Chapter 6

In Sun and Shadow
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In the previous chapters, we have examined two extreme facets of the mother daughter relationship projected in certain Indian English novels of the last decade. These relationships have been either totally amicable or hostile depending on the psychic distance of the daughter from the mother or the mother figure, the patriarchal pressure and individual variances. The relationship between the two women of the two generations appears to be both affable and intimidating at the same time making the relationship an enigmatic one. The mother and the daughter figures both adore and hate each other at the same time, thus forming a bond of baffling complexity. The social-cultural conditions and conditioning often creates a breach between the two with the result that one is distanced from the other. The mother generally has no option but to clutch on to the traditional societal values, and thereby compelling her daughter to rebel against her. Yet when this gap is bridged, mostly with the growing maturity of the daughter, a new dimension opens up as the revulsion is removed by mutual trust and belief. The daughter now realizes how the mother herself has been a victim of the circumstances and how each of them can be the only enduring support and comfort for the other. In this chapter we shall examine some fin de siecle novels by Indian women authors which highlight this positive aspect of the issue.
Devi and Sita, the daughter and the mother, in Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) reflect the ambivalences of the relationship. They share a unique love-hate relationship oscillating between tender affectionateness and sharp hostilities, sometimes drawing close to each other while drifting apart at other moments, but never breaking off completely. The relationship assumes more intense proportions as the two of them share an isolated life since the death of Mahadevan, Devi’s father. Naturally, the bond becomes private and personal. Yet, social factors play a definite role in this mother-daughter relationship and shape it up in certain ways.

When we first meet the two of them, they are continents apart from each other. Devi is in the U.S.A. continuing her studies and her hopeless relationship with Dan, a “black in white America” (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 4); whereas Sita is settled in her Madras home busy with her penchant for housekeeping. However, Sita’s letters carried with them the remnants of a different life compelling Devi “to walk along the source of an Indian rebirth” (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 6). Devi’s decision to return to India – leaving aside her studies and her passionate romance with Dan – was not an easy one. The deciding factor operating behind this return is to be located in her ambiguous feelings vis-à-vis her mother.

Above all, she felt a piercing ache to see her mother. But equally powerful was a nameless dread she only partly acknowledged:
the dread of the familiar love, stifling and all pervasive; of a world beyond her classroom and laboratory, charged with a more pungent uncertainty (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 7).

The mother figure, simultaneously loved and dreaded, has its own irresistible attraction, too powerful for the daughter to ignore in the present case.

The initial days of Devi at her Madras residence reflect the closeness with her mother. "My mother and I live alone in the house by the sea" (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 12) [emphasis added]. Here Devi can at last feel herself protected under her mother's wings. She is almost in the psychological state of enclosure as envisioned by Ann Dally in her work Mother: Their Power and Influence. This is a situation that is akin to the usual pre-natal physiological relationship between the mother and the child; we see Devi and Sita sharing a similar kind of embryonic bondage. Devi's entire interaction at this stage is with her mother, so much so that the mother forms her entire environment. Both of them are absorbed in one another and Devi eagerly looks towards her mother for security. Long before coming to India, Devi had her fears of the possibility of groping with social pressure. However, her immediate fears are put to rest as Sita puts a protective blanket round her, sheltering her from the ever intrusive relatives, letting her get used to the Indian conditions.

But like a gift to celebrate my home-coming, Amma has kept them all at bay. In this fortress that shuts out the rest of the world, I grope towards her, and she weaves a cocoon, a secure
womb that sucks me in and holds me fast to its thick, sticky walls....in the first few weeks after my return to Madras, we were intensely conscious of each other; we were pulled together by a tender protectiveness that encircled our necks with its fine threads. Drawn together, my dead father's memory receding for the moment, we became a one-celled unit. We became, not a family, but mother and daughter (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 13). [Emphasis added]

However, this relationship has to pass through a complex and problematic dialectics. In Devi's words, "One month later, the honeymoon was over" (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 13). Sita's cajoling letters were not just the desperate pleas of a desolate mother; they contained more practical bearings - proposals and plans regarding Devi's marriage. Now having let her daughter settle down in the new settings, Sita, like a master puppeteer, gradually unfolds her designs. During one of their evening walks Devi begins to talk about America. Sita simply tells her to let bygones be bygone. Devi feels flattered that her mother does not want to be all intrusive and lets her have her own secrets. They can now communicate on even terms - an adult to an adult. She is after all given the freedom that she craves for and treated as a separate person, one with her own identity.

The 'identification' with one's mother has been one of the focal issues in feminist literary theory. As Irigaray puts it, "You look at yourself on the mirror. And already you see your own mother there....What space is yours alone?"
Devi thinks that at last she has been able to disengage herself from the mirrored image of the mother and to have a space of her own. However, she is mistaken. If her mother is allowing Devi her own little bit of secret, it is not to give Devi an operating space but to make her forget that she had such a space ever. Sita, by refusing to listen and thereby refusing to acknowledge Devi's American days simply wants to obliterate the independence that Devi once enjoyed, a blotting out of the identity that Devi ever had. Thanks to her mother's imposition, Devi's free self, like Dan's gifts — the shirt and swimsuit — becomes a "relic" that she "cannot place in time" (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 20).

Sita plays the role of the traditional Indian mother. She uses her closeness to her daughter to make Devi pliant and give in to her wishes and thereby let her carry on her social obligations.

Like a veteran chess player she made her moves. I have to give her credit for her sense of timing. When she had kneaded the dough finely, thoroughly, and I was like putty in her hands, she encircled my shoulders, so ready to lean against her support, and led me to her carefully laid plans — a marriage for me, a swayamvara (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 14).

Devi was gradually cajoled by Sita to follow the customary track of marriage. Though she was not a party to this decision, Devi had no way to protest. The first phase of Sita's plan included showing off her daughter to the relatives; both near and far-flung. And as it is a show Devi has to behave
according to her mother's dictates. She presents herself coyly before her relatives, wearing her new silk sari, her gold chain, replying to queries in evasive monosyllables to be her mamma's daughter, docile and well behaved. Ironically, though a swayamvara is promised to Devi, she herself is made an exhibit, to be scrutinised, evaluated and judged by prospective grooms. And Sita seems to take a pride in her achievement:

See how I take risks, Amma's look said. She is different, she is special, but she is just as pliant as your home-grown daughters (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 15).

Sita, the mother, here becomes instrumental in wielding the patriarchal trap. Like most middle-class women she wants her daughter to follow the traditional footsteps and is happy when she sees her daughter doing so. She is intelligent enough to understand that for Devi who has led a different life in another geographically and culturally distant land it would be nearly impossible to cling to the Indian traditions. So she traps Devi in her motherly embrace from which her daughter knows no escape. She is no longer the distant personality that Devi had thought her to be and the mutual bond that develops between the two forces Devi to accept her mother's desires without much protest. Eventually a time comes when the distinct self-identity of the daughter is overshadowed by the dominant personality of the mother, and the former surrenders to the latter's will. Devi persuades herself to believe that she enjoys this surrender and self-delusion that she has reached by identifying with her mother. But such identification gives her mother the power to control and
manipulate her and make her opt for a life that she would not have embraced by any other means.

Devi, taking her mother’s cue, acts as the bride-to-be. Though the process involves humiliation and revulsions, she gradually becomes tamed. She is furious when her mother invites the Srinivasans to view her as a potential bride. But gradually her resistance gives way and she becomes a more willing accomplice to her mother’s desires. In fact, she feels it her responsibility to get married at the earliest opportunity. When after spending an evening with a prospective bridegroom at a five-star hotel, she learns from her mother that she “was not quite what the young man had in mind”, she feels, “not disappointed, but surprised; and looking at her, also a little guilty” (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 21) [emphasis added]. It is probably because of her empathy with her mother that Devi accepts Mahesh as her husband. Having accomplished her task Sita greets her daughter with “limpid-eyed blessings” (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 22).

The traditional Hindu approach envisions a life divided into four distinct parts. The second phase of life, that of *gṛhaustāsram*, can only be entered after marriage. Marriage is important for the creation of progeny, particularly sons, who can carry on the religious rituals. It is high sacrilege for a Hindu not to give away his daughter in marriage. Though the śāstras hold fathers responsible for carrying out such a duty, the mothers have no less important role to play as they coax and prepare their daughters for marriage. Sita has the twin responsibility of arranging her daughter’s marriage and preparing Devi
for the event as her husband is no longer alive. Thus Sita becomes instrumental in enforcing Devi into the conventional mould in spite of her unconventional education and exposure which, given the chance, could have paved way for another kind of life. The legendary Sita also has been left to fend for her twins in the Rāmāyana, but being male children they had their freedom and pastures to conquer. The mother's imposition comes down with greater force on the female child.

Sita, who has single-handedly managed the family and her husband's career, learns early in her married life the bitter lesson how to steer away from all dreams and vague aspirations. An accomplished veena player, she tears the strings of her favourite instrument once she realizes her occasional foray into the musical world can only be at the cost of her familial obligations. Her stern disciplinarian attitude and matter of fact approach to life had their bearings on her relationship with her daughter, Devi. Devi was a "difficult daughter" for Sita because of her secretive nature and her flights into the dream worlds, her escapades from the "firm and all-knowing" (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 104) hands of Sita. Devi used to sneak into her father's room, escape into the backyard to play with the servant's children and "Even worse, she could spend an afternoon talking to herself" (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 104-05). "Devi, though quiet and apparently manageable, was also bookish and dreamy, and as much of an oddity as her elusive father" (Hariharan, Thousand Faces 105).
It is against this over-practical nature of her mother that Devi had to rebel. In her father she found an ally and accomplice. Sita, in her role of the master puppeteer, controlled her family with an iron hand and decided and acted on behalf of all of them. It is worth noting how a mother is compelled to internalise the patriarchal norms. The father-figures being independent themselves, are free to be friendly and lenient to their daughters. The mothers, however, are forced by social pressure to impose the patriarchal code on their daughters. Sita's reign, however, faced many a challenge. "Both Devi and Mahadevan had grown into the sly, shifty-eyed accomplices of a mutiny that threatened to erupt through books, daydreams, gods and goddesses, secret corners, the innocent (and therefore more dangerous) sensuality of a stranger like Annapurna" (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 105).

Sita was there always to shatter any illusion. She relegated the gods and goddesses to a well lit prayer room, sent Annapurna away – well provided and demystified – packed off all the mystical books, "swept out dark corners, quiet afternoons" (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 106).

Purging Devi of all her dreams and fantasies seems to have been the unstated objective of Sita's life. It has been a conscious effort on Sita's part to make her daughter think and behave like her. Devi was a plaything at the hands of Sita, a plaything in place of her abandoned veena. "She had found a new veena to play on, and this time she was not going to give it up so easily" (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 104). It was her desire to model Devi her way.
But a real human being is not a musical instrument and her frustration is apparent.

Sita could never quite suppress a feeling of disappointment as she saw Devi grow into an awkward, thin, acne-ridden, stammering adolescent. She herself was thin, but it was a thinness that was spare, taut, uncluttered... Devi's thin body was different. She was angular, devoid of those essential suggestions of subtle areas only partly visible to the naked eye. Her thin, tall frame only stooped a little, and was, Sita shuddered to herself, almost tubercular (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 105).

If Devi's not being a look alike was enough disappointment for Sita, her distinctly different nature disturbs her even more. Devi's quest for the mythical and the mystical at once sets her apart from her mother, who has the resilience to discard all illusions, and simultaneously identifies her with her grandmother who looks at day-to-day life from a mystical, mythical viewpoint. Though *The Thousand Faces of Night* hardly explores the relationship between Sita and her mother-in-law, it becomes quite obvious that they hold totally opposite views towards life. Sita's practical, matter of fact, stern approach has an exact antithesis in the form of her mother-in-law's ambiguous, over indulgent nature. Devi has been nurtured by both the influences:

Thus we lived ordinary lives most of the year....But every summer, we lived another life with my grandmother (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 26).
Devi's admiration for "another life", a life less "ordinary", becomes obvious. Hence, her occasional foray into a secretive, dream world inhabited by demons and gods, noble princes and charming princesses sets the panic button in Sita's mind. She is not only in danger of losing her hold on her daughter; she is in danger of losing her child to her greatest adversary, her mother-in-law. Having already lost her veena, and all that it stood for in her life Sita can no longer afford to take a risk. She must make efforts to make her daughter disinfected of this germ of the fantasy world of her grandmother. Sending Devi to a continent distant enough was one of the surest means of achieving her objective.

There she would become a good Brahmin again, in the wholesome rays of scientific, antiseptic sun that did not hint at dimensions beyond face value. There the darker monsters of the Brahmin world – the gods, the ambiguous myth – would fall back into a less dangerous, better-lit perspective. Devi would learn that she had to use these monsters, not allow them to overwhelm her with lying dreams of blood, paradisiacal palaces and women turning into men (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 106).

It is with the same clarity of vision that Sita arranges for Devi's marriage:

...Devi had again been packed and dispatched, this time to a more permanent destination (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 107).

But what Sita thinks to be a finished job, expertly done, paradoxically remains unfinished. Devi, whom she had grown and pruned in her own mode,
shoots up unforeseen twigs as it were. As her marriage becomes increasingly unbearable, Devi runs away with her newfound love, a musician, Gopal. This is at once a double betrayal for Sita – Devi in the boldness of her youth deviates from the calculated, measured path that Sita had charted for her; moreover, she does so in search of an illusory love, that has long seized to exist in Sita's order of the world.

By the time she received the letter, with the lurid 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 (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 108).

Even if this seems to be the point of no return and rapprochement appears to be out of hand, Devi's betrayal eventually paves the way for a far greater understanding between the mother and the daughter. Both now have to undergo the process of self-introspection which can lead to a mature understanding between each other. So once Sita overcomes her initial disappointment she readies herself for her soul-searching, an attempt that not only brings her nearer to her daughter but closer to her own past self.
...she sat down, armed for an even more merciless exercise of introspection. Ready for self-examination, she sat before the relic from her past, the broken veena, freshly dusted, and waited for Devi to come back to her (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 109).

The veena, at this stage becomes a loaded symbol. Sita, by picking it up once again, reverts back to a life of creative indulgence that she had shunned all through her married life.

Devi too could not avoid the self-introspection:

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 (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 135).

Whereas Mayamma was a victim of the situation and had no control over the perils of her life, Sita was far more equipped and far more resolute to take on life's challenges. She was remarkably different from other girls, her talent and grim determination setting her apart. It is her resolve to be a perfect wife and daughter-in-law that made her to alter the course of her life.

She had paid the price for it, not a light one for someone who measured her self-worth so completely in terms of her music. There must have been other dreams, Devi thought, ambitions which had nothing to do with any of us.

In her ruthless attempts to keep these at bay, Sita had built a wall of reticence around herself. This was not a wall that
excluded the mundane, trivial or ugly. It distanced her from the ambiguous, and anchored her firmly to the worldly indices she had adopted in place of the veena (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 136).

Devi's focus into her inner self helps her understand the different matrix of Sita's viewpoint. If it is too worldly, too matter of fact, too ambitious, it is simply because it is in lieu of a world that was unmatched in its charm, splendour and bliss. It is only natural that Sita, who once gave away her world of music, would want adequate compensation in the material world that she embraced. Sita's sacrifice has been enormous, and so too her suffering. Her pain has been as intense as that of Mayamma, though the two are not similar on any count. It is only the suffering that brings them together. Having experienced the pain herself, Devi realizes the tie that binds the three of them – Mayamma, her mother Sita and she herself – or for that matter all women in general. Devi's introspection helps her to understand her mistakes, the steps where she has faltered. She has tried to break free from her mother's overwhelming dominance "greedy for a story of my own" (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 137).

If it is natural for every daughter to curve out a niche for herself out of her mother's mesmerizing presence Devi has also been afflicted by the same desire. But to do so is not to evade one's responsibilities. If a daughter has to cut out a separate space for her self that must not be at the cost of discarding one's own mother. The self-introspection makes Devi realize that she has just done so:
I have run away from all my trials, my tail between my legs, just as I turned a blind eye to my father's helpless thrashing about for an ally, or my mother's lonely hand stretched out towards me (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 137).

Hence she decides to return to her mother, “to offer her her love” (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 139).

Sita, on her part, finds that by submitting herself to the patriarchal notion of an ideal life she has not only deprived herself but also her daughter and husband. The rigorous discipline she imposed upon her own self and her family took its toll in the form of Mahadevan's untimely death, Devi's broken marriage, the vacuity she herself has to endure. Sita realizes Devi's flirtation with Gopal has not so much to do with her daughter's distance from Mahesh or love for Gopal, as with the rigours that Sita had put her through. Sita for once finds that Devi's rebellion was propelled not so much by her desire to escape but by Sita's unflinching hold on her. Freed at last from the patriarchal blindfolds Sita picks up her veena again. The garden, mercilessly pruned and drastically made to order in the past, is now allowed to grow lush and wild, symbolizing Sita's return to a real, vibrant life from an artificial, mechanical world. Devi too attains her freedom. On coming to extend her hand to her lonely mother, she is greeted by the "faint sounds of a veena, hesitant and childlike" (Hariharan, *Thousand Faces* 139). Devi's return marks a new beginning. The mother and the daughter begin a new journey based upon a more mature and deeper understanding.
Section II: A Matter of Time

Shashi Deshpande’s novel, *A Matter of Time* (1996) explores the mother daughter relationship in connection to a man, who has absolved himself of his responsibilities of being a family-person – of being a husband and a father. The decision of Gopal to move away from the family life begins a new chapter in the lives of his family members who now have to look at each other from a new perspective, which they had never done. The extraordinary situation calls for an unusual approach, an approach atypical in every way. And the various characters react to this unforeseen crisis in ways that are quite different from each other. Whereas Gopal’s wife, Sumi, seems to have taken the unexpected development quite in her stride, and calmly faces the situation, her daughter Aru reacts in a severe manner, holding her parents responsible for her misery. Charu, the second daughter grows pensive, a mood unusual for her. Seema, though apparently unaffected by the family drama, has to cope with her newfound adult identity, making it difficult for her and the family to cope with the situation. Finally, we have Kalyani, the mother of Sumi, who too becomes a part of the intricate family play, leaving everything at the hands of fate. The relationships involve new hurdles, encountering new hardships, as the equilibrium of the family set up seems to have been shattered by the crisis and the subsequent trauma, caused by the departure of Gopal.
Sumi – Aru:

Sumi’s attitude to Gopal’s decision to leave the family seems to be strange. She listens to her husband’s words, does not mumble a word of protest, waits until morning to allow Gopal to leave the house and then calmly speaks to her daughters about what has transpired between them. The peculiarity of her behaviour, her unusual calm and reticence takes the daughters by surprise, and eventually affects her relationship with her daughters. Her routine that day is quite usual and it sets the tone for the daughters. It creates an air of apparent normality, a false hope that everything is going to fall back to the normal again.

In the next few days the girls can almost imagine that there is, indeed, nothing wrong, that their father has gone out for a few days and will soon return, but for the fact that Sumi, despite her façade of normality, has a quality about her – a kind of blankness – that makes them uneasy (Deshpande, Matter of Time 10-11).

However, beneath the air of normality, the fact that their father has left them continues to hurt the daughters, and the mother is often held responsible for the crisis in their young lives. Aru, the eldest of the three sisters appears to be the most bitter. She is in no mood to accept the predicament that has befallen them. She finds herself helpless and it leads her to desperation. Her silent revolt when her grandfather arrives to pick them up only goes on to reveal her extreme anxiety. What hurts Aru most is the apparent indifference
of her mother, Sumi, in face of the impending doom. Nevertheless, she realizes that if anything has paralyzed the family into immobility, it is a hope – a hope that Gopal would make a re-entry into their lives – a hope that even Sumi seems to share.

Aru feels herself responsible for doing something to remove this paralysing force. Her decision to call her aunt, Premi, and make her part of the family crisis is a challenge to her mother. Despite her empathy with her mother, Aru cannot understand the poise with which Sumi handles the situation. She has a nagging feeling that Gopal has wronged them, especially Sumi. She wants to side with her wronged mother, but what hurts her most is the cool indifference of Sumi to the entire development. So when Sumi says to Ramesh that they have no option but to tell others of the event and she does not care what people might think of them, Aru reacts vehemently:

‘You don’t care?’ Aru’s reaction to her mother’s words is violent and sharp. ‘That’s wonderful. You don’t care about his having gone, you don’t care where he is, you don’t care what people think – but I care, yes, I do, I care about Papa having left us, I care about not having our own house. I don’t want to live like this, as if we’re sitting on a railway platform, I want my home back, I want my father back.’ (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 21).

Sumi too is somewhat taken aback by the harsh reaction of Aru. She never expected her daughter to act in such an immature manner. Her frustration with her eldest daughter – “I never thought Aru would take this so hard”
(Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 21) – reminds her of the obstinate child that Aru was. Naturally, the extreme crisis makes it difficult for the mother and the daughter to communicate effectively and in spite of all the sympathy between them there seems to be a growing discord between the two.

The growing conflict between the mother and the daughter is actually more due to a difference in attitude rather than a divergence in their feelings for Gopal. Aru, who is only a teenager, is impatient to know why her father has wronged the family. She needs to have an answer for Gopal’s walking out from the lives of his nearest ones. On the other hand, Sumi treads a different path. She realises that answers to all questions may never be found and even if such an answer is provided it need not be the solution.

But I have no desire really to pursue these thoughts.

Unlike Aru, I know that getting answers to questions will not provide me with any solution. The ‘why’ that all of them are pursuing leaves me cold. I know that they find it impossible to believe that I have not asked him anything. The truth is, I could not have spoken to him that night – no, it was impossible. But even if it had been possible, if I had asked him ‘why’, would I have got an answer I could have made sense of? (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 27)

The same conflict in attitude is poignant even in their approaches to life. Sumi, the more experienced in life proves to be much more pragmatic than her daughter, Aru. As far as the question of leaving their house is concerned,
Sumi takes a practical decision – her view is influenced by the careful consideration of her financial status. Aru on the other hand though aware of the economic compulsions nevertheless feels a pang in vacating the house. Her feeling evidently suggests that she is hoping against hope, believing in a return to normalcy, whereas the situation provides no such scope for optimism.

Aru is incredulous. As long as the house is theirs, they still have a home and the hope that Gopal will return, that they will be able to resume their lives. To give up the house, as Sumi is saying they have to do, is to pronounce the death sentence of that hope (Deshpande, Matter of Time 28).

However, in spite of all her troubled feelings, Aru looks up to her mother for comfort. The girls are hardly morose while packing their belongings. The sharp pang that they are leaving their house forever, that their lives would never return to the normal state, is overcome by the boisterous energy that Sumi is able to infuse in her daughters. It is no wonder that Aru’s emotions run to the highest and lowest extremes depending on the look on her mother’s face.

... Seeing her mother’s face, hollow-eyed, hair dishevelled, Aru feels a pang; this is how she will look when she is old. But when Sumi comes out of the bathroom after her bath, smoothing down the pleats of her sari, she looks so reassuringly normal that Aru has a sudden lift of spirits. Perhaps things will work out, maybe
we will be able to go on, even if we can’t go back (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 30).

In fact, it is to the mother that the daughters look for solace. Her room becomes "a place of refuge to the girls, a kind of re-creation of their home" (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 32). However, Sumi can never be her former self and this becomes quite evident to her daughters.

Sumi is the one who has the air of being lost, of having no place in her childhood home. She shows no outward sign of distress, but the girls notice a new habit in her, of touching them, holding their hands, smoothing their hair, as if this physical contact is a manifestation of some intense emotion within her (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 33).

Sumi’s behaviour reflects the psychological impact of physical proximity between the mother and the daughter. Aru had earlier shivered from her mother’s look (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 30) thinking she is going to look equally haggard once she is old. Now it is Sumi’s turn to find comfort in her daughters’ looks. Her impulse to touch her daughters is as much an expression of her affection for them as the longing for some assurances for herself. If her acts show her desperation in clinging to her daughters, of not letting them go; they also are acts of assuring her own self. The physical identity between the mother and the daughter has been well explored by Irigaray. This affinity according to Irigaray is a source of identity crisis.
Nevertheless, such a likeness helps in building up the relationship between
the mother and the daughter as well.

You look at yourself in the mirror. And already you see
your own mother there. And soon your daughter, a mother
(Irigaray, "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other" 63).

The daughters too are supportive to Sumi in her moment of crisis.
Sumi's triumphant gesture at having learnt to drive the scooter, Aru's joyous
response to her mother's feat, all suggest the deep bond between the two.
Aru's attempt to shelter Sumi from the predicament is also evident from her
harsh reaction to her sister Charu. Charu's reference to Sumi as "she", ushers
in an angry volley of words from Aru – "Why do you call her “she”?" "Just
because Papa has left her, it doesn't give you the right to be rude to her, it
doesn't mean she is worthless …" (Deshpande, Matter of Time 57). Aru's cold
fury is an outcome of her meeting with Gopal not going well; but it also
suggests her deep empathy for her mother. Out of this compassion for Sumi
originates the most outrageous decision of Aru. She feels that her mother
should not be a silent victim to her father's tantrums and should indeed take
Gopal to the courts. She suggests that her mother should visit a lawyer and fix
up the matter once for all. When Sumi suggests that she cannot understand
what purpose such a step would serve, Aru candidly says "The point is you've
got to do something" (Deshpande, Matter of Time 61). Finding her mother still
not convinced she makes her emotions clear:
‘But he owes you, he owes all of us, yes, you especially, he owes you —’... ‘something. He can’t get away like this...’

(Deshpande, Matter of Time 61).

The relationship between her parents perturbs her to the utmost and the moment Sumi comes from Devaki’s party, a place where she meets Gopal, Aru enquires if they have spoken to each other. She is serious even when Sumi tries to lighten her mood by making a joke. Actually, Sumi has no option but to shift the course of the talk deliberately to escape from her daughter’s prying gaze into her mental state. However, Aru’s obstinacy does not end here. She is so determined to punish her father for Sumi’s sake that she consults one of her relations — Premi-mavshi’s husband, Anilkaka — about the feasibility of taking her father to the court. Even if the response she receives is much akin to her mother’s reaction, she does not understand how her mother can remain so impassive about the entire episode. She even questions the basic need for marriage. Seeing her father walking out of wedlock of about two decades and her mother passively accepting the decision reflects her dread of entering into marriage.

‘But, Premi-mavshi, I want to make a point. I don’t understand Sumi, I truly don’t.’ She looks directly at Premi and Premi realizes she is in dead earnest. ‘I’ve been thinking about marriage a great deal, Premi-mavshi. What’s there in it? I mean, look at Amma and now Sumi... What do you get out of it?’

(Deshpande, Matter of Time 138).
Indeed Sumi too can understand this fear in Aru. She can easily appreciate her daughter's vulnerability and fears that Aru may put up a protective shield against marriage. She sees Rohit's feelings for Aru and can see how she goes on refusing his friendship just because he is a man. Her concern for her daughter's mental state is quite pronounced.

But I do worry, I have begun to worry about their marriage. I know they will stand on their own feet, I have no fears for Aru and Charu, not on that count. But marriage? Will Aru learn that love, however brief, however unsatisfactory, however tragic, is necessary? Will she realize that without that kind of a companionship some part of us withers and dies? (Deshpande, Matter of Time 169)

Aru's attempt to look at the gender equations from the point of betrayal of her mother continues to worry Sumi. She fears that Aru might end up being hater of the males because of her mother's experience in life. Indeed, the single incident concerning her father may change her whole view of life. She wants her daughter to live a life normal in every respect.

... She has been disturbed by the thought that Aru has begun to see her mother as a victim, that, in fact, she has begun to see a victim in every woman, a betrayer in every man. I don't want her to live, to start her life, with that kind of a generalization. It's unwholesome, Sumi thinks (Deshpande, Matter of Time 144).

Again while talking to Gopal, Sumi reflects:
‘... Making what has happened in our family part of the war between men and women – no, I don’t like that. The truth is, Gopal, I want Aru to go on with her life. I’m selfish and lazy, I want life to be easy and comfortable. And I want my child’s life to be that way too. I want her to enjoy the good things in life, I want her to taste life, I want her to relish it and not spit it out because she finds it bitter’ (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 220).

Aru’s extreme reaction to the crisis is actually a result of the vulnerability within her. Having lost her father, she is afraid of losing her mother as well. The fear is manifest in her when she suspects Sumi’s growing proximity with Kumar. This anxiety on her part results in her failure to understand her mother’s poise, the calmness with which Sumi masters the situation. She has a fear lurking within her that perhaps Sumi too was eager to let Gopal go just as he was disinterested in continuing the relationship any longer. Naturally, the moment Sumi has a semblance of understanding with a new acquaintance in her life Aru feels defenceless. Therefore, she asks Charu, “Do you believe in stepfathers, Charu?” (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 172). When Charu suggests that whether Sumi would consider any man in her life after what Gopal has done to her, Aru retorts bitterly, “Sometimes I wonder whether she minds that at all” (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 173). Though the professed cause of her anxiety is her concern for her mother “I’m scared, Charu, I don’t want anyone to take advantage of her” (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 173) it is actually her own confidence that she is so alarmed about. It is
the same anxiety about losing her mother that forces Aru to take Sumi to Kumar's residence. On the way back, they meet with an accident.

The accident shows the deep understanding between them. In a way, it changes the relationship between Sumi and Aru. Aru's fear of losing her mother is subsided. Though her anger towards her father is not diminished and she goes on pondering about taking him to the courts, she can appreciate her mother's mode of thinking a bit more. Sumi too, really understands the magnitude of loss at having been abandoned. The feeling of being watched by two dark silhouettes after the accident, when she was really in a helpless state, comes back to her time and again with a kind of nightmarish intensity. However, what makes her most bitter is the sense of being abandoned when she needed their help the most. Their negligence could have cost her, her daughter's life.

Sumi – Charu:

Sumi's relationship with her eldest daughter dominates *A Matter of Time* to such an extent that her relationship with her two younger daughters, Charu and Seema is hardly studied. However, there are traces, which allow us to look into Sumi's relation to her other daughters as well. Sumi sets the tone when Gopal deserts his family and her daughters can do nothing but to follow her. She behaves as if everything is normal and this continues until they have to shift to their grandparents' home. Even when they vacate the house, a home where they have all grown up, it is due to their mother that they keep
their emotions at bay. Thus, Sumi acts as the support on which her daughters can actually lean upon and take comfort in their hour of distress. Hence, her small room at her father's house becomes a "home away from home" for the girls.

This room becomes a place of refuge to the girls, a kind of recreation of their home. Seema, when she is in one of her moods, lies long hours on the large bed, which is the repository of all the extra mattresses, oblivious to everyone, uncaring of anyone calling out for her (Deshpande, Matter of Time 32).

However, Sumi's attempt at keeping everything normal fails. The girls do change and Sumi cannot do anything except being a passive observer. In spite of an apparent air of normality, the girls withdraw themselves into their own shells, pursue their activities with a doggedness never seen before and communicate minimally among themselves. All the earlier bickering between them cease and the girls behave as if they have suddenly turned more mature.

The three girls have changed in themselves, too. Aru's reserve has turned into a secretiveness. She goes out a great deal, more than she did before, and it is obvious that this has nothing to do with college or her studies. In fact, she has resigned from the Student's Council, something she had taken very seriously until now. Charu has become wholly single-minded and dogged, the intensity of her pursuit of a seat in a medical college frightening. Nothing else seems to exist for her,
apart from her college, her evening classes and her books when she is at home. And though Seema, belying Sumi's fears, looks the most untouched, she keeps aloof from her mother and sisters, following Kalyani about, even holding her sari-end, as if she is reverting to that early infancy she can't possibly remember. It makes Sumi uneasy (Deshpande, Matter of Time 59).

Though the developments in their lives strain the relationship between them, the deep understanding between them is never affected. This is evident from the anxiety and the empathy they feel for each other. For once, the words of Charu reminds Sumi of her husband Gopal, his philosophy of being strangers to each other in this world and her suppressed emotion finally gives way to a sudden outburst of tears. Charu seeing her mother sob like never before consoles her until she becomes calm. It is almost a reversal of roles as the daughter acts as the mother.

Charu finds her mother sobbing as she has never seen her do before, she sees the wildness, the madness of being lost in a strange world in her eyes and she is terrified.

'What is it, Ma? What is it? Please, Ma, tell me what's the matter.'

Her agonized pleas finally fade away into silence as if she realizes the futility of asking and she is content to hold Sumi close and rock her. She rocks her, as if she is the mother and
her mother her child, until both of them are soothed into a
tearless calm (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 112).

We find the same anxiety in Sumi about Charu too. Learning from Aru that Charu has taken the moped because Hrishi has not come to pick her up, she feels sorry that she cannot provide her with her own transport. Aru jokingly says that it is better that Charu does not drive herself as she can hardly drive. Immediately Sumi becomes nervous so that Aru has to take back her words to comfort her mother. Similarly, just before her exams, Charu can hardly go on studying and it is up to Sumi to restore her back to her spirits. She takes her away on a walk – “Left right quick march?” (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 192) – lapsing to a childhood language. Once settled, Charu talks about what keeps on discomforting her – her remembrance of one of her days of yore.

‘You know, Ma, just before I fell asleep, I couldn’t read, I couldn’t see any words on the pages, I just kept seeing us, as we were before. I remembered, God knows why, a day when we were playing cards. Seema kept sniffling, she had a cold, she couldn’t help it, but I can remember I was irritated with her. Yet somehow, thinking of it, that day seemed so wonderful, all of it, even Seema’s sniffles. I thought – if only we could go back there! My God, I must be mad to get sentimental about Seema’s sniffles. But I want us to be like that again, the way we were. I keep thinking – surely Papa will want to be back with us, he’ll come home and we’ll be like before.’ She turns to Sumi, a look
of suspicion on her face. ‘You will take him back, won’t you, if he returns? You won’t act all high and mighty, will you?’

(Deshpande, Matter of Time 193-194).

Charu’s words are a desperate plea to her mother to restore her lost childhood. She desperately yearns for the days to be back, though she is also probably conscious that they can never revert back to their normal way of living. Hence, she takes her refuge in studies. However, the moment she comes out of her shell she becomes too afraid to face the real world. Her belief that her father is going to come back and it is up to the mother to accept him back in their lives is a childhood mechanism of simplifying her response to the crisis in her life. In a sense, she, unlike Aru, is not so sure of her father’s irresponsibility. She rather thinks of her mother also as a possibly guilty partner, who may act “high and mighty” (Deshpande, Matter of Time 194).

Charu’s response to her mother thus is marked by an ambiguity; though she empathises with her mother, falls back upon her in her moment of crisis, yet she sees in her mother the only potential obstacle to her reunion with her father.

Sumi – Seema:

If Charu seeks a reversal to her childish self, Seema seems to do the opposite. The youngest of the three sisters, Seema suddenly changes and grows up into a mature adult. Her newfound adulthood has much to do with her changing physical cycle. Her periods start and it suddenly transforms her
from the baby she was into a grown up girl. However, she does not cope with her new physical state so easily. She hates her course of growing up. "No, I'm sick, I have a pain, I'm feeling dirty, I stink. I hate it" (Deshpande, Matter of Time 159), is her response to Sumi when she asks if Seema is all right. When told it is a part of the growing up process Seema immediately retorts "I don't want to grow up" (Deshpande, Matter of Time 159). Sumi, in fact, is awed by the prospect of making her daughter override the crisis.

Yet when she sees Seema in bed, lying on her side, her skirt rucked up showing the back of her thighs, she looks so childish, so vulnerable, that for the first time Sumi feels the burden of mothering girls (Deshpande, Matter of Time 158-159).

However, to everyone's surprise Seema seems to ride over the crisis all too well and exhibits a self that is different from her childish one. There is hint of this mature self of her when she sends her mother away and Sumi realizes that:

The tone is not a child's, it's an adult's and Sumi goes away. Seema has a right to cope with things in her own way (Deshpande, Matter of Time 159).

The next day Seema goes to school as usual, but there is a change in her behaviour. She asks Sumi to take her to Gopal, as she wants to talk to her father. However, she makes it clear that on no account Sumi can be there during their conversation. Their talks do not mend any broken bridge and when the father and the daughter come out they are as if "unaware of each
other, giving the sense of great distance between them" (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 162). Seema has developed a new distance with her mother as well; she “seems as much a stranger as the rickshaw driver” (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 162). Sumi is agonized at what has happened to her daughter, of not being able to communicate to her and probably for the first time her anguish drives her to put the blame squarely on Gopal.

... And what did he say to Seema? What did she ask him? Why doesn’t she tell me anything, why doesn’t she talk to me? How do I reach her? (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 162)

*Kalyani – Aru:*

It is, however, not only the relationship of the three sisters with their mother that is of importance; their relationship with their grandmother Kalyani also opens up new vistas in the study of the matrilineal lineage. Looking into the grandmother’s mirror has been one of the emerging paradigms in Women’s writing, whereby the continuous circle of the mother-daughter relationship can be fully explored. As a daughter turns into a mother she finds her relationship with her own daughter to be as troublesome as it was with her mother, showing how the psycho-socio factors contributing to her conditioning as a woman seem to be perpetual. In *A Matter of Time* the relationship forged between the granddaughters and their grandmother serves to show the mother daughter relationship in a new light; it brings the element of continuity
in the relationship making the new generation better understand the fears, anguishes and the dilemmas of the earlier generations.

The initial days between Aru and her grandmother, Kalyani are not easy. Kalyani, unaccustomed to deal with so many people, finds it almost impossible to cope with the situation; yet she is too reluctant to accept Aru’s help, who goes a long way in performing the daily chores. It is Aru’s way of helping her family, of taking on the role of the ‘man’ of the family. As Kalyani is opposed to this, there are minor annoyances over small day-to-day errands. Aru finds such interventions to be undignified, especially because she had faced no restrictions while living with Sumi. Ultimately, matters come to such a state that Sumi has to intervene on behalf of her daughter and let Kalyani understand that if she does not get used to taking others’ help, things are going to be really complicated. It is on this uneasy note that Aru and Kalyani begin to stay together.

Aru’s relationship with Kalyani takes a new turn as she fails to understand the relation between her grandmother and her grandfather, Shripati. Watching her grandmother stop mid-sentence, the moment she hears the music stop in her grandfather’s room and grow tense, several questions crop up in Aru’s mind.

Aru comes out of the bubble, her mind razor-sharp and clear, she sees a situation she has taken for granted for years. Why doesn’t Baba ever come down? Why doesn’t he have his meals here with the rest of us? Why doesn’t he ever speak to
Kalyani? She is his wife, isn’t she? And why is she so frightened of him? He rings the bell and she responds, he controls her from a distance. What has Amma done to make him behave this way towards her?

Poor Amma, Sumi says, poor Amma. But why?

In her confusion, Aru’s mind spirals towards Gopal, and his desertion no longer seems a bizarre independent occurrence, but connected somehow to the curious story of her grandparents, a story, she realizes only now, she has very little knowledge of (Deshpande, Matter of Time 39).

It is only later, sitting in a restaurant with her aunt Premi, Aru comes to learn about the lost son of Kalyani. While returning from Bangalore on a holiday, Kalyani – a young wife at the time – was left on the platforms of Bombay V.T., with her children and luggage as her husband Shripati went to check the reservations. When he returned the boy was no longer there. Kalyani sat on the platform with her two daughters and the luggage. The boy was mentally retarded. Shripati went mad and searched for him all over Bombay for two months. He returned empty-handed. From that day onwards, he never spoke to Kalyani. Aru wonders if her grandmother deliberately allowed the boy to drift away. He was retarded, was physically strong and it was very difficult for the young mother to care for such a child. However, her suggestion finds no favour with either her aunt Premi or her sister Charu. Both feel that it is impossible for a mother to do such a thing. Aru is however,
distraught over the silence of Kalyani. She feels if it is merely an accident and if Kalyani is not at fault, she should not be enduring her husband's cruelty without uttering a word. She should speak out and learn to voice her protest. Aru thus finds a similarity in the condition in the lives of her mother, Sumi—and her grandmother, Kalyani. She feels both of them to be victims of male chauvinist husbands, who desert their wives without any proper reason. Aru thus develops empathy for two of the most important women in her life, her mother and her grandmother. Her hostility towards her grandmother ends, as she can better understand the perpetual trauma Kalyani has lived with all these years. It is because of this growing understanding between them that Kalyani would finally choose Aru to unburden herself.

... She will, later, much later, and it is to Aru that she will speak. But even then she will not be able to bring herself to speak of that act of public desertion, of those long hours on the station platform with her children, surrounded by curious strangers, as if that is a memory so painfully blotted out that to bring it back to life would be as painful as the process of childbirth (Deshpande, Matter of Time 144).

Aru's association with Kalyani helps her get a glimpse of the family history. Kalyani tells her about the Ganesh idol found by her father. The story sounds interesting to Aru, though she cannot connect with it. However, a casual remark from Kalyani, "You look like my mother" (Deshpande, Matter of Time 116), connects her to her ancestors about whom she knows very little. It
is this continuing matrilineal line – remembering the foremothers – that is being underscored in much of the feminist writing today. Kalyani’s recognition of Aru’s similarity with her own mother, Manorama, opens up a new possibility in the relationship between Kalyani and her granddaughter. While telling the story of Manorama’s marriage to Vithalrao, Kalyani and Goda make it sound like a fairy tale. However, Aru marks the odd silences, which take care of their apparent discomfort in narrating certain aspects of their mother’s life. The silences often indicate stories that would never be unfolded.

It does not take Aru very long to realize that when the two women, Kalyani and Goda, speak of the past, they are playing cat’s cradle, skilfully transferring the thread from hand to hand, from finger to finger, creating a design between them, a design that allows certain facts to slip through. Clearly, there are stories concealed in the interstices of silence. One of these is of Kalyani’s marriage to her own uncle, Shripati (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 121).

It is the uneasy relationship between Kalyani and her mother Manorama that shapes the relationships between Kalyani and Aru. Manorama was always bitter to her daughter. Kalyani was not what Manorama had hoped. She had wished for a boy, but instead was cursed with a daughter. Even her daughter was not beautiful to look at. Kalyani considered her inadequacies as her own fault and silently endured her mother’s tantrums. Even she considered herself guilty for all her shortfalls.
... Aru will hear the story later, from Kalyani herself, though not all of it, for Kalyani will blame herself, absolve her mother of all wrongdoing. She was disappointed in me, she will say, she expected me to be like her, but I was too timid, too dull, she will say (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 149).

Kalyani lost her right to study at Yamunabai's school when Goda disclosed to Manorama about the romantic letters she was receiving from a young man. Kalyani herself was relieved when the burden of secrecy was taken off her. However, Manorama reacted most brutally to the situation. Kalyani's tryst with school was over and she was married to her uncle Shripati, ostensibly because Manorama wanted the property to remain with her natal home. Nevertheless, Kalyani does not blame her mother for the misery she had to endure all through her life.

And yet Kalyani is right in playing down everything but her mother's disappointment in her, for it was that which played the biggest role in her life. Manorama wanted a son; instead there was Kalyani. Not an unloved child, no, never that. But for Manorama, she became the visible symbol of their failure to have a son. And then, she fulfilled none of the dreams Manorama had for her daughter. Her daughter, she had thought, would be beautiful, accomplished, she would make a brilliant marriage that would be Manorama's triumph, that would show them, the family, all those women who had treated Manorama,
the daughter of a poor man from a village, with such contempt.
Instead there was Kalyani, who could do nothing that pleased her mother (Deshpande, Matter of Time 150 – 151).

The only time Kalyani was able to catch her mother’s fancy was when she gave birth to the boy. She was literally bestowed with what her father called a ‘red carpet living-in’ at her parental home. However, the son proved to be imbecile, and when Kalyani returned deserted by her husband, having lost her son, she had dashed every hope of her mother. Her suffering caused Vithalrao to change. There was a breach between him and his wife Manorama for the first time over their daughter. It led Manorama to greater cruelty towards her daughter. The event explicates the near-hysterical yearning for male-progeny in the Indian psyche. Manorama had always felt her inability to have a son as a shortcoming in her life. However, the birth of a grandson partly freed herself from her guilt-feeling. His loss brought back all the ill feelings in Manorama which found expression in her cruelty towards her daughter, Kalyani. Manorama even ascribed the death of her husband to Kalyani.

‘You are my enemy, you were born to make my life miserable.’ The words echoed in Kalyani’s ears every night (Deshpande, Matter of Time 153).

It was during her final days that Manorama was most tyrannical to her daughter. She would not allow anyone except Kalyani to nurse her, but at every moment, she complained that her daughter was going to kill her.
Kalyani, in spite of all the ill-treatment received from her mother, speaks of Manorama without bitterness. Nevertheless, there are peculiarities in her, which suggest the estranged relationship with her mother. She never wears the jewellery of her mother and when she mends her cloth, she has a guarded look, as if she is apprehensive of her mother coming to scold her. Aru tries to understand the connection between the Kalyani of yesteryears with the Kalyani of today, and fails.

Aru tries to connect the two women, the Kalyani left stranded by her husband in public and this Kalyani who seems to have exorcised all her ghosts. And fails. How can she not fail when she knows nothing of the long journey that lies between these two points, of the different points on that journey? Later, when they spend much time together, Kalyani will speak to her of it, of some of it. And strangely, she will speak without bitterness, as if she has, indeed, exorcised her ghosts (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 153).

Aru’s resemblance to Manorama, (“Look,” Kalyani points to Manorama’s picture on the wall, “You look like her” [Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 171]) allows Kalyani to relive her relationship with her mother. It lets her to mend the estranged relationship. Aru is at once the very image of Manorama to Kalyani as well as what her mother would have wanted her to be like. Aru’s similarity to her great grandmother Manorama, her sharing of her name with her great great grandmother Arundhati (Deshpande, *Matter of Time*
149), all in the eyes of Kalyani link her to the grand cycle of mothers and daughters. Therefore, Kalyani to truly exorcise the ghosts of her mother has to fall back upon Aru.

As a mark of truly burying the past behind her, Kalyani gifts her mother's diamond earrings to Aru. When Aru questions why is she giving them to her, Kalyani replies:

... ‘I think – I hope – my mother would have been proud of you. I was a great disappointment to her. Not only because I was a girl, but because – because – oh, maybe because I was none of those things she would have liked her daughter to be. I was not beautiful, not smart ...’ (Deshpande, *Matter of Time* 226).

Kalyani expresses her displeasure in not being able to satisfy her mother, but she feels finally that she has beaten her mother in the game of life, for she has learnt how to live and enjoy life, how to tide over the difficulties, whereas her mother only suffered from a sense of inadequacy for her daughter.

‘Why not? She was that way herself. I feel very sad sometimes to think that I gave her no joy at all. But Aru, I’m not giving these to you only for her sake, it’s for mine too. For so many years I thought I had nothing, I was so unfortunate that I could get no pleasure even from my own children. My mother didn’t care for my children, either. Daughters again, she said. And when you were born, a daughter, I wondered how she could have been so blind. Now when I look at you, my three
Kalyani's gesture finally displays her ability to be at peace with Manorama. She gifts the earrings of her mother to Aru, jewels she never adorned herself with in her life. We understand that this is not only because of her suppressed anger towards her mother, of the problematic relationship between them but also because of her awareness of not being up to the mark in her mother's eyes. But what she fails to achieve, has been achieved by her granddaughter. In a sense, it is her success story as well for mothers and daughters weave a cyclical pattern in which they continue to live ever after. Kalyani has achieved in her granddaughter what Manorama failed to achieve in her daughter. Again, Aru who is a look-alike of Manorama, by accepting the token from Kalyani finally absolves the latter from her failure. Thus, Aru is simultaneously a mother and a daughter to Kalyani.

Indeed, the novel looks at mothers and daughters as part of a great cycle, where individual identities get blurred. This also gets reflected in the following lines from Margaret Atwood's "Five Poems for Grandmother":

granddaughters, especially at you, I think – I'm luckier than my mother. She's the unlucky one who didn't know how to enjoy her children and grandchildren. And so...’ She plucks the earrings from their velvet bed with a kind of frantic haste, as if afraid Aru will escape her, and presses them into Aru's palm. ‘Take them,’ she says and closes her hand so tightly on Aru's fist that the sharp edges of the earrings cut into her palms. 'Take them, child' (Deshpande, Matter of Time 226 – 227).
Sons branch out, but
one woman leads to another.
Finally I know you
through your daughters,
my mother, her sisters,
and through myself (Atwood 14).

One is thus destined to play not only her own role, but is simultaneously assigned roles, which she may be hardly aware of. The patterns often seem to repeat as in case of Kalyani and Sumi, Manorama and Aru, yet each continues to live her own life.

'... I had to see what had happened to my mother. I was frightened. It seemed like something being repeated – my mother then, me now. And my daughters? But now I know that my life is not like my mother's. Our life, yours and mine was complete' (Deshpande, Matter of Time 221 – 222).

The novel analyses mother-daughter relationship as a potential minefield and yet so full of potentialities. In their identification with each other, the mothers and daughter often feel the constriction that suffocates the individual in them. Yet, they also lead their own lives; no two lives can be the same after all. This space actually proves fructifying and fulfilling for both the mother and daughter who can eventually share and identify with each other, and yet at the same time achieve their unique distinction as individuals.
Section III: The Binding Vine

Urmi – Inni:

The theme of initial misapprehension followed by proper appreciation of the mother is again exemplified in Urmi’s relationship with her mother, Inni in Sashi Deshpande’s The Binding Vine (1993). Inni is the quiet mother steeped in domesticity, quite the opposite of flamboyant Urmi. She is the caring mother who appears to be a bit withdrawn from the bustle of the daily life. Urmi is much more rebuffed than reassured by the fuss she makes over her daughter. Inni with her intruding concern over Urmi’s bereaved condition only disturbs her daughter.

We come to know of one such nervous handling of Urmi by her mother from Urmi’s conversation with her brother Amrut. As Urmi wakes up early one morning and prepares a cup of tea for herself, Inni frantically tries to stop her daughter and make the tea herself. Urmi tries to reassure her with a smile but obviously her mother is not convinced. Even Amrut knows what his mother can be and jocularly says, “Enough to unnerve anyone, let alone a sensitive plant like our poor Inni, to have her child grin at her that way at five in the morning” (Deshpande, Binding Vine 25).

Similar events abound in plenty. Just after watching a movie on TV everyone in the house agrees to go out with Harish, Vanaa’s husband. Urmi wishes to be away from the bustle. Inni is not prepared to leave her alone and it is only when Priti says that she would stay on for a while that Inni agrees to leave. Even while going, she pretty much makes it a point that Urmi should not
be washing the dishes. The same over considerate treatment of Urmi – as if she was just a little child – recurs when Inni wants her daughter not to take an active interest in Kalpana’s case. Obviously one wonders why Inni should make so much fuss over her daughter. Is it because of her senility due to her age or a result of the bereaved condition that she finds her daughter in?

However, the answer probably lies elsewhere. We find Urmi to be a bit hostile to her mother even when she was a child. As Vanaa and Urmi recreate the Ranidurg days, when Urmi stayed with her grandparents we find that she never wore the smart dresses sent to her by her mother, preferring instead to wear the “awful clothes” (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 8) stitched by her grandmother. She avoided the expensive dresses of Inni as they made her feel different. When Vanaa observes that she actually looked different in her Baiajji’s clothes as she must have been the “worst dressed child in the school”, Urmi replies:

‘I didn’t mind that. It was better than being distinctive in Inni’s expensive clothes. That’s why I kept on wearing the things Baiajji stitched – however old or shabby they got. I made her let them out until there was nothing to let out. And Inni’s dresses stayed in the cupboard until I could say – truthfully – that they were too small for me’ (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 9).

The ostensible reason put forward by Urmi for not wearing Inni’s clothes is that she never wanted to look different, but her attitude points out to a deep chasm between the mother and the daughter. By rejecting Inni’s dresses Urmi was in
fact rejecting her mother altogether. When we take this childhood experience into account the recent events tend to fall into place. We seem to understand Inni's nervous over-protective handling of her daughter. It is because of the uneasy relationship between the two, due to a gulf that has not yet been bridged.

This breach between the two gets exposed again when Inni seeing a framed picture wrapped in a packet casually enquires if it is Anu's. The mere suggestion by Inni that Urmi might want Anu's picture to be hanged on the wall to remember her puts Urmi in frenzy:

'I don't need a picture to remember her, I can remember every bit of her, every moment of her life. How can you imagine I need a picture...?'

To put my Anu on the wall, to place my child among the dead, no more a part of my life, never more part of my world – how dare Inni, how dare she think such a thing! A white-hot rage explodes in me, binding me, so that Inni's face is a blur. Then it comes into focus and I can see her – Kartik standing by her, holding on to her sari, the two faces alike in their expression of fear. I stop speaking. There is a terrible silence (Deshpande, Binding Vine 68).

This rage is born out of complex psychological equations. Nancy Chodorow in her essay "The Psychodynamics of Family" argues that in motherhood, a woman is able to recreate her original infantile experiences. The oedipal
relationship of a girl develops first with her mother and then with her father. However, at no point of time the original relationship with the mother is broken. Naturally, in a heterosexual relationship her oedipal needs are not satisfied, as she does not find a suitable replacement for her mother. During her motherhood, she identifies herself with her own mother, whereas, the child is situated in her place thus completing the oedipal triangle along with her husband. This implies identification with the mother on the one hand and a projection of the self into the child.

Inni’s careful remark thus has the potential of not only to "place (Urmi’s) child among the dead" but also of placing Umri herself among the dead. As Umri projects herself into her daughter, she must have her daughter alive, albeit if only in her own world, unless she wishes to die herself.

The relation between Urmi and Inni is a complex one. Even when Inni asserts that her pain is no less, that it is she who used to spend most of her time with Anu, Urmi requests her not to continue. When her mother fails to stop she gets irritated. Urmi’s relationship with her daughter, Anu, is so intensely a private matter that she cannot allow her mother to enter the domain. A direct relationship between Inni and Anu means the negation of Urmi. Even if Urmi places her in place of her daughter the relationship threatens to disbalance the complex Oedipus triangle.

However, Urmi’s relationship with her mother is not only unidirectional. Like most mothers and daughters they not only hate but also love each other. This ambiguous nature of the relationship becomes clear when Urmi feels:
I don’t like to think of Inni waiting for the sound of my key in the latch, the sound of Kartik’s bus. She seemed so self-reliant once, how did she come to this state? Sometimes she seems almost humble in her dependence; it gives me the same pang her loss of beauty does. As a child, her beauty had embarrassed me; it set her apart from the others, made her look as much a luxury object as the bottles on her dressing table. But now, when I see her losing it, her waist thickening, her upper arms flabby, her skin dry, it saddens me (Deshpande, Binding Vine 67).

If Inni’s beauty had ‘embarrassed’ Urmi as a child, it is now her mother’s fading beauty that gives her ‘pangs’. This reflects a more mature response from Urmi who can now empathise with her mother. This goes on to show that in spite of jealousy or envy or sheer hatred for her mother at one point of time Urmi has retained a soft corner for Inni. This love-hate relationship is probably a result of the daughter’s uneasy identification with her mother. As a child Urmi envies her mother’s glowing beauty, secretly wishing to be like her. But at this point of time when she is at her prime, Urmi fears looking at her mother, lest she is told what is in store for her. The daughter’s identity with the mother thus becomes the cause behind her distance from as well as closeness to the mother.

Urmi’s hostility towards Inni and the latter’s nervous appraisal of things concerning her daughter has their roots in the distant past for which none of
them are responsible. The antagonism has its root in Urmii's staying away from her mother all through her childhood. Her Ranidurg days, where she grew up with her grandparents, permanently made a breach in her relationship with her mother. Even when her grandmother expired she stayed with her grandfather. Urmii was only in her early teens and the event made her fiercely independent. But it is not Inni who is responsible for sending away her daughter though she carries the burden of guilt all through her life for not being able to look after her little daughter. She has had to wait for a whole lifetime to unburden her little secret and when she is finally able to do so, the words pour out haltingly:

'It was because I...because your Papa – he didn't trust me, he thought I couldn't...wouldn't look after you properly. I went out one day, I didn't leave you alone, I swear I didn't, Diwakar was there. Then Papa came home and found you crying and I wasn't at home. And he...oh my God, he was...'

I can see on her face the terror she had felt then, as if she has carried it within her all these years.

'I was frightened of you, Urmii,' it bursts out of her. 'I was too young, I was not prepared to have a child. And you were not easy, you used to cry all the time, I didn't know how to soothe you. Diwakar was good with you, he was better than me, but Papa said, "How could you leave her alone with a man!" Diwakar! He had been with us since I was a child, that's why Mummy sent
him to help me, he was so gentle, but Papa said, "He's a man."

Diwakarl’ (Deshpande, Binding Vine 199).

The confession melts the frigidity between the two. Inni’s unburdening of truth is not simply a shifting of responsibility to her husband but also an expression of her own vulnerability as a girl-mother not yet ready to cope with the stresses of motherhood. She reveals her guilt feeling at not being able to manage with her daughter properly, of having had to depend on Diwakar to look after Urmi. And Urmi can see the terror in her mother’s eyes, the terror she carried all through her life. As Urmi moves back into the past she imagines her mother arguing and cajoling with her Papa, a scene she has not witnessed in her real life. She can easily see for herself the desperation in Inni’s pleas, the absolution her mother seeks again after all these years. Having lost her daughter, Urmi is in a position to realise what her mother must have had felt when she was sent away.

‘...You know your Papa...I didn’t want you to be sent away to Ranidurg, believe me Urmi, I didn’t want that, I wanted you with us, I never got used to the idea of your being in Ranidurg, I wanted you with me...’ (Deshpande, Binding Vine 200).

Inni’s reliving the horrors of her life strikes a sympathetic chord in Urmi. She realises how she and her mother had been victims of situations beyond their control. It is not only the physical distance that matters, but rather the compelling emotional gulf that crops up which has the potential to permanently damage the relationship. The irreducible breach between the two, Urmi and
Inni, has now been bridged and the daughter has a better understanding of the wronged mother.

There's something supplicatory about her; it's as if I'm seeing that girl-mother of long ago, kneeling before her husband for understanding, forgiveness. She wants me to give it to her, the absolution Papa never granted her.

I do...A sense of being vulnerable and naked, as if some armour I've been wearing all these years — against what? — has fallen off (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 200).

Urmi's taking up of the patriarchal garb and giving her mother the absolution, she once sought from her husband, is a triumph of feminine sensibility over the patriarchal social order. Inni has so long been an unwilling agent of a patriarchal order and even her daughter fails to understand her compulsion. The moment Inni's vulnerability is revealed to Urmi, the daughter can establish new ways of communication with her mother. Even Inni feels unburdened having been absolved by one whom she had wronged. More than anything, Urmi too is relieved. She is no more the unwanted daughter sent away to a distant place to stay with her grandparents. As a consequence, the firewall of hostility that she had erected as armour to protect herself peels off. She feels 'vulnerable and naked' and happy to shake off a burden from the past.

But can the whole past be shaken off at one go? Urmi herself seems to be unsure.
Then she is gone and I think of how I had agonised over why they had sent me away, I think of all the theories I had constructed and I begin to laugh – a laughter that suddenly turns into tears. It's a painful, agonising, tearing-my-insides-apart sobbing. My nose, my throat are blocked by great globs of mucus; it's the ugly unrestrained crying of my childhood. It goes on and on, my breath coming out in painful gasps...

Why? Because the scars of an old cruelty have shown me how hopeless, how utterly hopeless it is? Because I've seen how bottomless the chasm is, how impossible to bridge?

(Deshpande, Binding Vine 200 – 201).

The misunderstanding has been too great, too prolonged to dissolve into nothingness. It has to remain there, but there is the hope of looking at the gulf from a more mature angle. Urmi realizes both the sending of as well as the attempt to cling together by her Papa and mother respectively were out of love. After all these years everything reduces to, "I thought he was a just man, a wise man, but Inni was wiser. She knows that what mattered was that Diwakar was 'gentle and good'". If any wrong was committed to her after all, it was only due to the error of judgement.

Urmi looks back at her Baiajji, a lady who was "the fount of wisdom and love" (Deshpande, Binding Vine 200). And yet she was cruel to Aju and kept his daughters from the other marriage away. Urmi thinks that her Papa had felt such a cruelty and hence insisted on giving those daughters there proper
share of property when Aju died. Urmi too realises the paradox in her father. He loved his wife deeply and yet was cruel to her. Urmi’s final realisation is that love does not absolve us from being cruel. Drawing from Shakutai’s experience she knows that such a paradox is central to the mother-daughter relationship. There is no way by which the bridge can be completely crossed though there is always the yeaming to do so.

Perhaps it is this, the divide in ourselves, that is the great divide. Perhaps it’s this divide in ourselves that’s the hardest to bridge, the hardest to accept, to live with (Deshpande, Binding Vine 201).

Shakutai – Kalpana:

The Shakutai-Kalpana episode brings out another significant dimension of mother-daughter relationship in the lives of the urban poor. Indian women novelists, themselves being of middle class origin, generally tend to dwell on the same class. Shashi Deshpande’s exploration of the lives of the urban poor class in The Binding Vine is remarkable in this connection as it goes on to show the universally enigmatic nature of the mother-daughter relationship. The study also lays bare the societal pressures on women, which may remain hidden in a middle class set up but surfaces in all its brutal reality amidst the poor.

Urmii gets involved with Shakutai when she goes to the hospital to keep an appointment with Vanaa. There she finds her friend helping a fainted
Shakutai and comes to know from her that Shakutai's daughter has been admitted to the hospital in a critical condition with a head injury. She has also been raped. As soon as Shakutai regains her consciousness she despairingly cries out to tell her what she has heard about her daughter is untrue. When the doctor insists on the truth, her immediate reaction is “What is he saying, tai? Tell him my daughter is not that kind of a girl” (Deshpande, Binding Vine 58). She even accuses Vanaa “It’s not true, you people are trying to blacken my daughter’s name” (Deshpande, Binding Vine 58). Her desperation increases as she learns that the doctor is going to report the matter to the police – “No, no, no. Tell him, tai, it’s not true, don’t tell anyone, I’ll never be able to hold up my head again, who’ll marry the girl, we’re decent people” (Deshpande, Binding Vine 58). And finally she is reduced to frantic pleading –

‘If a girl’s honour is lost, what’s left? The girl doesn’t have to do anything wrong, people will always point a finger at her. Doctor,’ she turns to him, ‘even if it is true, keep it to yourself, don’t let anyone know of it, I have another daughter, what will become of her…?’ (Deshpande, Binding Vine 59).

Shakutai’s reaction brings out the society’s insistence on the girl’s ‘chastity’, the societal pressure for keeping a girl’s ‘honour’ intact. The patriarchal society coerces women by imposing strict and discriminatory sexual restrictions. Rape thus becomes a weapon in the hands of men not only to physically torture a woman but to demean her position in the society. Naturally, the usual response of a rape-victim is to hide her humiliation and
injury, thereby allowing the rapist not only to go scot free but to choose his next victim at will. The sexual control which the Indian society imposes upon its women, thus projecting chastity of women as the highest value, controls the mother-daughter relationship as well. The mother, here in the form of Shakutai, is more interested in hiding her daughter's shame rather than taking an interest in punishing the guilty. Apparently she works in the interest of her daughter. Practically she plays into the hands of the patriarchal order by indirectly protecting the very people who have committed the most heinous of crimes against her own daughter. The fear of violation is so strong in Indian women that they do not even allow their daughters to dress in an attractive way. It is the mother, who more often than not, has an active role in imposing prohibitions upon the daughter, thereby straining the mutual understanding which could have been so valuable and sustaining otherwise.

In this novel too, Shakutai's first reaction to the news of her daughter's violation is one of shock and disbelief. But once she has no other way but to admit the truth, her concern is to protect her daughter by somehow preventing the tarnishing of her name. She realises very well that even if her daughter is not at fault in any way, people are sure to blame her for the mishap. And once a girl's name is tarnished the whole family will be looked down upon; her other sisters too lose their chance of marriage.

As Shakutai can do nothing and watch helplessly her daughter, who is in a state of coma – neither dead nor alive – the memory of guilt returns. She though married a man, was left at her parents’ home. She decides to join her
husband at Bombay. The man cannot support her as he is not ready to work. Shakuntala has no option but to provide for herself. She takes a job at a grocery shop. But before she can etch out a living for herself she becomes pregnant. She does not want to be burdened with a child at that stage.

'...I didn’t want the child, I didn’t want Kalpana, I wanted her to die.'

She sees my face and flashes out at me. ‘You can’t understand, you won’t understand, how will you? I took things, I used to hit myself hard – here – with the rolling pin, you understand, when making chapattis – but nothing happened.

She was born’ (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 111).

Her problem is solved when Sulu, a childless woman who looked after the children of Shakuntala when they were born, wants to keep Kalpana with her, look after her wellbeing. But Kalpana flees within three days and goes straight to her father who has in the meantime deserted Shakutai and is now living with another woman. For Shakuntala who goes on working without a grudge “so that (her) children could grow up, that they could go to school, live better than (her)” (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 111), this is sheer betrayal. So when Kalpana is brought back, she scolds and beats her: “Die then,” I said, “What do I care? What can I give you but dry chapattis and one set of clothes?” Whereas Sulu – what would she not have done for her’ (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 111).
And now that she finds her daughter in her death-bed she is disconsolate:

Suddenly it bursts out of her, ‘Sometimes, Urmila, I think I was cruel to the girl; but I did it for her. I wanted her to have all that I never had – education, a good life, a good marriage, respect from others. Look at me – what am I? I don't want my children to be like me.’ And then the cry breaks out of her. ‘Did I do wrong, Urmila, was I cruel to her?’ And again, ‘I didn’t want her to be born, is that why she is dying now? Is this my punishment?’

(Deshpande, Binding Vine 112)

Her obsession with Kalpana takes its toll on the household activities. When Urmila visits Shakutai she finds, “Shakutai’s obsession with Kalpana has made her neglectful of the others, of her home. I can see the neglect like a slight overlay of dust, over the room, over the child herself…” (Deshpande, Binding Vine 142). Kalpana by her very absence seems to be omnipresent in the room, in her mother’s memory. Every thing associated with the room – from the cat she used to feed to her collection of cheap cosmetics kept in an old biscuit tin – suddenly seem to relate to the girl. As these ordinary household goods assume poignancy there is a premonition in Shakutai’s mind that her daughter would return no more. But her despair is also tinged with anger – an anger she bears towards her daughter for the problems created by her. It’s remarkable that Shakutai accuses Kalpana for her fate. In the hospital she had first tried to stifle the fact that her daughter has been raped out of fear
of social ostracism. But it is not only the society which raises an accusing finger towards the victim; even the mother herself does so. While looking at her daughter's photograph Shakutai remembers how she had asked Kalpana not to show off too much and how her daughter had rebuffed her without bothering to listen to her. To Urmila she candidly admits her fear:

'Here boys are like ... they're like dogs panting after bitches. And if you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they'll leave you alone? Ever since Kalpana grew up, I have had to live with this fear' (Deshpande, Binding Vine 146).

The guilt is a consequence of this fear. It is a guilt born out of not being able to stick to the norms, however unjust they are.

And now that Kalpana has shamed her mother, every little rebellion of the girl is looked at with a magnifier. Turning the pages of the album Sandhya, Kalpana's younger sister, points out to a picture of Kalpana along with Sulu and Prabhakar, which the girl had tried to tear up. Shakutai looks at Sulu and Prabhakar as saviours who had tried to bring comfort to Kalpana. Kalpana's enmagement seems to be betrayal to her and she has no idea of what goes on in her daughter's mind:

'... I don't understand that girl, Urmila, what does she want, what does she want?'

It's a cry of such rage and despair, it startles me.
‘I asked her, again and again I asked her, what do you want? But she never gave me a reply’ (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 146).

The despair in Shakutai’s voice is born out of her inability to understand her own daughter. Born out of her flesh, Kalpana seems to be seas apart from Shakutai. With Kalpana on the death row the chasm seems not only to be deep but also unbridgeable.

The uncertainty with regards to Kalpana gets intensified when she reacts strongly to Prabhakar’s slapping of her brother, Prakash. Shakutai who looks at Prabhakar for the support finds no fault with him. Prabhakar is for her a family friend or to be more precise “He’s like his (Prakash’s) father” (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 147). But Kalpana believes it to be high handedness.

The misunderstanding leads to accusations. When Kalpana is raped Shakutai faces social isolation which holds her guilty for not being able to control her daughter. Even her son accuses her of the same. Without any support Shakutai tries to redeem herself by remembering how many times she had warned Kalpana but was unable to penetrate under the garb of indifference which her daughter assumed before her.

‘...My children have become a burden to me, Urmila, they have become a burden.’ She stops, exhausted. ‘And now, Prakash ... “You should have controlled her,” he says. “You let her go out of hand.” I don’t blame him, he listens to others. I
know what they're saying. What can you expect, they say, of a
girl whose mother has left her husband? Imagine! He left me for
another woman, left me with these children to bring up. And I
have to listen to such words because of this girl. She's shamed
us, we can never wipe off this blot (Deshpande, *Binding Vine*
147).

Even Urmi's attempts to make Shakutai realise that it is not Kalpana but the
man who raped her, who is responsible for the unfortunate course of events
do not strike any chord with Shakutai. She simply dismisses the idea:

'The man,' she says after a small silence. 'What use is it
blaming him? Women like you will never understand what it is
like for us. We have to keep to our places, we can never step
out. There are always people waiting to throw stones at us, our
own people first of all. I warned Kalpana, but she would never
listen to me. 'I'm not afraid of anyone,' she used to say. That's
why this happened to her... women must know fear'
(Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 148).

Shakutai's overtures make Urmila angry. She feels that Shakutai can
hardly realise the enormity of the situation; forgetting her daughter's
precarious state she "speaks as if getting raped is merely one more of those
childish misdemeanours that so annoyed her" (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 148).

But probably Urmila is only partly correct in her assessment. Shakutai
obviously understands the enormity of the situation. She realizes quite well
that Kalpana is never going to come back. Her bouts of grief are no less sincere than her fits of anger. What may confuse us is the direction of this anger. Instead of blaming the wrong-doer she affixes the blame on the victim. But there is no other option left. With society taking sides with the wrong-doer one can only hope not to be wronged and protect her self in any manner possible. Her anger is born out of the desperation and guilt of not being able to protect her own child. This anger is at once an attempt to save herself from this guilt consciousness as well as a result of her total identification with her daughter. In the first instance, it is solely directed against her daughter; it acts as a protective shield by squarely putting the blame all upon Kalpana. In the second instance it is an anger directed both against her daughter and her own self, an anger born out of her identification with her daughter, her shame. It is a self indicting anger born out of frustration. The daughter's failure thus gets identified with the failure of the mother. That this failure is not enormous is born out of the fact that she looks at her daughter's flaw as a 'childish misdemeanour' (Deshpande, Binding Vine 148). But that does not take away the bittemess of her anger, for this is one flaw for which the consequences are enormous.

The next momentous event happens when Shakutai reveals Kalpana's story in front of the press. The hospital treating Kalpana decided to transfer her to a far-flung hospital citing lack of enough beds for the patients as the reason. When Umni is told about this, she tries frantically to stop the move; but her efforts yield no result. Suddenly she spots Malcolm, a journalist who
happens to be her friend. Urmila realises that the only way they can stop Kalpana's removal is by giving the scoop to the press. She asks Shakutai to make a choice. The mother, without any option left, gives her consent to make the matter public. Kalpana's story receives much publicity. While some papers put a question mark on her morality others portray her as a victim. The women's groups earnestly take up the issue. Even the state assembly allows a debate. An investigation is ordered into the case and the decision to shift her is withdrawn. But Shakutai has to pay a heavy price for this. She becomes an instant celebrity all for a wrong cause. Plenty of support comes for Shakutai and her family; "The whole world is my friend" (Deshpande, Binding Vine 179) she observes dryly. But the pity is shallow, false; it is a sympathy reserved for the objects of spectacle. And now Shakutai questions her judgement and feels that she has again wronged Kalpana.

'...I think I made a mistake. I should have kept quiet. I thought I was helping Kalpana. But sometimes I think the only thing that can help Kalpana now is death. You know, each time I come here, I keep thinking, may be this time, when I come into this ward, I'll see an empty bed, or may be there will be another patient in her bed and they'll tell me, "Your daughter is dead, she died last night." And for a moment, sinner that I am, my heart feels light at the thought. Then it's as if someone has hit me here and I think, what kind of a woman am I to long for my daughter's death? I, who gave her birth... I'll never live like you, she used to
say to me, always, all the time. God has fulfilled that desire of hers. Look at her, just look at her. I gave her nothing in her life, my Kalpana, and now I've given away her name as well' (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 178).

This feeling of remorse and guilt haunts Shakutai further when she comes to know that it is Prabhakar who is the rapist. Sulu, Prabhakar's wife, confesses all when she comes to know about it. She reveals how Prabhakar was crazy about Kalpana and even wanted to marry her. Sulu too had persuaded Kalpana to do the same. It seems strange that Sulu should persuade Kalpana to marry her own husband, Prabhakar, thereby affecting her own marital life. Though no definite reason is ascribed in the novel for Sulu's behaviour, one may assume that it is her childless state that compels Sulu to act in this manner. She must have been a victim of social and familial pressures and held herself guilty for not being able to provide Prabhakar with a child. By attempting to get Kalpana married to Prabhakar, Sulu probably tries to absolve herself of this guilt.

Tormented by the fact that she has to betray either her husband or her sister Shakutai, Sulu commits suicide. Shakutai holds her daughter guilty one last time for not abiding with Sulu's request. But the moment Urmii points out that would have been wrong. She seems to understand, "Yes, we were wrong, Sulu and I, we were both wrong" (Deshpande, *Binding Vine* 193).

Sulu's death helps solve the puzzle that Shakutai was so confounded with. Kalpana's behaviour now becomes comprehensible to her. She now
realises her mistake of never trying to understand her daughter and accusing her of all her tantrums.

'She was only a child then, she was fourteen and he thought he could.... That's why she ran away and refused to go back. But she didn't tell me, why didn't she tell me? And where were my eyes? I should have known, I should have guessed... I've done wrong, Urmila. I've done great wrong, such great wrong'

(Deshpande, Binding Vine 189-90).

For some time she remains desperate. She wants to send Sandhya away fearing her presence in her daughter's life will ruin the latter just as it had ruined Kalpana. But once she overcomes the initial shock she asks Urmila what to do.

I realise this is not a cry of desperation. She is asking me for an answer, she wants me to tell her what she must do....

I know now why it is she wanted me here – not for comfort, not for consolation, no one can give her that, and there are enough women here to give her that kind of support anyway.

No, it is for this that she wanted me here, to give her an answer to this question. She thinks I can give it to her. Can I?

(Deshpande, Binding Vine 194).

Kalpana's rape and her subsequent condition which come as a shock to Shakutai help her to build a bridge with her daughter. The stubborn girl who seemed to be rebellious to her mother is looked upon rather sympathetically.
The better understanding now mellows down the vociferous anger into grief, concern and guilt-feeling.

Section IV: Small Remedies

Savitribai – Hasina:

The previous chapter offers us a glimpse of the hostile relationship between Savitribai and her daughter Munni. But this relationship cannot be fully comprehended without analysing her relationship with Hasina. Both Munni and Hasina are connected to the life of Savitribai through Ghulam Saab. The first is the daughter of Bai’s former lover, the latter his granddaughter. Though Bai becomes totally separated from her daughter, it is Hasina on whom she depends most in her old age. Hasina is different from Munni in one respect, she does not hate what Bai stands for; rather she is an ardent admirer of the artist in Savitribai and her keenest student. In spite of Bai’s dependence on Hasina for all practical matters Bai exhibits her haughty self while dealing with Hasina. She is only referred to by the term ‘That girl’ (Deshpande, Small Remedies 59); her identity is never acknowledged. Bai would not even allow any outsider to get involved with Hasina. When Madhu puts forward some questions about Bai’s daily routine to Hasina, Bai gets visibly agitated.

‘If there’s anything you want to know about me, you ask me. I can tell you whatever you want to know. I may be old and sick, but I’m not an idiot. And I’m not dead yet, you know’ (Deshpande, Small Remedies 125-126).
Bai is ever complaining about Hasina's activities. When Hasina stops taking
the classes she has to cope with the myriad nitpickings by Bai. The criticisms
cover almost every aspect of the musical lesson. However, they are all
reserved for Hasina; the other students are hardly ever chided. Bai thus in
relation to Hasina appears in the image of a dominating matriarch, who is
almost tyrannical by nature. But yet Savitribai retains a soft corner for Hasina,
which becomes evident when her anger mellows down: "That girl still has a lot
to learn" (Deshpande, Small Remedies 60). This love-hate relationship puts
Hasina in the position of a daughter figure. It is as if she is the surrogate
daughter replacing Munni. Her place in Bai's life connects Bai to the man she
loved and her daughter, in spite of all denials on her part.

The close bond between the two is not apparent to the casual visitor.
Nevertheless, Bai and Hasina share a very intimate relationship which is
remarkably absent in Bai's relationship with her own daughter. When Bai
suddenly falls ill, Hasina admits her in the local hospital and calls for Madhu.
Hasina's anxiety puts Madhu in a dilemma.

...I've never heard Bai speak kindly to Hasina; she's exacting,
suspicious, often harsh. Why, then, does Hasina care so much?
Or, is this an impersonal pity for a suffering human?

Hasina gives me the answer. 'I've been her student for
fifteen years, she says. 'These last two years I've been living
with her. Now I have to be with her till the end. She and I are tied
to each other' (Deshpande, Small Remedies 242).
Hasina's link to Savitribai is through her grandfather, Ghulam Saab. She portrays to Madhu the image of Ghulam Saab as an artist, the one who was always the prop on whom Bai could rely. She is eager to correct the idea that Madhu has about Ghulam Saab. According to Hasina, Ghulam Saab was just not a lover, or an accompanist but an ardent musical expert, who sacrificed himself for the making of Bai. It is he who introduced Hasina to the world of music. Together they explored this world. Ghulam Saab teaches Hasina about the control of Bai's voice but what she recognises is the "ease and comfort with which they (Savitribai and Ghulam Saab) move together, the seamless union between the voice and the instrument" (Deshpande, Small Remedies 276-277). It is the close relation between her grandfather and Bai that brings Hasina near Savitribai. She looks at Bai almost as a mother because she finds her to be close to the man she really cared for. Her resemblance to Bai's daughter does not end just in her caring for Bai. Ghulam Saab, shocked at losing her daughter Munni, used to call Hasina by the very name. This puts Hasina in a peculiar situation. She is as if the surrogate daughter of Savitribai. Ghulam Saab and later Madhu look at her as a substitute for Munni. Probably Bai also looks at her from the same viewpoint. By any standard Hasina is much more a daughter to Bai than Munni. Whereas Munni was only a biological daughter, Hasina carries on the same vocation for which Bai dedicated her entire life.

It is significant that Bai does not lose her daughter after all. If hatred, mistrust, denial marked her relationship with Munni she finds more than
enough compensation in her relationship with Hasina. She passes out of the world with her flag bearer to take her place, one who holds aloft her musical tradition, who in a way encompasses the very struggle she has had to endure. It is fitting that Bai passes on her mantle to Hasina. Bai’s whole life has been one dedicated to music and it is through music that she may attain a kind of immortality. While in her death bed listening to a song of Hasina there are tears in Bai’s eyes. Madhu wonders what the tears are for. But they herald a happy auguring.

When Hasina comes to the end, she gets up and comes to Bai. Bai has recovered, there’s no trace of her tears. She says something to Hasina, something I can’t understand. But Hasina does, she calls the twins and tells them what Bai has said. Appreciative words, I imagine, for they bend down and touch her feet. Hasina wheels Bai away to her room and comes back to me, her face alive with excitement. She tells me her news. She’s going to sing for Guruji’s death anniversary this year. Bai had suggested her name and last night it was finalized.

‘My first big performance,’ she says. ‘My first chance to prove myself, to show the world what Baiji has given me’ (Deshpande, Small Remedies 285).

The recognition comes at last. The recognition denied to Munni comes in the form of the recognition to Hasina. Being the hard task master that Bai is, this recognition from her needs a lot of striving on part of the daughter to attain.
The reconciliation between the mother and daughter, which at one point seemed impossible, is finally achieved. And there can be no better note on which this understanding between the mother and daughter figures could be accomplished. The daughter starts at the point where her mother herself had begun her journey thus symbolising the beginning of the next circle.

Section V: Difficult Daughters

Virmati – Kasturi:

Like *The Binding Vine*, Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* (1995) captures the complex and ambivalent relationships between the mothers and daughters over the tenure of three generations. Set in pre-independence India, the novel criss-crosses the space between Amritsar and Lahore as it unfolds the story of Virmati, a daughter and mother, and with her the tale of generational dialectics that underscores every daughter’s relationship with her mother.

Virmati’s case seems to follow the classic description of the eldest daughter in Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*:

Frequently the oldest girl, her father’s favourite, is the special object of the mother’s persecution. She loads her with disagreeable tasks, requires of her a sobriety beyond her age: since she is a rival, she will be treated as an adult; she, too, will have to learn that ‘life is no novel, no bed of roses …’ (Beauvoir 534 – 535).
Her relationship with her mother is most problematic. Being the eldest of the eleven children she has to play the role of a second mother for her brothers and sisters. She is most often the one who has to do the most oppressive of the daily chores and is often abused by her mother, without any apparent reason. It happens because Kasturi, the mother, sees in her a rival able to challenge her world. Besides Kasturi's repeated pregnancies made her sickly, which resulted in her total dependence on Virmati to manage her household. As a natural consequence her unique position in the home is lost which she has to yield to her daughter quite unwillingly. Virmati thus becomes a 'substitute' and not the 'double' that every mother wants her daughter to be. Consequently, the relationship assumes hostile dimensions.

The language of feeling had never flowed between them, and this threat was meant to express all her thwarted yearnings.

... Why was her daughter so restless all the time? In a girl, that spelt disaster.

Virmati left raging. Why was saying anything to her mother so difficult? May be it was best to keep silent (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 11).

The conflict reaches more intense levels once Virmati begins to assert her independence. Her marriage, deferred by two successive deaths in the two families, is no longer a naturally cherished goal once Virmati falls in love with the Professor. She confronts her mother with the proposal of not marrying. To Kasturi, the loving mother, this stands for betrayal. She is in no mood to
recognize the need for freedom which her grown up daughter is craving for. Her intense identification with Virmati makes her think of her daughter's expression of independence as sheer selfishness smacking of ingratitude. Here Kasturi unknowingly becomes the voice of patriarchy. She holds those values as ideal which patriarchy has taught her to be so. And when her daughter rebels against such values she takes it to be a rebellion against her own self.

Kasturi, in order to maintain her integrity cannot bear to have her daughter establish a separate identity which could make her feel fragmentary. Women experience a superior position only in their relationship with children, especially with their daughters. Once the daughter grows up and disturbs the power equation the mother loses her privileged position. Beauvoir expresses this phenomenon as, "She (mother) cannot bear to have her double become an other" (Beauvoir 334).

Virmati's growing liaison with the Professor on the one hand and her imminent marriage on the other, forced her into a crisis from which she finds no escape. After an unsuccessful attempt at committing suicide we find her confronting her family members where her mother appears to be cruellest. In her daughter's despair she finds herself humiliated. Instead of showing compassion, she behaves most inhumanly feeling betrayed by one who most resembled her, was closest to her. The only way now Kasturi can bear the shame is by disowning her daughter altogether.
Luce Irigaray in her essay "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other" points out how the daughter becomes the image of the mother and how the without the daughter the mother's life becomes impossible. She sees herself (the daughter) as the guarantor of her mother's life, "if I leave, you lose the reflection of life, of your life" (Irigaray, "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other" 66). So Virmati's attempt to commit suicide is also a threat to the mirror image of the mother. It is not only Virmati's honour that has been at stake, it is Kasturi's too; it is not only Virmati's life that has been endangered, her mother too feels equally threatened.

Virmati's rebellion against her mother is a consequence of her mother's tendency of ignoring her:

At times Virmati yearned for affection, for some sign that she was special (Kapur, Difficult Daughters 6).

Kasturi's identification with Virmati does not let her realize her daughter's need for a separate identity, an independent existence. So Virmati has to rebel. She rejects the world of domesticity, marriage and child-bearung all that her mother stands for and accepts the new world of knowledge and self assurance, a world to which her mother has no passport. Hers is the position of the daughter in Irigaray's essay "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other" who says, "I'll leave us ...I'll live my life, my story" (Irigaray 66) [Emphasis added].

Virmati's is a fight both against the engulfing power of the mother as well as the oppressive forces of patriarchy symbolised by the mother figure. The rebel in Virmati might have actually bartered one kind of slavery for
another. But towards the end she becomes free, free even from the oppressive love of her husband. And once she succeeds in doing that, she gets her husband all by herself, her child, the reconciliation with her family. Though providence plays a part in it, symbolically it marks her true emancipation.

That Virmati did not live her life without making compromises does not mean she achieved little. It hardly matters that she could not voice her own words. What matters is that she at least tried her own words. To use Alice Walker's words in another context, "It is not so much what you sang, as that you kept alive, in so many of our ancestors, the notion of song" ("In Search of Our Mother's Gardens" 181).

A study of all these relations shows how complex the association between the mother and the daughter can be. There may be various facets of such a relationship. The mutual love and adoration may turn sour due to misapprehension and mistrust between the two. The close emotional bond often precludes an adequate emotional space. Consequently the mother and the daughter lose their own distinctive identities. They then tread on each other's territory intimidating one another in the process. Again, often there is a lack of proper communication between the mother and the daughter resulting in misunderstanding between the two. In trying not to inflict pain upon each other the mother and the daughter tend to suppress facts that could possibly clear all misunderstandings. Finally, the mother accumulates the patriarchal
dregs which then percolate into her daughter leading the latter to rebel and resulting in hostility between the two. However, there is also the other side of the relationship as well. They are often led to re-evaluate their own attitudes and look at each other much more sympathetically, and then eventually strike a more mature, sustained and mutually satisfying relationship.

Notes:

1. A practice in ancient Indian royal households by which a princess chose her future husband from a number of suitors.

2. The entire Sumi-Aru episode moves round the image of the mirror. Aru is not satisfied with what she sees in her mother; rather she would have preferred to see what she wants in Sumi. This is akin to Lacan's concept of the mirror which reflects not only the object but the mind as well.

3. Kalyani's statement seems to bring out her emergence from the patriarchal trap which only celebrates the male child. Simultaneously, it shows her understanding of her mother Manorama's inability to find any pleasure in her. Kalyani realises how Manorama too had equally been a victim of the patriarchal forces at work.