clearly the fact that Priya is the only earning member of the family has left her mother with little control over
her actions, and Priya prefers to rub her nose in this fact. Devi in *TFN* describes their family with these words, “Amma, my mother, Anna, my father and I had always been a tightly-knit little nucleus of our own. I suspect Amma wanted it that way” (*TFN* 12). Notice that she uses the word tightly-knit instead of the more customary, closely knit. The fact that it was her mother who intended it that way shows the amount of anger Devi holds suppressed against her manipulative mother. As a child, Devi finds her mother cold and often distant, describing her love as, “too snobbish to caress freely” (*TFN* 84).

Manju Kapoor’s *DD* in fact underscores the incompatibility between the mother and the daughter in the very first line, “One thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother.” Though this statement is about Ida’s bond with her mother Virmati, the bond in central focus that between Virmati and her mother Kasturi too is characterized by the very same bitterness. Virmati the eldest of eleven children ran the house and looked after the younger children for her mother who was mostly ill. She yearned for her mother’s affection but was always repulsed, “However when she put her head next to the youngest baby, feeding in the mother’s arms, Kasturi would get irritated and push her away asking, ‘Have you seen to their food—milk—clothes—studies?’” (*DD* 6) Virmati’s is “the fate of the typical girl-child who is never coddled and appreciated, who is blamed for everything that goes wrong, who is never a child and who is always a woman” (Jain “The Marginalisation of the Girl Child” 84).
All five of the protagonists of these novels remember their mothers in a negative light. Is it as Freud found a case of inborn love for the father which drives the girls to hate their mothers? Or is it a form of resistance against patriarchy which takes the form of rebellion against the most visible patriarchal agent? A closer look at the father-daughter bonds in these novels will reveal that Saru considers her father inept and disorganized. She does not show any great love for her father. The only positive memory that she has of her father is that he once supported her when she raised the demand to study further. But even that occasion does not seem to have brought them any closer. The second time she seeks his help telling him vividly of the atrocities in her married life hoping for a solution, “she could only hear his words telling her to go . . . he had nothing for her” (*DHNT* 205). Indu’s father too is an epitome of bungling incompetence. He is picturised as a wanderer who is unconcerned about worldly things to the extent of forgetting the very existence of his daughter. Indu’s father involves himself in her life only twice; once, to take her away to a hostel for higher studies, and later to attend her marriage with Jayant. Devi’s father too is comparatively unseen in the novel. Even his death is not given much importance. Virmati and Priya too never express any special attachment to their fathers. In fact, in none of these novels do the fathers play any role of importance in either the development of the action or occupy the thoughts or hearts of the protagonists for any considerable amount of time. Hence Electra complex
or negative Oedipus complex as the only and most natural base for the hatred between mothers and daughters can certainly be ruled out.

The role mothers play as patriarchal agents seem to have more responsibility in the bitterness within the bond. In the case of all the five protagonists we find the harshness in the way they were brought up heightening their animosity for their mothers. Leela Dube in “On the Construction of Gender” writes of the Indian girl’s process of growing up:

The young girl’s sexuality is to be repressed and controlled. Any expression of it may invite unwanted male attention. The concept of honour plays an important role in the repression of the girl’s sexuality. Any misdemeanour on her part would bring shame to both herself and her family, result in decreased chances of getting a good match. Therefore behavioural norms for girls are prohibitive.

Unlike Manu’s dictum of being kind to the girl child while executing these rules in deference to her delicate physical and emotional position often we find that mothers for one reason or another do not take the time to explain things to their daughters, expecting them to obey unquestioningly. Keen on creating young women who would be accepted by the patriarchy these mothers, according to their daughters stifle their spontaneity. Beauvoir acknowledges this universal rule when she talks of how a girl is taught, “to repress her spontaneity and replace it with studied grace and charm taught her by her elders” (376). Devi attests to the fact when she writes about her
childhood, “Thus we lived ordinary lives most of the year, in a house Amma filled with her mottoes, the words I heard most often from her as I was growing up: order, reason, progress” (TFN 26). But none of the five protagonists of these works are willing to fit the bill of patriarchy. They rebel through words and deeds especially against whom they perceive to be the strictest agent of patriarchy—their mothers.

The mother-daughter relationship undergoes added conflict and strain in the adolescent years. Nortar and McDaniel describe the mother/daughter relationship as "... often conflictual, particularly during their daughter's adolescence" (13). They further note two studies, Flax in 1978 and Fisher in 1981, that report that during adolescence daughters hold the most negative attitudes toward their mothers. The protagonists being studied in this chapter break all the possible rules in the rule book, throughout their childhood and especially during their adolescent years, with an eye on irritating their mothers. Saru runs around in the sun in spite of being told again and again by her mother that it would ruin her complexion. She almost flaunts her darker skin colour in front of her mother. Indu provokes Akka’s anger by climbing trees and walls and talking to boys when she has been forbidden to do so. Priya deliberately looks down on her mother’s melodramatic actions and pronouncements derisively and never hesitates to get into a pre-marital affair with her boss. Devi rejects her mother for the more loving grandmother with whom her own mother was in perennial conflict.
C. J. Jung assigns this kind of rebellion to a negative mother-complex. In his words the motto of this type of women is, “Anything so long as it is not like Mother!” (The Archetypes 90). We can see this sentiment being echoed by all of the five protagonists. Saru is the most voluble declaring openly, “If you are a woman, I don’t want to be one” (DHNT 62). Indu is shocked when Jayant comments on the similarities between herself and Akka. Priya considers every single pronouncement of her mother “filmi” and dissociates herself as much as possible. Because Devi’s mother refuses to let her bond with anyone, especially her peers Devi deliberately attaches herself to a distant orphaned cousin Annapurna to provoke her mother. The daughter in describing the mother’s reaction to the friendship uses the simile of “a bitch guarding her own” (TFN 77). This clearly reveals the intensity of the hatred which the daughter feels for the mother.

Another method of resistance by the daughter identified by C. J. Jung lies in turning her attention to intellectual pursuits or gaining for herself a better education than her mother. C. J. Jung writes:

Again resistance to the mother can sometimes result in a spontaneous development of intellect for the purpose of creating a sphere of interest in which the mother has no place. This development springs from the daughter’s own needs and not at all for the sake of a man whom she would like to impress or dazzle by a semblance of intellectual comradeship. Its real purpose is to break
the mother’s power by intellectual criticism and superior knowledge, so as to enumerate to her all her stupidities, mistakes in logic, and educational shortcomings. Intellectual development is often accompanied by the emergence of masculine traits in general. (Archetypes 91)

All the five protagonists resort to this method to distance themselves from their mothers, to be able to believe that they are different from their mothers, to believe that they are better than them. Their insistence on studying further is in fact a desire to crush the dreams that their mothers have for them. Saru admits “. . . I had to work hard, to be a success, to show them . . . her . . . something. What? I didn’t know” (DHNT 50). In spite of her mother’s protest that they would not have any money left to marry her off Saru insists on taking a Medical degree, making her the only doctor in their neighbourhood and thus different from the rest of the women there, especially her mother. Jasbir Jain prefers to look at this attempt to educate oneself for a better deal in life in a more positive way than C. J. Jung does. To her, the antagonism towards the mother actually plays a positive role in setting the girl-child free from meekly following the blueprint set for her by the society. She writes:

The mould of the mother awaits a young girl in her adulthood. The antagonism or hostility frees her to find her ‘self’ to prevent a complete submergence in the ideal, which is all pervasive in a woman’s socio-moral environment and is deeply embedded in
socialisation processes as well as in the notion of acceptability and approval. ("Daughters of Mother India” 1655)

Virmati in DD however has more difficulties than Saru in getting her way. When Virmati demands to study further the reply she gets is full of taunts at wanting to be independent and stubborn and not caring for the well-being of the family. Instead of providing love or understanding Kasturi gets irritated and even hurts Virmati by banging her head on the wall. When this does not, as Kasturi had expected, “knock some sense into her” (DD 104) she begins to get the cold shoulder treatment which affects Virmati more deeply. Yet she remains adamant and even attempts suicide. The point is finally driven home and Virmati is allowed to study further in Lahore. Kasturi herself takes Virmati to the hostel and is happy to see the spartan conditions, and allows herself to relax. Each time Virmati returns home for her vacations she is hounded by comments on the uselessness of education for a girl and the absolute need for her to get married. However amidst it all Virmati remains unyielding. Though at the back of her mind is the hope of a life with the Professor she loves, it is the image of her cousin Shakuntala a professor in a city college in Lahore that she idealizes. Unlike her mother who according to her is caught in the drudgery of domesticity she dreams of something different. Indu and Devi too use education as a means of getting away from the autocratic rule of their mothers. Priya’s education helps her to escape from her mother, through a job and she uses the fact that her mother is a housewife to consider herself
superior to her. She seems to detest the ordinariness of her family and especially that of her mother. Her greatest desire is to move up in the social ladder and reach a position as different from her roots as possible. Dressed in finery and moving in the socially elite circles of Bombay she begins to find her mother’s simplicity irritating. Her yearning for a glamorous life can thus be read as a form of rebellion against her mother. The daughters, by educating themselves seem to want to move away from what Judith Kegan Gardiner has termed the “mother-villain, the woman whom the daughter fears she will come to resemble, the woman whose life is without power and worldly success the daughter seeks, the woman who represents an adherence to customs the daughter wishes to overthrow” (King 164).

However it is in the choice of the husbands that one finds rebellion against their mothers at its highest, “All her instincts are concentrated on the mother in the negative form of resistance and are therefore of no use to her in building her own life. Should she get as far marrying . . . the marriage will be used for the sole purpose of escaping from her mother” (Jung, C. J. *Archetypes* 91). Indu follows this pronouncement in exercising her choice of husband which does not meet with the approval of Akka. In fact she marries Jayant knowing fully well that a man from a different caste would be a choice which would upset Akka. One even wonders if her attraction to Jayant is partially because she is aware that he would not meet the approval of the mother-figure she hates. It could in fact
be a method of provoking Akka to greater anger. Akka responds by banning the whole family from any contact with her. Saru had always considered that, “to get married, and end up doing just what your mother did, seemed . . . not only terrible but also damnable” (*DHNT* 140). Yet, when Manu proclaims his love for her she holds fast in all eagerness. Having believed from her childhood that she was ugly and unlovable, Manu’s declarations sweep her off her feet. But a greater role in the acquiescence is played by her mother’s anger. Saru recalls how, “her mother had called him ‘that man’ as if his name would have sullied her lips” (*DHNT* 30). She admits to the memory of her mother that, “If you hadn’t fought me so bitterly, if you hadn’t been so against him, perhaps I would never have married him” (*DHNT* 96). Just like Indu, Saru too had always known that her mother being very particular about caste matters would not approve of Manu, who was from a lower caste. Her mother warns her, “I know all these ‘love marriages.’ It’s love for a few days, then quarrels all the time. Don’t come crying to us then.” Saru can barely disguise her scorn when she replies, “To you? God, that’s the one thing I’ll never do. Never!” (*DHNT* 69). With the marriage she is cast out of the family and for this too she holds her mother more responsible than her father. Both Saru and Indu subscribe to “the romantic myth in defiance of a caste-compatible arranged marriage” (D’Cruz).

Virmati too finds herself outside the protective care of her family on her marriage to the professor, who is already a married man. Even when
Virmati arrives at her father’s funeral she is shooed off and directly blamed by Kasturi for having caused the deaths of her father and grandfather. Though Virmati’s marriage cannot be seen as a direct act of rebellion intended to inflict pain on her mother as in the case of Indu and Saru, the mother’s attitudes do play an important role in the decision. Virmati wants to be as unlike her mother as possible and the life that the professor offers appears radically different. She wants to be the intelligent wife, who provides intellectual companionship to the man in contrast to the roles played by her mother and the professor’s first wife. Priya’s marriage is however, arranged by her mother. Yet, there is an awning gap between the reasons why the mother and the daughter focus their attention on the same man. Though the mother values the family, sober habits and good nature of the boy, Priya trashes them all basing her decision solely on the Standard Herald car the boy possessed. Agreeing to the marriage for this reason alone Priya is actually rebelling against all that her mother holds dear. Throughout the marriage preparations the mother is not mentioned and henceforth Priya behaves as if she does not exist. Priya is only too glad to escape from her mother’s house. Like Priya, Saru and Indu too do not even try to meet their mothers for many years holding their grudges close to their hearts. Devi’s marriage though different yet has the very same core. When with her mother’s blessings she marries Mahesh, she “swallowed my (her) hard-earned education, bitter and indigestible, when he tied the thali around my (her) neck . . .” (*TFN* 74). The reason
why she agrees to the proposal from Mahesh too is curious . . . he did not have a mother. Clearly she has had enough mothering for a lifetime.

In fact these women so hate their mothers that they exhibit a detestation of everything even remotely feminine. As has been recorded earlier, resistance to mothers according to C. J. Jung, “often manifests itself in menstrual disturbances, failure of conception, abhorrence of pregnancy, miscarriages and so on” (Archetypes 91). Each of the protagonists dealt with in this chapter has her own version of these problems which can be traced to the onset of puberty. Mukta Atrey notes, “Although this process of preparing the girl child towards her ‘otherness’ begins in early childhood, it is intensified from the moment of her attaining puberty” (249) leading to “dramatic changes in the life of a girl” (Dube 172). Reactions and responses of young girls clearly vary. Simone de Beauvoir comments on the different attitudes seen in girls apropos their first menstrual experience: “If she has already accepted her condition, she greets the event with joy—‘Now you are a woman.’ If she has always refused to accept her condition, the bloody verdict stuns her; most often she falters; the monthly uncleanness makes her inclined to feel disgust and fear” (340). Saru’s hatred of menstruation starts as a reaction to her attitude to her mother:

‘You’re growing up,’ she would say. And there was something unpleasant in the way she looked at me, so that I longed to run away, to hide whatever part of me she was staring at. ‘You
should be careful now about how you behave. Don’t come out in your petticoat like that. Not even when it’s only your father who’s around.

And it became something shameful, this growing up, so that you had to be ashamed of yourself, even in the presence of your own father . . . my periods began . . . It was torture. Not just the three days when I couldn’t enter the kitchen or the puja room. Not just the sleeping on a straw mat covered with a thin sheet. Not just the feeling of being a pariah, with my special cup and plate by my side in which I was served from a distance, for my touch was, it seemed, pollution. No, it was something quite different, much worse. A kind of shame that engulfed me, making me want to rage, to scream against the fact that put me in the same class as my mother. (*DHNT* 62)

Indu too endorses the same sentiment. With her induction into menstruation as an unclean stage Indu begins to resent her womanhood, “I, who had all the child’s unselconsciousness about my own body, had, for the first time, felt an immense hatred for it . . . I was unclean” (*RS* 87). When told of the rules which made her an outcast for three days the young rebel screams out, “I won’t be a girl then”(*RS* 119) only to be laughed at by the other women. Both of them begin to hate their femininity. Devi however has a friendly mother-figure who helps her out, “When I bled for the first time, my stomach cramped in knots of pain I went in search of my
grandmother. Don’t tell anyone else, she whispered to me. They’ll make you sit alone in the room at the back for three days” (TFN 87). The two become accomplices in fooling the mother and the rest of the family. Thus her initiation into womanhood becomes an adventure that, they share, though in accord with universal practices it continues to be, in the young Devi’s mind as in the minds of all young girls, something shameful and hence to be hidden.

As has been stated by C. J. Jung it does not stop with menstrual pains alone. Saru goes on to hate even her own body just because it is a female one. She later admits that it was only when she studied anatomy at medical college that she realized how wonderful a woman’s body was and began to enjoy her curves and roundness. Saru hates her mother so much that she has to go away from her mother in order to appreciate even her femaleness. The other purely feminine characteristics like pregnancy and childbirth too are received unenthusiastically by her:

. . . the children had started as a disappointment. She had been buoyed up through all the months of pregnancy by the thought of a miracle awaiting her. The miracle of motherhood. But when, after a day-long struggle, she had felt through a haze of pain and shock, Renu’s head forcing itself out she had been outraged by the indignity of it. Her posture, her grunts, her cries, the pain which made an animal out of her . . . was this then the prelude to motherhood. (DHNT 161)
Saru appears to be totally disillusioned with anything remotely connected with the feminine.

Devi too refuses to adapt to her femininity; however she reacts differently in that she refuses to become a mother. She remains unperturbed by the fact that she cannot conceive. Her indifference makes Mahesh accuse her of not wanting to be a mother, “You look so fragile, so feminine. It’s hard to believe that you don’t want a child” (TFN 93). She is not ready to have motherhood forced onto her because she doubts their ability to become good parents. The situation arises from Mahesh’s dubious replies to her questions on parenthood, “‘Why do you want a baby,’ I asked. ‘What kind of a question is that,’ Mahesh said” (TFN 87). Rebel that she is, she is not willing to do something just because the whole world expects her to as hinted by Mahesh. His eyes, which appraise her body on returning from each business trip seeking eagerly for signs of pregnancy, along with her own ill feelings about her mother combine to infuriate her. For her motherhood is a commitment as she herself puts it, “to be a good mother, to be a mother at all, you have to earn the title just as you have to renew your wifely vows every day” (TFN 89). And until she comes to terms with it through her status as a daughter she is unable to consider motherhood.

Both Priya and Virmati go through the cycles of unwanted pregnancies, abortions, miscarriages and all the related tortures. Priya conceives after many long years of a sterile marriage. Though outwardly
she goes through the notions of a happy pregnancy—knitting sweaters and shawls and booties for the unborn child, embroidering bed sheets and pillowcases, stitching nappies—deep inside she admits to being terrified of the thought and act of childbirth. She confesses, “I had heard so much about the pain of parturition that I would awaken screaming soundlessly in the dead of night, my body covered with cold sweat. The doctor reassured me that it was only gas, but I knew better. It was terror” (PDP 68). And proving her fears right, she soon loses her baby. Virmati too goes through the very same rigmarole. However she has to first go through the pain of abortion before the professor gathers courage to marry her. The first pregnancy comes as a shock to her and unable to contact the professor she sells her gold bangles to raise the money to abort the much feared baby growing inside her. Her second pregnancy too is hateful to her. Though the child is welcomed eagerly by the professor as a child of their loving union Virmati begins to hate it as she is made to sleep with her mother-in-law who “sang Sanskrit slokhas through the night . . . often making rotating motions with her hand over” (DD 225) Virmati’s abdomen. The extended hand of her old mother-in-law often makes her jump in horror. This pregnancy does not last long either:

Virmati had completed three months of pregnancy when she woke up in the middle of the night convulsed with cramps. Thick, dark red, rubbery clots dotted the inside of her salwar. Bent double with agony, she managed to get up, fold some old cloth into a long, thick
pad and tie it around herself with a string. In no time at all she could feel the blood soaking through. Alarmed, she lay down, clenching her thighs together, hoping that if she was very careful and did not move the cramps would go away. *(DD 226)*

However the doctor arrives only to announce that the child had been lost. The feminine role of mother too does not seem to rest lightly on the shoulders of these women. Indu does not have any children and the narrative does not give any reasons for the same. Virmati’s daughter Ida speaks openly of how her mother had kept using her as a means to get appreciation from the professor and remained unaware of Ida’s own interests and desires in life leading to an unbridgeable gap between the two. Saru, though the mother of two seems to dissociate herself from motherhood completely, “Have you ever seen a baby being born? Do you know, Manu, how easy it is to cut the umbilical cord and separate the baby from the mother? Ligate, cut and it’s done. There’s scarcely any bleeding either. It is as if nature knows the child must be detached from the parents. No Manu, for me there will be no trauma, no bleeding” *(DHNT 39)*. Saru does not even feel comfortable calling her children her own. When she shows her father a snap of her two kids and unconsciously announces them as her children, she corrects herself, “My children . . . suddenly she found herself full of distaste for the words. How possessive they sounded. Can one ever possess another human being? The act of birth can be cruelly deceiving, making you imagine you have some claim on the human you
bring into the world” (*DHNT* 164). Saru seems to be overcome by the fear of not being able to measure up to all that her children would expect from her leading to a kind of detachment. In fact she often feels perturbed by the silent stares of her own daughter Renu, “becoming nervous, unsure, uncertain of herself” (*DHNT* 33).

Each one of these women who hate their mothers to the extent of wiping out everything feminine within them seeks to forget and thus escape their mothers. Indu stays away from home for as long as thirteen years; Saru does not even allow the memory of her mother to come to her mind; Priya caught in the glamorous life of the city mentions her mother’s death in a single line forgetting to even tell the readers if she had been to attend her last rites; Virmati tries to meet her mother twice but seeing the unforgiving nature prefers to stay away for three years; and Devi chooses to run away from the life her mother had chosen for her by taking a lover. However, one notices that in spite of working hard at their high aspirations of a life away from their mothers they are unable to find happiness.

Saru becomes a victim of the nightmarish cruelty of marital rape. She compares herself to a “ventriloquist’s dummy” leading a life without any meaning to it. She fears that one day her assistant Nirmala “would look in and find no one behind the table. Just a white coat containing nothing. Emptiness” (*DHNT* 22). Indu too is stuck in a job she hates unable to find the daring to break free from the system which saps her of all her positive energy. Her love for her husband Jayant too is described as
a “restricting bond, tormenting . . . which she was so futilely struggling against” (RS 186). Priya finds herself totally isolated with not a single person to love her. Her affair with B. R. and the finding out of the manuscript she had been writing make her husband throw her out of their home. Devi too finds herself an unwanted appendage to her lover Gopal, the famous musician, stared at by the visitors and talked about by the audience at any gathering. Virmati finds herself insecure about the professor’s love for her even having to fight with her co-wife for her conjugal rights. Each one of them is in pain, having nowhere to run to, no shoulder to cry on and no motherly breast to share it.

But each one of them gets a chance to introspect. Each of the protagonists due to one reason or another is offered a moment of respite, a time for reflection, understanding and acceptance. In the case of Saru it comes with the news of her mother’s death:

Do you know your mother is dead? . . . the finality of it pierced her. Her mother was dead. But the realization brought not grief but anger. A childish rage filled her. It was no use now. She would never show her as she had so often told herself she would.

I’ll show her. I’ll make her realize.

But her mother had not waited for the reply. She had gone leaving the battle unfinished, taking victory away with herself. All her postures now crumbled into dust, into nothingness. She had been
posing, making gestures of defiance at a person who wasn’t there at all. She felt foolish and ridiculous. (*DHNT* 60)

The pyrrhic nature of the victory upsets her to the extent of making her decide on a journey back home. She packs her bags, and arrives at her parental doorstep much to the surprise of her father. It is here that she begins to re-examine the whole situation. Initially she is on the defensive, accusing her mother of having cursed her life as no mother should. But slowly as days pass she begins to see her mother in a new light. It all starts with the step she metaphorically takes into the room in which her mother used to sleep. Slowly she begins to dress like her mother in old frayed saris, never bothering to tie up her hair or to look presentable. She even begins to resemble her mother, making her father comment, “Saru, do you know you look amazingly like your mother now?” (*DHNT* 164). It is pertinent to note that this remark by her father does not seem to annoy her, revealing that the ice has finally begun to thaw. Slowly the similarities overcome the differences. She begins to remember strange bits of conversations with her mother as the one where she accuses Saru of not wanting to spend any time with her. Her complaint, “Can’t you talk? Am I so much below your notice? You can talk to your friends for hours, but you can’t speak a sentence to your mother. What am I? An enemy?” (*DHNT* 170) gives the hint to Saru that perhaps lack of communication was the root cause of all her mis/reads of her mother. Saru’s role in her brother’s death was always a bone of contention between the mother and
the daughter. On seeing the dead body the mother had accused Saru of killing her brother. Saru however, takes the cry of pain from a mother’s heart seriously even believing that her mother did not want her to be alive. It is only when her father brings this to her notice that she realizes how all the while that she had been blaming her mother for not forgiving her it was she who had in fact never forgiven her mother. It is only upon this revelation that Saru is able to cry openly breaking the bond of hatred and replacing it with a new understanding. She returns, “. . . symbolically to her origins, not as the beloved daughter of her mother, which she was not . . . but as the legatee of her mother's discovery of the loneliness of individual subjectivity” (D’Cruz). It is this knowledge which helps her to find a way out of the trauma she is going through.

Henceforth her life is viewed altogether in a new light. She studies the room of her parents and observes how her mother had managed to efface her personality from the room, “And how powerful, how strong, she now thought, her mother had been to achieve that. How certain of herself she must have been” (DHNT 19). Slowly but steadily we find this very same sense of purpose creeping into Saru. Called to cure the child of a neighbour she is once again able to find a meaning in her existence. She begins to read the letters of her children, asking her to return in a lighter vein. She finally dares to give voice to her greatest fear, the fact of the nightmarish brutality which her husband regularly inflicted on her. She had always been puzzled by her husband’s ability to act normal during the
day as if nothing abnormal had happened during the night. She fears to talk about it because she is under the mistaken notion that talking about it would make it a reality which can then never be swept under the carpet. However gaining courage from her newly-acquired understanding of her mother she realizes that there is more to life than dependency on marriage, parents and other such institutions—and she resolves to use these to make a better life for herself. Pushp Lata observes, “Saru realizes that she cannot attain happiness through anyone else, be it a husband, a father or a child. She can attain peace of mind by her own efforts. No one can give. Now she is ready to face her husband as well as affairs of her life” (137). This conviction is visually presented in the joy with which she now reads the letters from her children and also her determination to finally open the door to her husband.

Like Saru, Indu too had lived away from her childhood home for a long time never bothering to return or enquire after any of her family. But upon hearing that Akka is ill and wants to see her, she makes the journey with which the novel begins. She cannot understand the reason why Akka has sent for her. The rest of the novel however is her process of discovering the Akka that she had failed to understand while she was alive. On her deathbed Akka names her the heir to all her wealth stupefying her. Akka forestalls all arguments from her announcing that she is too tired to speak and promises that she would speak again the next day only to go into a coma the very same day never to recover. Her death and the
announcement of the conditions of her will by the family lawyer leave Indu at the focal point of the anger of the family. Gradually Indu realizes that her affinity to Akka is multitudinous. Even Jayant who becomes a part of the family only after Akka’s death and hears of the tyrannical figure only from the other members of the family recognizes the similarity between his wife and Akka. He comments:

‘You! And tears! You know, Indu, when I first saw you, I thought you a frail, little creature. Now I know you better. You’re indomitable.’

The word fell into me with a heavy thud.

‘Indomitable? But Jayant, that’s what we called Akka!’

‘Perhaps you are like her,’ he began lightly, but seeing my face, he went on more seriously, ‘Aren’t you? Isn’t that why she chose you . . . only a great-niece, really . . . from among all the family.’

I was aghast at the idea.

‘Like her? But then . . . will I have my victims, too? Maybe I have one already. Look at this wedding! It wouldn’t have been possible without me.’ (RS 5)

From then on Indu begins to realize her strong affinity to Akka, and her curiosity to know her better takes her through a journey where she tries to go back seeking answers to the many questions that arise in her mind. It is Atya another paternal relative, who helps her to understand Akka’s past
better. Her biographical details bring about a sea-change in Indu’s attitude to her.

It was then that Atya told me Akka’s story. It was the first time I’d heard it. Now I know how strangely inadequate was my knowledge of Akka. And how strange too, my ignorance of the fact that my knowledge was incomplete. And to hear it then . . . It was as if the knowledge of that woman had been preserved for me all those years to come upon me at that moment, when it meant so much more to me than it would have done at any time before. At that moment, an understanding of what Akka was, and why she lived the way she did, why she behaved the way she did, was somehow necessary to me. I was groping in the darkness and without this bit of light it would have been worse, far worse. (RS 69)

It is her knowledge of Akka that helps her identify with the fundamental nature of Akka. Moreover her experience in managing the wealth left to her by Akka makes her realize how a person naturally becomes tough when all around only appear flattering to get as much out of a person as they can. She begins to realize that she has the instinct to recognize insincerity in people and hence realizes that just as Jayant had said she does have many similarities to Akka. Also she recognizes the steel within her as she bluntly takes decisions autocratically disregarding the many suggestions and hints as to the way she ought to spend the money, by the many different members of the family. Though many even openly speak
about her irreverence to their opinion she ignores their comments to go on acting autocratically realizing in one moment of perception that she “felt like Akka herself” (RS 59). The woman whom she had all along hated now becomes so similar to her that she feels one with her.

It can be seen that though the hatred between the mother and the daughter is initially very strong, it slowly undergoes a change and a new more tolerant equation is achieved between them as the protagonist gains more life experience. In such works a new understanding is arrived at which helps the daughter to resolve the many difficulties which she faces. This journey of reconciliation leading to a strong affinity to the mother-figure whom she had hated brings about a sea-change in Indu’s personality. She, through this new-found mother-daughter bond gains the strength to change her life as per her requirements. Her career which was not proceeding in the way she had planned is relinquished in a moment’s notice for the apparent independence and freedom of writing real stories rather than “what would sell articles” for the magazine she worked for. She even goes to the extent of throwing to the winds the traditional Indian notion of pativrata and has an affair with a relative whom she is attracted to, Naren. Though at first she feels confused as to how to deal with the situation, especially after his death, with the help of the new-found steel and practical sense she very soon comes to terms with the change. Her relationship with Jayant continues though she plans to bring about many new changes, within it. Earlier she had often wondered how her life with
Jayant was one based on dishonesty, but now she decides on bringing to it the “scorching touch of honesty” (*RS* 187) rather than hide behind what she thinks is the right response of a good wife. But even more relevant is her decision to never reveal the interlude with Naren to Jayant. The Indu we find in the last chapter of the novel is not one who lives in fear of her past catching up with her but a worldly wise one who calmly declares through the last words in the novel, “Maybe Jayant would understand. Maybe he wouldn’t. But even so . . .” (*RS* 187). As Shantha Krishnaswamy points out in another context, “There are no simple solutions any more but the process of awakening of her consciousness leads to her inner enrichment” (251). Indu revisits her past, let’s go of her false notions and comes out all the more stronger for it—a quality which she had learnt from the story of Akka’s life and acquired through her deferred bonding with her.

In Indu’s case it must be noted that Indu’s biological mother had died while giving birth to Indu and hence she had no memories of her: “. . . a child, in spite of losing its mother, gets some idea of her from others, from photographs, from conversations . . . But for me it had been a total blank” (*RS* 43). She however had many pleasant memories of another mother-figure Atya. Atya never rises to the importance of Akka in Indu’s life as can be understood from the way she easily forgets her after leaving the family home. Yet the importance of Atya lies in the fact that Atya’s
presence makes girlhood easier for her. As Sudhir Kakar notes in his essay “Feminine Identity in India”:

As an Indian girl grows up her relationships with others within the extended family tends to dilute any resentments that she might harbour

. . . Among the many adults who comprise a Hindu family there is almost always a someone in particular who gives a little girl the kind of admiration and sense of being singled out as special that a male child more often receives from many. In such a family system, every child, irrespective of sex, stands a good chance of being some adult’s favourite, a circumstance which softens the curse of rivalry, envy and possessiveness which often afflicts modern nuclear families. (50)

In this context it is significant that Deshpande makes Atya the means to Indu’s reconciliation with Akka. Indu’s ability to overcome her hatred can thus be seen to have its roots in another kind of positive mother love that she got from Atya. Hariharan’s Devi too has one such figure of understanding and support in her grandmother. The intensity of her preference for her grandmother during her childhood can be felt from the fact that it is to her grandmother that she goes when she is most confused and in pain. But her grandmother’s death leaves her painfully lonely.

Devi’s story too moves through the very same trajectory of reconciliation with a mother she hates to find peace as those of the others.
After her marriage she finds Mahesh’s open admiration of her mother highly irritating as she is unable to come to terms with her bond with her mother. He brings it up at every given chance. When he finds her reading he remarks, “Baba’s books again? He said, bending down to pick up the book. ‘Devi,’ he said patiently, his eyes on the page where I had been interrupted, ‘did your mother need books to tell her how to be a wife? I have never met a woman more efficient than your mother” (TFN 70). Such constant references to her mother’s efficiency in comparison to her own lack of it make her resort to nagging her husband for even the most insignificant things. The nature of her singular imprisonment in a marriage which she finds unsatisfying only makes her angrier with her mother who had driven her into it. And the visible admiration for her mother by her husband adds oil to the fire. When one day she receives a sari as a gift from her mother Mahesh comments, “‘Your mother has such exquisite taste.’ . . . ‘Yes, she does,’ I agreed, and put away the rustling plastic cover in my cupboard” (TFN 72). The sari is never worn by her, and it thus becomes a symbol of her unarticulated protest against her pawn-like status. To wear even that which has been selected by her mother and not the ones which she herself has a taste for seems to her the final straw on the camel’s back.

Whenever she complained about the monotony of her life she “could hear her mother’s voice, melting into Mahesh’s saying, but what is all the fuss about?” (TFN 72). This makes her run away. As a daughter she
could not choose her mother but as her husband’s voice merges into that of her mother becoming one and the same, she has no qualms in running away from her marriage. More than Mahesh the elopement is addressed to her mother and hence it is she who feels the shock. Speaking of Devi in the metaphor of a plant grown and pruned by her, the mother comments:

She reduced it all, she compressed it, with her usual painstaking meticulousness, into a simple unfragmented, one-viewed organism. She pruned and re-potted it sensibly, as she did her plants, and she did it in the belief that it would take in the soil, even if it was the soiled ground of a life devoted to being the ideal woman.

In this mood that hovered around resignation, that soared momentarily toward reconciliation, Sita was not prepared for an unexpected betrayal . . . telegram from Mahesh—Devi had run away . . . By the time she received the letter with the livid details of the betrayal, Sita was in a fury. So this was what she reaped after years of sacrifice, years of iron-like self-control. After all those quarrels with her husband about discipline for a growing child, won through silent, ferocious struggles, and sleepless nights of thorough, between-the-lines planning, the best of possible lives had been offered to her daughter. And what had Devi done in return? She had torn her respectability, her very name, to shreds. (**TFN 107-108**
The dilemma is that of a player who has played all the right cards only to find that he has lost the game. The shock however makes Sita, the mother, sit down and take stock of the situation which leads to the later changes and a resultant reconciliation between the estranged mother and daughter.

Devi on her part too comes to the very same understanding. Unable to bear the pressures and expectations of becoming a good wife and mother Devi had run away with a singer, Gopal, whose beautiful renditions and interest in her had captivated her. But once she elopes, the situation and the setting become appropriate for her to rethink her bond with her mother. She spends many months with him, and in the new world, music acts as a messenger, “Like a sweet-tongued messenger, a wily peacemaker, the music drowned all effort at resistance. Devi drifted in its mothering arms, with the blank mind of the newborn, the dream of a fresh beginning rekindled” (TFN 128). The music is described in terms of a mother and the musical atmosphere kindles a moment of epiphany. The many things she had heard earlier fall into place like one big jigsaw puzzle. It reminds her of how she had once seen a photograph of her mother, as a child sitting with her veena in hand. She had run to her Pati asking her if her mother knew how to play the veena and found the grandmother surprised to find even one photograph left, “Where did you find that photo? . . . I thought your mother had torn them all” (TFN 28). On seeking further explanation the grandmother gives a typically cryptic answer in the form of the story of the mythical figure of Gandhari who had
bandaged her eyes for ever on learning that she had been married to the blind Dhritharashtra:

Do you know about Gandhari my little one? Listen; listen and you will learn what it is to be a real woman . . . I said nothing, and was not precocious enough to ask how Gandhari’s story and Amma’s came together. Or perhaps I knew. I must have known, even then, that Gandhari’s pride, the fury that was to become her life-force, the central motive of years of blind suffering was no piece of fiction. Gandhari’s anger, wrapped tightly round her head in a life-long blindfold, burnt in a heart close, very close to mine. (TFN 28-29)

Devi realizes that even as a child she had somewhere in her mind instinctively understood that the real Sita was hiding behind a façade. Though it takes her many long years to gather the pieces together the reasons are now apparent to her. Her mother in her life had clearly undergone the very pain that Gandhari had. Sita used to play the veena beautifully and had ambitions in the field. But after her marriage she had moved into a strictly traditional family which had not encouraged her in pursuing it. One day when her father-in-law had returned home to find his dinner uncooked and Sita immersed in playing the veena he had asked her if this was the way a wife and daughter-in-law ought to behave. That very moment she broke the strings of her veena never to take it up again affirming emphatically, “Yes, I am a wife, a daughter-in-law” (TFN 30).

Devi realizes that like Gandhari, her mother Sita’s fury had become her
life-force. Since both society and religion endorse creativity as a masculine
domain, motherhood takes the limited significance of care and nurture.
Irigaray says that because of this reduced meaning, women often run the
risk of compensating it with over-investment, in self-denial, in non-being
or over-possessive maternity. Srilata Ravi considers Sita a symbol of one
such woman. She writes:

Githa Hariharan’s narrative demonstrates that motherhood is not a
natural construct but a patriarchal ideal that Sita has built unto
perfection, Sita has over-invested by effacing her ‘Self’ in denying
herself her womanness (symbolized by her violent renunciation of
her music), in order to be an ideal wife and ideal daughter-in-law.
She saw her feminity as an ‘illusion’ and so she ‘seized it firmly by
the roots and pulled it out of her soul till the enticing stems of the
seven-noted scale came apart, broken and disharmonious in a cluster
of pathetic twangs’ (105). By giving up her music she was giving up
the ‘veena totting Saraswati, all feminity and ambiguity’ to take on
another goddess, ‘the most ferocious of all charges.’ Modelling
herself on the ‘Terrible Mother’ image of Kali, she meticulously
planned the lives of her husband, her daughter and herself with
clinical efficiency. (82-83.)

She had taken the role of the perfect mother and daughter-in-law to heart
and never ever deviated from the same. She played the role to such
perfection that everyone admired her for her efficiency. But the burning
pain in her heart tinged every act of hers with coldness. Sita too admits to the fact:

When she cut herself off from the clandestine link with the past, a foolish young girl’s dreams of genius and fame, she made a neat surgical cut. She seemed to forget, along with the stringless veena condemned to dumbness, her own mother, father, the gurus of her childhood. She wrote them an occasional duty-dictated letter, but she could never find a time convenient enough to revisit the town where they still lived, or to indulge in a narcissistic voyage. (TFN 103)

Thus her life had started to revolve around the word “duty” which slowly drove out all happiness and bonds of love from her mind. Unhappy and furious deep inside the act of relinquishing her music left her unable to love anyone. Even her bond with her husband and daughter are dictated more by duty than love. Devi equates her to Amba, “a woman avenger who could earn manhood through her penance” (TFN 39-40). Devi felt that being a good mother was to Sita a penance. This new understanding of Sita begins to put her picture of her mother in a totally new frame, entailing a process of re-definition and re-negotiation in terms of their relative statuses and their role perspectives. She begins to explore the similarities between them and begins to think of how women everywhere are joined together by their struggle for survival, “She thought of the three of them; Mayamma, Sita and herself. Three of the women who walked a
tightrope and struggled for some balance; for some means of survival they could fashion for themselves” (*TFN* 135).

Even the names opted by Hariharan suggest this deep link. Both Sita and Devi are different aspects of the very same Goddess in India. Sukumari Bhattacharji in her interesting book *Legends of Devi* (1998) traces the origins of the current pantheon of Indian goddesses. She identifies the beginnings of the worship of Devi or Goddess in India to the period of the Indus Valley Civilization and beautifully narrates how the worship of the prototype Devi later got divided into Prithvi (when Aryans settled to agrarian life), Lakshmi (with Aryan prosperity), Ganga (with the realization of the importance of water in rituals), Saraswathi (with leisure leading to growth of knowledge, art and craft), and the cult of Shakti (warrior Goddesses when the need arose to fight evil) which included Durga, Chandika, Chamunda, Kali and others. Sita of the myths who is the consort of Rama is seen as an incarnation of the goddess Lakshmi. Thus both Sita and Devi are in fact two aspects of the same phenomenon. This link with her mother, which when extended to other motherly figures as well, brings about a huge difference in Devi’s attitude. The very same moment, her thoughts begin to run clearer and in a more positive frame:

> And I thought . . . My grandmother had fed me fantasies, my father a secretive love. My mother sought me out with hope, and when disappointed pushed me forward in the direction she chose. You could say I have been lucky, I have been well looked after. I have
mimed the lessons they taught me, an obedient puppet whose strings they pulled and jerked with their love. (*TFN* 136)

The reminiscences bring about a sea-change in her and she is better able to face the problematic situation she is in. A woman who had run away from her marriage, unable to find satisfaction with her lover, she begins to think of things in a better perspective as she discovers reasons to bond with her mother. Srilata Ravi notes Devi’s rejection of Gopal for her mother in terms of the mirror image, “Devi’s covering of the mirror with her silk saree as she finally leaves a sleeping Gopal is symbolic of her rejection of herself as a reflection of Gopal” (87). In the patriarchal system, the only identity that a woman possesses is that which defines her in relation to a male; she is either his wife or his child’s mother, and hence literature has mostly depicted her in the role of daughter, wife and mother. But here we find Devi boldly rejecting her image of herself as a reflection of Gopal. “She covered the mirror with the silk so that the room suddenly became darker and everything the beds, the table, the sleeping body of Gopal, were themselves again, no longer reflections” (*TFN* 138).

Her awareness is linked to her desire to represent things in her way, to construct her own language and her own expression in order to construct a positive feminine identity she has to look for a different order of meaning in the colourful garden of female intimacy. She realizes that she would certainly be accepted back into her mother’s home and starts back, “though she was, for the first time, no longer on the run” (*TFN* 138).
The very words show her confidence of finding peace in her mother’s home. On her way, “She rehearsed in her mind the words, the unflinching look she had to meet Sita with to offer her love. To stay and fight, to make sense of it all, she would have to start from the very beginning” (TFN 139).

The difference that has come over Sita too is apparent. Githa Hariharan cleverly works in the symbols of the garden and the veena to show the change. The garden, which used to be watered, manured and pruned regularly, had earlier been used as a symbol for the way the daughter had been brought up by the mother. Now its “wild and overgrown” (TFN 139) state clearly reveals that Sita’s attitude to Devi has changed. She will finally be allowed to bloom in the lush ground of a mother’s love for her child. The veena symbol is also very cleverly incorporated. After her initial anger at the news of her daughter’s elopement Sita slowly calms down and, “Ready for self-examination, she sat before the relic of her past, the broken veena, freshly dusted, and waited, for Devi to come back to her” (TFN 108). The rediscovery of her passion for the veena makes us realize that the coldness in heart has begun to thaw. The closing words of the novel show the happiness that can be had when the mother and the daughter bonds:

Suitcase in hand, Devi opened the gate and looked wonderingly at the garden, wild and overgrown, but lush in spite of its sand-choked roots. Then she quickened her footsteps as she heard the faint
sounds of a veena, hesitant and childlike, inviting her into the house.

(TFN 139)

Indians believe that, “The true musical mantra is the transmutation of words into pure sound” (Lal, L. 163) and the music of the veena which is said to invite Devi into her home pre-empts the need for any articulation on the part of the mother or the daughter. It must also be noted that in Devi’s case she already had a positive mother role model in the form of her grandmother. It only took her some time to realize that her mother too can be one such. Her initial bond with her grandmother a mother-figure and her comfort in her own womanhood has definitely a strong role in her ability to reconcile herself with her mother.

Though the discussed pattern repeats itself in Manju Kapoor’s DD, the novel has to be approached much more carefully as it has a much more complex narrative technique. The narrative moves back and forth in time and also from narrator to narrator. It also mixes up the genres moving from the investigative journalism mode to confessional, to imaginative; and inventive to documentary style from page to page.

There are in fact two sets of mothers and daughters with many more in the sub-plots. And in fact in each and every mother-daughter bond we strangely see the wide chasm between each mother and daughter slowly but gradually being bridged. This in turn gives them the strength to manage the predicament they find themselves in.
The first pair is the narrator herself and her mother though the second pair the narrator’s mother, Virmati and the narrator’s grandmother Kasturi are the ones who are centrally placed. The opening scene is full of the confused mental state of Ida after her mother’s death. As she watched her mother’s body being cremated she says that she was, “dry-eyed, leaden” (DD 1). All her relatives are seen clustering around the pyre crying, yet she cannot find it within her to cry. In fact she realizes that by cremating the body she was deliberately disregarding the wishes of her mother who had wanted her body donated. Incompatibility in temperament and inability to communicate with each other thus begins with the very first page of the novel. An argument that they had earlier had about the procedure to be followed after the mother’s death is recalled by the daughter:

That way someone will value me after I have gone. And, she went on, when I die I want no shor-shaar. I don’t want a chauth, I don’t want an uthala, I want no one called, no one informed. Why bother having a funeral at all? I asked. Somebody might actually come.

Why do you deliberately misunderstand me? (DD 1)

The mother very clearly feels that there would be no one including her daughter to value her after her death. And the daughter appears to be piqued by this assumption, but she too does not know how to put her concern into words. She very sceptically comments that one need not even
have a funeral. This in turn makes her mother accuse her of deliberately misunderstanding her. It is thus made very clear in the very beginning that the problem in this novel is not that the mother and the daughter do not love each other but that they are unable to communicate with each other. Thus this novel is slightly different from the others. Whereas, in *DHNT*, *RS* and *TFN* the protagonists had thought that they had all the while hated their mothers only to be rudely awakened to the fact of their strong affinity to them and the slow return to the mother’s hearth to bond with her; *DD* is different in the sense that the mothers and the daughters realize all the while the need to bond and at the same time are unable to find the means to achieve it. It is only after they overcome this inability that they find peace.

After her mother’s death Ida goes through her mother’s papers and she finds an old photograph of her mother as she was at fifteen:

> I peer at the face and see beauty and a wistful melancholy.

> Should my memory persist in touching her, the bloom will vanish into the mother I knew, silent, brisk and bad-tempered.

> I stare at this early photograph of an unknown woman and let despair and sorrow run their course. I could not remember a time when it had been right between us. (*DD* 2)

The beauty of the woman in the photograph captivates her but at the same time she realizes that this is a woman that she is unfamiliar with. Her mother in her own words was always “silent, brisk and bad-tempered.” We
realize that Ida is at the moment totally at a loss as to her role or place in this world. The “despair and sorrow” she speaks about which followed her chance encounter with the photograph is the moment of epiphany in the novel. Ida realizes somewhere deep within that her present state or her inability to find her space and role is due to a lack of understanding of her origin, her upbringing and the people who were connected with her upbringing. She realizes that her inability to bond with her mother has played a major role in her current angst. Thus begins Ida’s journey in search of her mother’s past to perhaps understand her better and thus find her peace, “. . . Without her I am lost. I look for ways to connect” (DD 3). And connect she does as the final words of the novel indicate, “This book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word a brick in a mansion I made with my head and my heart. Now live in it, Mama and leave me be. Do not haunt me anymore” (DD 258). Through a greater understanding of her mother achieved by the end of her journey, she springs out of the depression she was in, after the failure of her marriage and the death of her mother and above all for the first time in her life, stops blaming herself and her mother for all that has happened in her life. For now, as she herself claims, her understanding of her mother has moved into a new territory “with my head and my heart”—both intellectual and emotional.

In the narration of the bond between Virmati and her mother Kasturi too it can be seen that it is through the act of finally bonding with her
mother that Virmati finds true peace. A chance to reclaim her daughterhood comes in the form of the riots after the partition of India. Earlier she had tried to see her mother twice and had been ignored both the times. But when the riots break out, Kasturi herself sends for her daughter and as the mother and the daughter work next to each other cooking and providing for the hundreds of refugees arriving each day in the city, a new vigour sweeps into Virmati. After her first abortion she had not been able to carry her second pregnancy to its full term. But this time with her mother by her side she feels convinced that her baby will be born. The narrator Ida thus considers her very birth as an end product of the reconciliation between the mother and daughter. Priya’s story too moves along a similar trajectory. After her marriage the narrative moves through the incident-rich world of Bombay and Delhi high society and Priya totally forgets her mother except for one reference to her disease and later death:

My mother was still the same, except that she had developed a filmi mother’s wracking cough . . . Actually, her nagging about the cough was quite justified, for it was T. B. that she died of, four years later. It was diagnosed only after her death, thus depriving her of the certain bitter satisfaction she could have extracted from this neglect. (PDP 23)

Even in death Priya thinks of her mother only in terms of a constant nag, and her pleasure at having escaped is apparent. Priya feels that if her mother had been aware that T. B. was the cause of her death she would
have felt happy and content in dying with the satisfaction of being able to accuse her children for not having taken due care of her. Even though we are told that her mother died, Priya forgets to tell us whether she had been to see her or to even attend the death rites. Having hated her mother all throughout her growing years she gives very little space to her even in death.

Curiously however one can see that with her mother’s death Priya’s own life though outwardly perfect becomes emptier and emptier. Priya finds that her life is totally devoid of love and laments the fact of her loneliness and disillusionment with life at length but never once does she associate the predicament with the absence of her mother:

I sat alone at home; it was a Sunday morning. I realized suddenly that I was quite alone in the world. I had nobody, but, nobody, who loved me, liked me, or even cared for me. I had a host of acquaintances—my kitty party friends, all of whom despised me with the same intensity with which they dislike each other; Atul Bhaiyya, whose wife didn’t like me in the least, and who wrote me a token cheque every Rakshabandhan; Lenin . . . B. R . . . Paro . . . I felt constantly ill, and even found a doctor who pandered outrageously to my hypochondria, so that I was constantly benumbed by the consumption of millions of tablets and pills. My mental and physical states would co-relate to the degree of
absorption of the various chemicals in my bloodstream, so that I was
to all practical effect an absolute zombie. (PDP 118)

However once everything in her life does go wrong and she is asked to leave by her husband, the first thought that unconsciously comes to her mind is that of her mother, “‘But where can I live? Even my mother’s dead,’ I said in desperation” (129). She is at first packed off to her brother’s from where he too in his turn shifts her to their old house in Andheri. She is surprised to find that it has not been disposed off yet and begins dusting and cleaning it in earnest. The emptiness of the flat which had once been filled with her mother’s presence begins to affect her. To pass the time she goes through her mother’s collection of old Hindi romances and very soon finds a different view of life. She spots that, “. . . there was no confusion here between right and wrong—the heroines were torn only by contrition and remorse . . .” (PDP 137). Here she decides to put her life back in order. She dramatically proclaims, “‘I am an Indian woman, and for me my husband is my God.’ So I got down to telephoning him . . .” (PDP 137). As Jayita Sengupta quotes Freud, “Despite her rejection of her mother as inferior, the girl nevertheless continues to identify with her” (70).

Her husband lets her return and a life with some semblance of marital harmony resumes. Priya realizes that in a world filled with self-centeredness her husband’s love for her is perhaps the only kind of love that is a real. The romance she had been expecting in life is replaced by a
down-to-earth taking-care-of-each-other-ness. Clearly it is the unseen hand of the mother which has brought her back from the brink of an attempted suicide. The peace that she achieves can be attested by the fact that earlier when Priya had been pregnant she had been tortured by the fears of childbirth pains. But this time when she announces her pregnancy it is with the serenity of a person at harmony with her body. Thus when Namita Gokhale ends her novel with “faint stirrings within her [Priya’s] womb,” (PDP 172) it can definitely be associated with the brief reconciliation with the memories of her mother or the kind of life her mother had always wanted for her. “The loss of illusions and the discovery of identity, though painful at first, can be ultimately exhilarating and strengthening” (Mehrotra 191).

Separated from their mothers by many mis/readings all the five women discussed in this chapter stumble and totter in the darkness, till light reaches them in the form of an understanding of their mothers. The decisions that each of these protagonists take at the end of the respective novels is different yet one fact in common is that these decisions which take them towards greater inner peace is always achieved through their mothers. Like the wondrous phoenix which is reborn from its own ashes, the bond with their mothers even if initially ugly, never dies out but magically revives itself from the burnt remains of hatred to help the daughters survive.